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The Development of E-government within the Context of the European Union: A Comparative Study
N. Protogerous, P. Tahinakis, D. Ginoglou and M. Rriggas

Law and Regulation of E-government Procurement (EGP) in India
Sandeep Verma

Development of E-government in Malaysia: The Role of Leadership and Organisational Efficacy
Hazman Shah Abdullah and Maniam Kaliannan

Ontario Government Approach Towards in E-government
Shalini Mathur

A Preliminary List of Target Services of E-governance
Nicolae Costake

Java Economy in India: A Conservative Estimate
Rajanish Dass and Rashi Goyal

Re-engineering Government

Re-engineering Government: A Critical Analysis
Gopal Meena

Re-engineering Government: A Conceptual Framework
Vasant Godse

Transforming Local Government Services in the UK: From Vision to Reality
Vishanth Weerakkody and Yogesh K. Dwivedi

Business Process Reengineering and Change Management: Learning from E-governance Projects
D. N. Gupta

Measurement of Business Process Re-Design: A Framework for Continuous Improvement
Anil P. Panikar, Vishnu K. Kanhere and Jacob G. Victor

E-governance in rural India for Poverty Alleviation and Development Administration: An Approach towards Administrative Reforms.
Karunamay Subuddhi

E-Government in Road Transport: A Case Study
G. P. Sahu and Vindhyesh N. Gupta

Competitiveness Through E-government in Power Sector: Identification of Critical Success Factors to Acquire Winning Edge
Geetika and Neeraj Panday

Issues and Initiatives in ICT and E-governance: A study of Transport Sector in India
Reena Sethi

Author index

Subject Index
E-governance – Inhibitor or Facilitator for Democracy and Citizen Empowerment?

Bardo Fraunholz1 and Chandana Unnithan1*

ABSTRACT

Democracies of the globalised world have been striving towards citizen empowerment in the recent decade where E-Governance is perceived as a facilitator. Democratic governments in general feel that being accessible online 24/7 to the average citizen not only makes them transparent, but also empowers the average citizen. In this process, citizen data privacy, information sharing across nations and uniform accessibility to electronic services delivery, emerge as pertinent issues. Through a critical discourse analysis, we take a deeper look at the perception of e-governance being a catalyst in empowering citizens in the global progress towards electronic democracies.

Keywords: Democracy, E-democracy, Digital Democracy, Citizen Empowerment, E-governance

1. Introduction

The concept of empowering the citizen via electronic governance has been gaining momentum across liberal economies in the world where democratic principles underlie the government constitutional structures. Norris (2003) purport that this has been enabled by the growing use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) particularly designed for strengthening democratic governance around the world. E-governance is widely acknowledged as the application of new ICTs, especially the Internet and WWW as channels for engaging citizens in government as well as facilitating delivery of government information and services. According to a UN Study in 2001, almost all developed nations had launched comprehensive initiatives in e-governance with big budgets. Forefront in this progress is the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Norway, Canada and the UK (UN/ASPA, 2002). However, reports in the same year (Backus, 2001) indicate that e-governance is being deployed as a vehicle for facilitating uniform democracies in some developing economies such as Uganda and South Africa, where issues of uneven spread of ICTs and low literacy are limiting the progress. In India, a progressive developing democracy, e-governance seemingly is visualised as an equaliser which will eventually empower the disparate population in participating in the democratic process.

An alternative dimension is provided by Treanor (2006) in his commentary, ‘Why democracy is wrong’. He points out that electorate rich democracies will not accept mass transfers of wealth to poorer democracies nor accept mass migration. A causal relationship is thus developed at global level between democracies in rich democracies and excess mortality in poor democracies. This is where the digital divide comes into governance. Although the Internet may have prepared an even playing ground, the digital divide among

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E-government: Macro Issues

democratic nations across the world has lead to an uneven implementation of electronic governance and also brought up varied issues. The rather implicit, yet pertinent issue that is beginning to emerge is that whether electronic governance is really facilitating the promises of democracies by empowering the citizen, also via bridging this divide.

Conversely, in developed rich democracies of the world, the issue of privacy and security/integrity of personal information is beginning to emerge as the pertinent issue. In a brief research of three democratic developed nations Riley (2004) points out that there is information sharing of citizen databases not only internally among departments, but also between the nations, enabled by the new ICTs/Internet. Internally, there is a move towards ‘surveillance societies’ which then endangers the foundational principles of a democracy itself. If the government or executive is watching its citizens (albeit for their own protection), with their information handy for reference (albeit for identity/convenience purposes), how will this translate into free democratic principles? There is also a distinct possibility of manipulating or using it for sustaining the government.

