

The Impact of Internet on E -Democracy and E-Governance

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INTRODUCTION

We truly live in a revolutionary age. Changes occur rapidly and instantly. In last few years, Internet has impacted the nature of business and government to such an extent that is unprecedented in the history of mankind. In this paper, we are focused on the transformation of the role of the state and citizens in light of electronic revolution. The major hypothesis of this paper is that Internet has revolutionized the nature of citizen/state and has paved the way for e-governance and an e-participatory model of democracy. By participatory e-democracy, I mean the combination of current representative form of democracy with active participation of citizens in political process and policy-making through internet. I believe that our preoccupation with information technology should not distract us from the real issues which are democracy, government and citizens. Therefore, in this paper, I have touched upon theories concerning these issues.

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THE INTERNET REVOLUTION

The introduction and popularization of Internet has shrunk the globe to the size of a computer work station, where a keyboard and a mouse can unleash the electronic “Genie” who like Aladin’s famous Genie would fulfill the wishes of his master at an eye blink. The only difference being, unlike Aladin’s Genie, the “Electronic Genie,” which operates through the web, does not confine his master to three wishes and has no intention of becoming “free” and leaving his master behind. As some scholars have argued, the internet has eliminated the time and space dimensions.⁽¹⁾ Because of the flexibility provided by the internet, virtual communities have been formed which have made interaction and the free exchange of information a reality. Local, as well as national and international communities have been formed which have given new identities to their members and have helped them overcome their isolation. The US based Pew internet Organization reports that 90 million American have established online groups and feel more connected to their communities through these virtual connections.⁽²⁾ In an international level, Tatars who were uprooted from their homeland in Crimea by Tsarist Russia and Stalin are building their virtual communities and trying to end their diaspora by petitioning the Russian policy-makers and international community.⁽³⁾

Internet has empowered the “global villagers” by allowing them to use huge databases such as Yahoo and Goggle have enabled e-citizens bypass the monopoly of information by governments and media giants. It has also allowed the decentralization of decision making which has had a major impact on the protection of citizens rights.⁽⁴⁾

Realizing the “magic” of on internet, Howard Dean, the former Governor of Vermont and pre-primary Democratic Party front runner, was able to use it a powerful tool for political campaigning and raising money for presidential election. A report by Time Magazine indicates that Dean was able to raise \$7.5 million in 3 months (\$1.5 million more than John Kerry).⁽⁵⁾ Dean was also able to run an electronic campaign with the aid of his 55,000 strong army of supporters. According to one of the Democratic Party analysts, Supporters of Dean “...were not just sending e-mails solicitations,

they developed an online community...”⁽⁶⁾ Despite this, Dean was quite aware that internet can not replace campaign platform. He had prophetically conceded “Internet is a tool, not a campaign platform”⁽⁷⁾ Although Dean’s inattention to set up a powerful campaign platform, led to his demise during the primaries, Chris Taylor, the Time Magazine’s reporter succinctly wrote about this phenomenon: “...his (Dean’s) early success suggests that the internet may prove to be the great modern means of creating grass root momentum”.⁽⁸⁾

INTERNET USAGE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Although people, worldwide, are fascinated by internet and (to say the least) are curious about using it at least once, its unavailability to the general public is a major problem. Access to computer (and to internet as a result) is not universal. As people are divided by social classes and levels of income, so are they divided in relation to the access to computers. Available data shows there is a correlation between economic status of people and their access to computers. That is, the higher the socio-economic status of an individual, the higher the propensity to own a computer and use the internet.⁽⁹⁾

The digital divide exists in both developed and developing countries. In post-modern, IT language, we might want to rephrase the above sentence as: in our digital age, the class cleavage is manifested in national and international digital divide.