Our paper is based on this premise where developed democracies in the world are struggling to find the right balance while developing democracies are faced with the difficulty of equal distribution of wealth translating into ICT access, and implementation issues – in the hope of facilitating digital democracies to empower the citizen and enable more participation of informed citizens in governance. Two main objectives have been identified for e-democracy: (1) to provide citizen access to information and knowledge about the political process, services and choices available and (2) to enable the transition from passive information access to active participation by informing the citizens, encouraging them to vote, representing them, consulting with them and involving them (Backus, 2001:1). Depending on varied dimensions of democracy, these objectives may translate into varied initiatives in e-governance, which may or may not be a facilitator for the types of democratic governments and in many cases there may be conflict of founding principles/ideals. In this premise, we propose our research question: is e-governance an inhibitor or facilitator for democracy and citizen empowerment?

This paper is organised as follows. In the next section we explain the research framework with justifications, essential terms, underlying principles and theories. The following section discusses some pertinent issues via examples visible in developed and developing economies, to highlight the issues that are emerging with metrics which seem to indicate their relevance. The paper is concluded with an outlook, throwing an open forum for debate. We expect this paper to be one of the pioneers in bringing together varied economy profiles into context, informing academia, researchers and political forums engaged in the progression of digital democracies.

2. Research Framework

The post modern approach of critical discourse analysis (see Locke, 2004; Blommaert, 2005) has lately been used as a way of approaching an issue by deconstructing reading and interpretation of the ‘discourse’ available in public domain, especially when there is not sufficient empirical data available for analysis and the topic itself is evolving or fuzzy. The contribution of the post modern Discourse Analysis is the application of critical thought to social situations and the unveiling of hidden (or not so hidden) politics within the socially dominant as well as all other discourses (interpretations of the world, belief systems, etc…(Palmquist, 2005:1). While there are no set guidelines on applying this method, in general, emerging debates and information are presented in a logical discussion to probe their hidden meaning – bringing forth relevant insights. Numerous instances have revealed the applicability of this approach in information systems related discourses. Beath and Orlikowski (1994) applied this approach in deconstructing the IS user relationship in information engineering. Abott and Jones (2002) attempted to bring forth emerging themes on the near shore software outsourcing and globalization. Thompson (2004) applied this approach to elicit meaning from a developmental discourse on ICTs and power in emerging economies. Yamaguchi and Harris (2004)
applied this approach to a Bt Cotton discourse to find that there are dominant shifts over time from governmental process to economic impact.

Our research quest is on a topic that is being debated in different contexts across the world and the answers are still emerging. We felt that this approach is most suitable to ‘deconstruct’ the debates and find some emerging answers. In the process, the paper has been written with this underlying philosophy of posing questions, deconstructing the rhetoric and drawing some emerging thoughts together. Before we launch into the discussion, a few terms that are relevant to this paper are defined in the table below. Given the varied definitions available, this is a broad attempt to define those terms that are relevant to our theme and not seminal definitions.

### 2.1. Demystifying Democracy in Context

World economies have experimented with varied forms of government structures. While every form of government including monarchy, capitalism, communism, socialism, dictatorship has had its relevance in history as well as recent times, the most popular form in the world today is democracy. However, democracy can either foster a cohesive political structure by engaging/empowering the citizens, or destabilise societies in transition by dissolving consensus and fuelling differences (Hay, 2005). As pointed out by Treanor (2006) democracy perhaps does not deserve a semi-sacred status, as the issues of inequality and defects of the democratic culture are in conflict with its application… it is perhaps possible to create a political condition

| Table 1: Definitions in Context: Democracies to Digital Governance |
|---|---|
| **Democracy** is, literally, rule by the people (from the Greek demos, "people," and kratos, "rule"). In contemporary usage, the term "democracy" refers to a government chosen by the people, whether it is direct or representative (Wikipedia, 2005:1) In contemporary usage, the term "democracy" refers to a government chosen by the people, whether it is direct or representative (Wikipedia, 2005). |
| **E-democracy**, a portmanteau of electronic democracy, comprises the use of electronic communications technologies, such as the Internet, in enhancing democratic processes within a democratic republic or representative democracy (Wikipedia, 2005) |
| **E-democracy** refers to the processes and structures that encompass all forms of electronic interaction between Government (elected) and the Citizen (electorate). (Backus, 2001:1) |
| **E-government** is a form of e-business in governance and refers to the processes and structures pertinent to the delivery of electronic services to the public (citizens and businesses), collaborating with business partners and conducting electronic transactions within an organisational entity (Backus, 2001:1) |
| **E-governance** is the application of electronic means in the interaction between government and citizens; government and businesses as well as in the internal government operations to simplify and improve democratic, government and business aspects of governance (Markus, 2001:1) |
| **Digital Governance** refers to governance processes in which Information and Communications Technology (ICT) play a significant role. The role played by ICT could be wide-ranging: in delivery and standards of governance services, to how people access such services, and the participation of people in the governance sphere. Digital Governance uses ICT to induce changes in the delivery and standards of governance services and more importantly, in the way citizens interact and participate in the governance sphere (DigitalGovernance.org, 2005) |
for utopian world, via rather non-democratic, but innovative societies. For facilitating innovation at grass root levels in democratic societies however, as the proponent Thomas Jefferson believed, educating the averaging citizen and empowering them in the process is essential. This is perhaps where e-governance begins. In a seminal paper, Norris (2003) brought out theories on the role of e-governance in deepening democracies which have been used as a theoretical platform to launch our discussion.

Pluralist democracy suggests elite level competition and bargaining among the representatives of diverse interest groups, agencies, voluntary organizations, NGOs and political parties representing the major sectors of society. Within strong civic societies such as the United States, the use of new ICTs in politics are likely to accelerate hyper-pluralism, with a fragmentation of new specialist organizations and agencies seeking to influence multiple access points in the policy process. This is further exemplified by networks concerned with consumer protection and environmental advocacy (Norris, 2003:4) However, if the civic societies are weak and power remains with the government, there is a role for e-governance. For example, take the case of public contracts bidding process being online. Opportunities for corruption would reduce and competition would become healthier, due to transparency. Other roles where e-governance can facilitate democracy is via facilitating cost effective efficient public sector for routine e-government transactions such as issuing official ID cards, driving licenses and birth certificates as well as disseminating information such as jobs, weather forecasts or rural crop prices for rural farmers in developing societies. The ideal role of new technologies for government in this view is to improve core business operations in the public sector, reduce transaction costs, expand information resources, and deliver services faster, cheaper, and to a wider variety of ‘customers’. To meet the requirements of pluralist democracy, at a minimum level, government websites need to emphasise the provision of rich information content as well as facilitate two way interactive communication with government officials and people involved in policy building (Norris, 2003)

Representative Democracy by contrast focuses particularly upon how democracies function through free/fair elections. Theoretically, citizens are allowed to choose from alternative candidates/parties to represent them in government, by exercising their informed choices while casting a vote in the elections. Opportunities are then given to citizens to have their preferences weighted equally in the conduct of government. Theoretically, government is thus kept accountable. This is also perhaps the widely practised form of democracy in the world.

However, there is the real question if this process really works in democracies today? For example, in a democratic nation where half or more of the population in illiterate – how can an informed choice be made? Here is where the promise of ICTs and e-governance comes in. First, e-governance could improve the quality of information available to a citizen to make an informed judgement in electing the correct representative. Corrado (2000) argued that a number of political websites, including mass media, interest groups, parties, unmediated information and so on could prove to be information sources on performance of government, record of candidates and legislative debates. The use of ICTs conversely could enable efficient electoral administration facilitating vote counting and dissemination of results. The potential of e-voting adds a further dimension as an important innovation reducing costs and strengthening electoral turnout – as it is more convenient. Further, in established democracies having multiple channels for political communication, where press is partisan or state broadcasting is biased, the Internet may be a neutral source of independent information. To meet the requirements of representative democracy, as with pluralist visions, government websites need to provide official information such as laws, research reports and publications, as well as facilitating two-way interactive communication with officials in the agency and with issue-related policy networks. Ideally to strengthen representative democracy governments should also introduce a variety of e-registration and e-voting facilities as well, a stage which currently remains under development with pilot schemes tried in many countries such as Switzerland, the United States and the United Kingdom (Norris, 2003:4)