A research conducted in Canada indicates that families with high income (i.e., \$80,000.00 or more) had twice as much access to computer than the low income families (i.e., \$20,000 or less).⁽¹⁰⁾ The same trend can be traced in other developed countries. A report by US Census Bureau in 2001 shows the following fascinating results:

90 per cent of families with the household income of \$75,000 or more owned computer, and at least one family member was using Internet at home. On the other hand, only 30 percent of American families with the household income of 25,000 or less had a computer at home, and only 20

percent of these used internets at home. The same report also indicated that 83 per cent of adults and 57 percent of children (of the households who owned computers) used internet at home. Finally, in year 2000, 94 million Americans used internet at home (up from 57 million in 1998).⁽¹¹⁾

A research done in regard to this trend in the United Kingdom shows that “...three times as many well-off families in the UK are going online for the first time as those with low income.”⁽¹²⁾

The digital divide also exists among nations. While in “developed” and Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) of Asia such as Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea, average internet usage is 60 percent or above, hundreds of millions of people in the South are deprived of access to computer and internet usage.⁽¹³⁾

Thomas and Gathia Riley show this disparity as follows

...the internet’s reach in most of the developing countries ranges only from less than 1-5 per cent of the total population. For example, in the Philippines it is currently put in the range of 2-3% and in Nigeria 0.1%. while some developing nations such as Malaysia, Brazil and Taiwan have made substantial progress; approximately 87% of people are online live in post-industrial societies. There are twice as many users in Sweden than across the entirety of Sub-Saharan Africa.⁽¹⁴⁾

Digital divide in many developing countries shows the Sexual digital divide as well. A comparison between the ratio of women in workforce in Asia and their share of access to internet will illustrate this point further. China has the largest woman workforce in Asia (75% of Chinese woman are working outside of their household). This ratio is between 41% and 43% in East, Northeast and Southeast Asia. Despite the fact that a high percentage of Asian women are employed outside their households, their share of internet usage is minimal. Available data shows that 78% of internet users in this vast continent are men, but women constitute only 22% of internet users.⁽¹⁵⁾ Suryani Sidiq Motik, Secretary General of Indonesia Businesswomen Association indicates that of 15,000 women members of this organization,

only 12% have e-mail accounts.⁽¹⁶⁾

Governments in several post-industrial societies have set up programs to bridge the digital divide. In Britain the “Electronic village Halls” have been set up to bring marginalized social groups, communities and areas to the information age.⁽¹⁷⁾ Canada, the United States, Denmark and Sweden have also set up programs to make internet services available to those who do not have access to it at home. These governments have made free internet access to the general public in public libraries, educational institutions, and community centers.⁽¹⁸⁾

A survey about 98 cities of world with the highest percentage of internet usage, placed 3 Asian cities of Seoul, Hong Kong and Singapore at the top of that list. This survey which was done between June-October 2003 by E-Governance Institute of Rutgers University at Newark and the Global E-Policy Government Institute of Sungkyunkwan University of Korea ranks the top 10 cities in regard to the above mentioned criteria as follows:

Ranking	City	Score
1	Seoul	73.48
2	Hong Kong	66.57
3	Singapore	62.95
4	New York	61.35
5	Shanghai	58.00
6	Rome	54.72
7	Auckland	54.61
8	Jerusalem	50.34
9	Tokyo	46.52
10	Toronto	46.35

This research reveals interesting information about the cities in the survey. For example, although New York City is ranked number four in term of internet usage, it is ranked number one in regard to the content and the quality of services offered by internet providers. This survey also shows that of the top 20 cities in term of internet usage, 3 of them are located in developing countries. Talin (Estonia), Dubai (United Arab Emirate) and Jakarta (Indonesia) are ranked 14th, 18th, and 20th respectively. This report also indicates that average score in term of internet usage for these Cities

was 28.10 out of 100, while the average score for the OECD countries was 36.34. The average score for non-OECD countries was 24.26. In the research cited above, 67 cities had no official city web site, while only 3 per cent of European cities had no official web sites.⁽¹⁹⁾

FROM DEMOCRACY TO E-DEMOCRACY

Although E-Democracy is a new phenomenon and needs more time to evolve fully, I define it as deepening democratic process through the active participation of citizens in public policy via internet. Therefore, we need to explore different interpretation which exists about democracy, before discussing e-democracy.