Direct Democracy (alternatively termed ‘strong’ or ‘deliberative’ democracy), assumes that the public should have more opportunities to exercise their voice rather than periodic via elections. For this purpose
they need to become engaged in community decisions. Etzioni (1993) envisioned that the Internet will enable
a ‘teledemocracy’ through mobilisation of virtual communities that participate in the process. Budge (1996)
commented that e-governance could enable online referendums, plebiscites and public forums for direct
decision-making. In established democracies many believe that the growth of e-governance can serve to
modernize and deepen democracy where the public has become more disenchanted with the traditional
channels of participation in representative democracy, exemplified by falling levels of voting turnout, party
membership, and community associations( Norris, 2003:7). However, as Robert Putnam (2000) argues,
mass membership of voluntary organizations has eroded democracies such as America, reducing social
capital and the capacity of citizens to work together to solve common problems. While there are debates on
the ‘crisis of democracy’ (Trenear, 2006), the growth of average informed citizens in affluent democracies
are on the rise, with high expectations on the form of democratic governance. Conversely, there are rather
passive evaluations of the actual performance of the traditional institutions of representative government.
The new ICTs and e-governance put together could ‘…potentially serve to reengage citizens with
government, though expanding public consultations, increasing two-way interactions between citizens
and public officials, and widening deliberation’ (Norris, 2003:7). As against the other forms, direct democracy
‘…emphasize action-related facilities, including, at a minimum, the ability for citizens to perform transactions,
to submit forms online, to engage in online issue-related discussion forums, and to appeal procedural
irregularities. More demanding forms of interaction would ideally involve departments offering public
consultation processes, online surveys and polls.’ (Norris, 2003:8)

With the three types of democracies, strengthening public participation in formulating government policies
or facilitating the governance is a common feature. The attempt to engage the public direct through new
ICTs could widen social inequalities in less developed democracies. As Margolis and Resnick (2000)
comments with the power of Internet, the democratic process would be ‘politics as usual’ as it reinforces the
power of established institutions such as the major parties, interest groups and media corporations, that are
already well-entrenched players in the policy process. Although Internet may be a new and neutral platform,
it may be of no value in a less developed democracy where there are wide inequalities of access or an
established democracy with uninterested average citizens, who vote passively. Will the Internet based
information help in an illiterate or semi literate society where citizens lack the inherent knowledge or do not
have sufficient access to the Internet? Chadwick and May (2003:289) argue that e-governance serves to
reinforce managerialism in the public sector rather than opening new doors for public consultation and
participation. While studies on direct democracy focus on government websites delivering better services,
they may not have addressed the converse perspective on ICTs or e-governance that conflicts with democratic
ideals. As Norris (2003) comments, a broader understanding is required to evaluate the actual value of e-
governance in facilitating democracies.

3. Deconstructing Discourses on E-democracies

In this section we are exploring some established, new or developing democracies in the context of e-
governance. In 2004, an e-democracy seminar was organised by the European Commission in Brussels. The
highlights of this seminar reported by Riley (2004) seem to point towards citizen participation and empowerment,
in relation to facilitating democracies. At a second level, all the governments involved may perhaps be
facilitating governance via local councils, state councils or federal offices i.e. online (Okot-uma,2000; Caston
and Tapscott 1992, Holmes 2001) to make themselves available to average citizen 24/7. The real question is
how much of this is really engaging the citizens, which would then make e-governance an effective vehicle
in facilitating democracy? Riley (2003) argues that the debate is often polarised between those who feel that
the new ICTs will enhance the participation by the citizen in the government process and others who feel it is
another medium only. Clift (2002) believes that if the governments deliver more services online, there will be
a dramatic shift in the willingness of citizens to use them. Is this a correct assumption? If the government
E-government: Macro Issues

engages in online activities with the citizen, does it mean that it will automatically facilitate the democratic process? Conversely, will the use of ICTs in governance interfere with the democratic freedom within a nation? These are some underlying questions that are driving this discourse analysis.

Consider the notion that the free and fair election process which is regarded as fundamental for democracies. It is meant to enable citizens participate in the democratic process, by electing their representatives to represent them in the government. The essential component in this is the participation of all citizens in the elections. According to a recent survey (MORI, 2005) there is a gradual decline in the number of voters in developed nations although many economies enforce mandatory voting (for example, Australia) so that every citizen is included participating in the democratic governance. Conversely, the survey also highlighted an increasing desire among developing democracies to lower election relation costs through e-voting. Many economies such as Austria, Brazil, Canada, Estonia, India, Ireland, Norway, etc have pioneered electronic voting (Ace, 2006). We cite two examples from a developing and developed economy that is relevant here. In Brazil, more than 400 thousand electronic voting machines were used nationwide in the 2002 elections and the results were tallied electronically within minutes after the polls closed. Subsequently, data transfer took place on secure diskettes or via satellite telephone to central tallying stations, and then transmitted electronically over secure lines to tabulating machines in the capital, Brasilia, where the results were consolidated and announced within hours (Ace, 2006). In the Canadian State of Ontario, 12 municipalities held the first full municipal and school board electronic elections in North America using either the Internet or the phone but no paper ballots. The e-voting system helped increase turnout to 55 percent in some places, against normal municipal election rates of 25 to 30 percent (Ace, 2006). As visible from these examples, both developed and developing democracies do have valid precedents for pursuing the e-voting process – as a first step towards empowering the citizen in a democracy.

The Republic of Congo had its first open and democratic legislative elections in four decades (Isango and Colombant, 2006), where more than 9500 candidates were competing for the country’s new 500 seat parliament – the electronic voting process would seem quite relevant in enabling the process. The elections which were held in July 2006, with the international community investing USD460 million into the election process (Flynn, 2006). However, following the elections, allegations of fraud lead to the arrests, unrest and deployment of peace keeping troops in September 2006, when the results were to be announced. The Supreme Court of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) postponed the release of final results and also declared second proposed elections in October as unconstitutional (Xinhua, 2006). The costs in conducting a re-election and logistical difficulties seem to be the major reasons for this ruling. Therefore, it would be theoretically very relevant for this economy to use electronic voting to avoid fraud, reduce transaction costs and perhaps resulting in a more peaceful outcome. However, this would mean engaging all of the citizens in the process. In a country with a population of 3,039,126 with 82.8 percent literacy (Wikipedia, 2006), wrought with civil war history, lacking infrastructure, where the reach of ICTs to every citizen poses a significant challenge — is this a viable solution? In such a situation, can ICTs and eGoverance be the answer to facilitating equitable participation resulting in a representative democracy?

India is touted to be the world’s largest which has pioneered e-voting seemingly to reduce the costs as well as to engage as much of its large voter base in the population. Over 1 million electronic voting machines were used in 2004 elections (Ace, 2004) to engage approximately 672 million voters which constitute a large literate/semi literate population. However, electronic voting is only one of the initial measures in the way towards empowering citizens. The voter population at the end of 2005s per indicatory statistics show that the literacy is approximately 66 percent with an almost 50:50 percent spread between literate/semi-literate population (Fraunholz and Unnithan, 2006). The semi-literates are the population which has developed from government initiatives in literacy using ICTs. However, a large population of voters are the ‘digerati’ generation (Bagga, 2004), mainly concentrated in the metropolitan cities as professionals or the beneficiaries of the ICT industry. To a large extent, the ICT revolution and the subsequent boom of businesses relating to
business process outsourcing has led to an increase of informed citizenry. Conversely, the usage of ICTs and e-governance is visible in the state and federal level government services (www.mit.gov.in). In a review of the usage of ICTs and e-governance, Dogra (2005) points out that e-governance has been a useful way of reaching the country’s large population base. He argues that the initiatives have made the government more transparent, efficient and engages the citizen in the democratic process.

India has a multiparty system in which candidates are nominated for participating in the elections by people representations. Over time, there have been allegations of implicit manipulation by political parties also aided by the media to help in the winning process of any political party although this may not only be the case of India, but rather all democracies. In the recent elections, the strongest political party which was set to win the elections were the BJP who really targeted the ‘digerati’, with campaigns via Internet. (Wilkinson, 2005). Perhaps, the ultimate aim was to win via the ‘swadeshi’ or self reliance using ICTs-However, as against predictions, the Congress party which campaigned in the low or semi literate rural areas, aiming at farmers and common man, hoping for less or no mass votes from metropolitan areas won the elections. As pointed out by the post election analysis of Wilkinson (2005), most professionals seem to have voted for the Congress, especially from metro cities. As an antithesis, the CPI Marxist party, which had always remained in the shadows except for their regional presence, formed an alliance with the Congress party – with completely different set of ideals to form the new government.