David Beethman and Kevin Boyle associate democracy with equality of all citizen, and the control of decision-making process by people.⁽²⁰⁾ They also indicate that critics of democracy, view popular sovereignty, and citizens participation in the political process (which are the main thrust of democracy) dangerous and impossible.⁽²¹⁾ Anthony Birch associates Democracy with the representative nature of the government and free competition in elections.⁽²²⁾

Robert Dahl identifies Democracy as a political system built upon the following principles:

1. Equality in term of voting.
2. Popular participation.
3. Enlightened understanding
4. Final popular control over the agenda.
5. Effective participation.⁽²³⁾

Christopher Morris indicates that active participation of citizens in the political process is the major aspect of democracy.⁽²⁴⁾ David Held, defines democracy in term of:

1. Citizenship rights (i.e., one person-one vote, freedom of _expression and organization).
2. A divided system of government.
3. Competitive electoral system.⁽²⁵⁾

Joseph Schumpeter defines democracy as a political system limited by the rule of law and the will of people.⁽²⁶⁾

Although there are different interpretations about democracy, three models of democracy are very well known.

1. Direct Democracy (practiced in Greek city-states over 2000 years ago)
2. Participatory Democracy (such as Town Hall Meetings of New England which came into being over 200 years ago)
3. Representative Democracy (which is practiced in today's Parliamentary systems).

Despite the existence of different forms of democracy and various theories, by democracy, I mean active participation of people in political process, equality of all people before law, recognition of the citizens rights by the government, the rule of law and citizens freedom from harassment by government.

Having delved into theories of democracy, it is appropriate to discuss the phenomenon of e-democracy. Steven Clift defines e-democracy as

... the use of information and technologies by “democratic sectors” within the political process of local communities, state/regions, nations and the global stage. The “democratic sectors” include the following: Governments, elected officials, media (and major online portals), political parties and interest groups, civil society organizations, international governmental organizations, citizens/voters.⁽²⁷⁾

E-democracy, according to Thomas Riley, is the engagement of civil society in political activities through using internet and other Information Technology.⁽²⁸⁾ Mitra Dighamany and Reza Suny, regard e-citizens interaction with public sector as the main ingredient of e-democracy.⁽²⁹⁾

The active participation of e-citizens has had a tremendous positive impact on democracy movement worldwide. Internet makes it very hard or might even prevent authoritarian regimes from running their countries arbitrarily. Howard Rhinegold, as an internet adventurer and promoter argues that virtual communities are instruments of revitalizing democracy

and promoting citizens' rights.⁽³⁰⁾

E-citizens engage in one-on-one as well as many-to-many dialogues and create community networks and virtual communities

Although democracy should not be limited to voting, active participation of citizens in electoral process will enhance democratic political systems. Low voter turnout which is mainly associated with political apathy has plagued several western democracies and has caused concern among politicians and scholars about the future of democracy in these countries. While voter turn out is high in New Zealand (83%), it is much lower in Britain, Australia, and the United States (with 60%, 58% and 51% respectively).⁽³¹⁾ Some scholars and governments believe that e-voting will result in more voter turnout and would protect their voting rights.⁽³²⁾ But citizen's response to this issue is not very encouraging.

A survey conducted by Washington Post in 2000, reveals that the public is not very interested in e-voting. Of people Contacted, only 10 per cent were in favor of e-voting, but 54 per cent opposed this method of voting strongly and 13 percent were somewhat opposed to it. The report shows that majority of Americans are not very familiar with e-governance and only 8 per cent reported that they were very familiar with it.⁽³³⁾