E-governance seems to be successful in the Indian context especially in reversing a defect in the democratic system, and thereby helping to empower the citizens. First, many of the government services and information becoming electronic has helped the upcoming professionals with much demand on their time. The lifestyle changes caused by the ICT revolution in India, also promoted actively through governance, have brought the semi-literate population closer to Internet and to better inform them regarding the democratic elections. Specifically, while the illiterate population who is approximately the 50 percent voters is becoming better informed, the already literate, professional, ‘digerati’ who is already aware of the actual reforms touted to have been taken place by the existing BJP or regional governments is questioning them. For example, a professional who has benefited the most from a multinational or BPO is questioning the notion of ‘swadeshi’ or national self reliance slogan of BJP because it contradicts with the existing structure. These people seek economic stability and expect the governments to create an atmosphere of stability and prosperity. In some regional strongholds such as the ‘Cyberciti’ of Hyderabad, the post election posters seem to indicate that the professionals have woken up to the fact that nothing concrete is being done to improve their quality of life by the existing regional governments (Hindu, 2004). And the result, we think, perhaps is the success of e-governance and ICTs in facilitating the democratic turnaround in India, reversing the possible manipulation by the government.

Table 2: India – A Post Election Analysis of Media

| ‘…the Congress-UPA victory represented the Indian people’s rejection of economic liberalisation – a call for government to focus on helping the poor and rural Indians rather than software engineers, exporters, call-center employees, and other assorted yuppies in such boom towns as Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune, and Chennai (Madras). One post election newspaper cartoon showed defeated Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu, nicknamed the “laptop minister” for his high technology and economic modernisation initiatives, being beaten over a peasant’s knee with the caption “the Laptop…” |
| …supporters of secularism claimed that the election results represented a clear rebuke to the BJP’s Hindu nationalist ideology and politics of polarisation that led to massive anti-Muslim programs… |
| …a third explanation saw the elections as part of a more familiar pattern of anti-incumbency in India. State and national governments perform so badly that India is perhaps the only country where it is statistically better to be a challenger than an incumbent. |
E-government: Macro Issues

The notion of manipulation of governance in democracies facilitated by e-governance takes the discourse into the area of dual citizenships. Post the world war time many people migrated to different countries seeking a better quality of life. With globalisation and movement of people, many economies now constitute a significant amount of immigrants from another nation. Over the past decade in particular, dual citizenships became the norm to keep these migrants engaged in the democratic process of their parent economies. We take the example of Australia, a large immigrant nation in this context initially. According to statistics, 3.5 percent of Australian population in 2003 consisted of Italians (Cavallaro, 2003). Our discourse is focussing on this population who live as immigrants in Australia, many with dual citizenships.

As is evident from table 3, the existing governance has been able to manipulate the turnout in the electoral process, through dual citizens, living outside of Italy. We argue that perhaps, when the migration began post world war, without the Internet and power of ICTs translating into e-governance, this obvious manipulation would not have been that easy. The manipulation is now easy given that the older generations of immigrants are still caught up with sentimental attachments to their homeland and the second generation of immigrants finds the concept ‘interesting’ (Cavallaro, 2003, ABC Radio National, 2006).

In such a situation, is e-governance really empowering the citizen or manipulating it? And therefore, can this be enabling a democratic process of true representation?

Table 3: Italian Elections – A Media Analysis

Australia, a large immigrant nation has dual citizenships with many democracies across the world. As of 2005, a significant population i.e. 5 percent of citizens live outside Australia as dual citizens (COA, 2005). For a dual citizen, the mandatory requirement of voting is fulfilled through postal voting routed through their nearest embassy. There has been several debates on the provision of electronic voting, which would make the process more convenient for the citizens, but remote e-voting is yet to come into practice. Conversely, every citizen perhaps is regularly inundated with information regarding the votes and candidates and so on. There are two types of Australian citizens who live outside Australia. The first is seeking a better quality of life in regards to work or have settled in the UK or US. This is also similar is the case with an economy such as Jamaica, where much of its population live and work in the US. For these people, how relevant are the current issues that happen in Australia (or Jamaica) which might inform them better in the voting process to take an informed choice in their respective home economies? With the information overload, the tendency is to become more complacent and vote passively because of the mandatory requirement enforced by some democracies.

While the principle behind the mandatory enforcement is to engage every citizen, we ask the question, is it really engaging the citizen? Conversely, consider the significant number of dual citizens from economies such as Lebanon, who have become Australian citizens but live in their home country. For these people, the citizenship and passport acts as a ‘security blanket’ especially in times wrought war. How involved are these citizens in Australian democratic process? Specifically, in such a situation, how relevant is the mandatory voting, which will empower the citizen, made even more convenient via electronic voting, to a dual citizen? Would they really exercise the voting intelligently, considering the issues relevant for their
home democracies?

Australia had undertaken a recent census in which all people where to participate, using the Internet. One of the options which the person had to tick off was to make their information public after 90 years. There has been several debates regarding the privacy of such information. What if the governance changed and the information is then released for public? What is the guarantee of privacy with such a rich database? In light of the recent security dangers, is there any guarantee that the actual data is not manipulated affecting certain ethnic minorities, who exist in the population? Is this not affecting the democratic principles? To ensure security for average citizens, it is common practice to photograph people on the streets in many developed nations. However, how does this align with the democratic principles of the freedom to be left alone in a democracy? In regards to privacy, Riley (2004:12) focuses on the national ID card debate in the UK. The labour government proposed biometric passports, ID cards and finger printing of citizens who want to fly to the USA. The government argues that these are measures to protect the average citizens within UK against terrorism. An ACLU (Riley, 2004) report articulates fears about potential privacy violations and the growth of the new ‘surveillance society’ where there is seemingly gross violation of citizen privacy. For example, the ‘Terrorism Information and Prevention System’ in the US was proposed to engage citizens from all walks of life, such as cable repair men or technicians and public transit employees in the security initiatives via building a database with their information. The program met with an outrage, as it reflected badly on an average citizen of the country or specifically, it turned them into ‘potential terrorists’. Any person with a grudge could misuse this opportunity with misleading information. And as a result, instead of enabling democracies and citizen empowerment – there would be gross violation of privacy and the right to be left alone in a democracy. Riley (2004) comments that over the two centuries, the thrust on human rights have also increasingly lead to privacy legislation becoming a critical issue. In democratic societies, individuals have certain expectations on governments in this regard. More specifically, in leading first world economies such as the USA, UK and Canada, personal information is available to the government for security purposes mainly. This in net effect means that these economies, promoting dual citizenship will also share the data. Is this not an interference with democratic principles?

4. Summary and Outlook

In this critical discourse analysis, some poignant issues relating to the notion of e-governance and ICTs in enabling democracies have emerged. First, the notion of democracy and e-governance seem to have different relevance in developing and developed democracies. While it seems to be a cost effective option to deploy e-governance techniques in a developing democracy, the lack of infrastructure and uneven spread of education adversely affects the concept. Unless 100% literacy which will include all the people and infrastructure to support the ICT deployment is in place, perhaps, it is not correct to suggest that the e-governance is really facilitating democratic governance. In the case of developed nations, the argument for e-governance is conflicting with the principles of democracy itself. In the name of security and involvement in the democratic process, e-governance necessitates that citizen data is gathered and stored. In the globalised
world, where dual citizenships exist, the question of data sharing amongst nations as well as misuse of their information is causing privacy concerns. Conversely, the power of e-governance in facilitating or inhibiting democracies through elections process is seemingly different. It has been manipulated (thereby inhibited) democracy in one nation, it seem to have succeeded in another nation in facilitating democracy.

Enabling a better quality of life in a democracy and citizen empowerment seem noble ideals that are fundamental in the deployment of e-governance. However, we find that as the world is becoming increasingly globalised, developing nations are progressing rapidly, and migration of people is common – the concept of democracy itself might need critical assessment. How can e-governance facilitate democracy in a developing nation where it is unable to reach every citizen? Conversely, in a developing nation, where every citizen data is collected and used for identifying ‘potential terrorists’ in the name of security, how does the e-government deployment facilitate the democracy? It is doubtful if e-governance and democratic principles are really progressing together or enabling each other. From another perspective, is democracy or enabling it via the use of ICTs really the answer for progress and stability of nations? We argue that it is perhaps time to move on to a new concept in governance, a new world where ICTs and e-governance may really empower citizens, reaching every citizen in adequate manner, without interfering with their freedom to be themselves – without the violation of human rights in the name of enabling democracies.

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E-government: Macro Issues


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