Some scholars who had high expectations about e-democracy have become disappointed and lament that despite all the efforts, dedication of energy and resources, it is still "politics as usual".⁽³⁴⁾ Although I agree that we have not seen substantial changes in state/civil society relation, we should not downplay the outcome of the process either. Governments are still interested in one-way dialogue with e-citizens and have misgivings about entering into a two-way dialogue with them. They prefer (and find it safer) to load information to their citizens, respond to their e-mail, let them know about the new bills, and the policies adopted, rather than engaging them in a two-say dialogue. They also would very much like to have people send fees, dues and taxes online, but have no interest to solicit their opinion on how their money will be spent.⁽³⁵⁾ Despite this, where e-governments worldwide are open to people's input and willing to take them into consideration to some extent. In countries where e-governance is the strategy

of the public sector, the stream of inputs downloaded to the governments is so overwhelming that they find no other alternative but to respond. During this process, transparency, accountability and responsiveness of government which are the main elements of good governance will emerge. But the key is to get the e-citizens involved.

David Mitrany, over 50 years ago had indicated that technology makes politician irrelevant and technicians and other specialist will actually run the governments. He had correctly anticipated that specialists and lower levels of government decision-makers have no interest in conflicts and tensions and would rather see peace and tranquility through integration and cooperation.⁽³⁶⁾ E-democracy has actually forced the restructuring of policy making to change from horizontal, hierarchical (top-down) to a decentralized and disbursed combination of the above, plus horizontal decision-making, where all stakeholders can participate in decision making processes.⁽³⁷⁾ The more the e-citizen gets involved in the policy process and pressures the policy makers to listen to him rather than cow towing to special interests, the closer we will get to an e-participatory democracy. E-participatory democracy does not do away with the current representative system, but corrects its shortcomings by allowing the e-citizen to participate fully in the process of policy-making.

E-GOVERNMENT AND E-GOVERNANCE

When discussing the problematique of government, we can not escape the question of “who governs?” Different school of thoughts, responds to the question differently. Marxists believe that in all class societies, the ruling class, which is small in number but owns means of production, runs the state. They further argue that socialism will change the situation by allowing the most numerous class (the working class) to come to power and pave the way for a classless society and withering away of the state (i.e., communism).⁽³⁸⁾

Contrary to socialists, proponents of Elitist theory such as Gaetano Mosca and Alfredo Pareto believe that powerful small group or individuals

always run governments. They further argue. What in reality we witness is the circulation of elites, not the replacement of elites with non-elites (i.e., popular rule).⁽³⁹⁾ David Beethman and Kevin Boyle condense the argument of elitist as: "...the masses of people are too ignorant, too uneducated and too shallow to take any part in public policy"⁽⁴⁰⁾

Some scholars such as C. Wright Mills, Thomas Dye and William Domhoff, who are influenced by both Marxism and proponents of Elitism, while critical of the latter theory, these scholars argue that elites are currently running governments and individuals are powerless in comparison with huge government institutions and big corporations that are linked together and have common interests.⁽⁴¹⁾

Proponents of Democratic theory, on the other hand, believe that popular sovereignty, responsiveness of government and separation of power, are the main characteristics of democratic societies. They further argue that democracy and democratic principles constitute the future of mankind. Thomas Jefferson regarded consent of people as the main ingredient of good government.⁽⁴²⁾ John Stuart Mill, regards popular sovereignty as the most important ingredient of good governance. "The best form of government is the one in which sovereignty is vested in the community and that people will have an opportunity to take an active part in the government."⁽⁴³⁾

There are different views about E-Governance. Some governments and scholars equate e-government and e-governance and hence use them interchangeably. I need to clarify misconceptions which exist about the issue of Government and governance before going into the detail about the subject. Government is the institution, the organization and the physical manifestation of the state. What this institution does and its interaction with citizens constitutes governance. Michael Johnson of Colgate University associates governance with accountability, transparency and the rule of law. He also argues that these elements are the outcomes of democratization process driven by interaction between the citizen and the government.⁽⁴⁴⁾ David Issman, also sheds more light on the differences between government and governance by asserting that while the former is the institution, the latter deals with the process of interactions in society and how people,

corporations and organizations operate.⁽⁴⁵⁾ He further shows the difference between e-government and e-governance as follows:

E-government defines terrain-the public sector-as well as the institutions, people and process that operate within that terrain. E-governance is about how that terrain operates, and how it gains and maintains legitimacy.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The Canadian government uses e-government (instead of e-governance) and sees it as the instrument of empowerment and bridging the Berlin Wall, which separates government from citizens. Canada is currently the fifth wired country in the world, spending between 3 to 4 billions dollars a years on e-government projects. Mell Cappe, Head of the Public Service Department in Canada associates e-government with “enabled, empowering and responsible government” and asserts:

E-government is more than simply putting information and services online. It means using new technologies, including internet, to improve the administration of programs and services. It involves people and sharing of ideas...E-government requires collaboration across departments. As we put programs and services online, we must examine their values by grouping them across citizens’ needs and requirements.⁽⁴⁷⁾

The United Nations specifically is interested in the development of governance and e-governance, and emphasizes on empowering people through their participation in political process.

E-governance is the public sector’s use of information technology with the aim of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision making process and making the government more accountable, transparent and effective”.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Thomas Riley of Commonwealth Center for E-Governance believes

accountability, transparency, ethical financial activities, citizen centered programs, and workable programs are crucial factors for achieving e-democracy and e-governance.⁽⁴⁹⁾

One of the most interesting definitions of e-governance is provided by the Indian government which in an attempt to overcome poverty and economic stagnation has found the use of electronic technology in policy making very useful. The Ministry of Information and Technology of India defines e-governance as application of new technology in the process of government functions and defining it as SMART which stands for

Simple
Moral
Accountable
Responsive
Transparent.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Steven Clift of Minesota DO Wire Organization does not believe E-Government is an accurate terminology and suggests Representative E-Government instead.⁽⁵¹⁾ I believe this definition adds more to the complexity of the issue. If we accept this argument, the first question which comes to mind is: what makes a government representative? Do we mean Parliamentary systems are truly representative systems? If our answer is positive and we equate Parliamentary system and representative system (that we usually do), then the following question might appear on the monitor of our brain:

1. Are those who run for office, necessarily the best possible candidates?
2. Do citizens rationally and logically elect candidates or Candidates with bigger campaign chest are in a position to sway the public opinion and win the election?
3. Do elected officials represent the entire nation or they represent certain interests in society?

Available data shows that more often than not, it is the established political parties that dominate the election and through the “iron law of oligarchy”

handpick their candidates and have final say in the outcome of elections.⁽⁵²⁾ Joseph Schumpeter sheds more light on the subject by stating: “Voters do not decide issues. But neither do they pick their members of parliament from the eligible population with a perfectly open mind.”⁽⁵³⁾ The impact of money and organization in the victory of candidates in democratic regimes and the influence of the machinery of the state in authoritarian regimes are too well documented to require further discussion.⁽⁵⁴⁾ It will suffice to say that even liberal democracies are not representative enough. They basically fulfill the bare minimum requirement of democratic political systems. That is, they ensure the stability of the constitutional democracies and the rule of law. The shortcoming of this model is that the citizen is kept out of political process and is mostly a bystander in the outcome of policy. Usually he resembles a soldier in the military who has to follow the order (laws) of his commander here the lawmakers). The major contribution of e-democracy and e-governance is that they have started the trend toward ending the “business as usual”. As the time goes by, the stage will be set for an e-participatory model of democracy. This model keeps the basic principles of the parliamentary system, while complementing the democratic model by active e-citizens participation in every level of political process, from selecting candidates for election to policymaking and reorganizing the political economy.

Even in the best possible situation, (that is when the elected officials are true representatives of citizens), then the very nature of government which is distrustful of people, self-serving and conservative, will not provide for the active participation of citizens in the political process and policy-making. Needless to say, governments are more interested in monopolizing decision-making rather than allowing the e-citizen to participate in a two-way dialogue with the government or allow them to have an impact in the process of decision-making.

E-Governance goes beyond the simple representative nature of government. E-governance aims to do away with the shortcomings of the concept of representation. It is based on sharing responsibility with citizens and welcomes their active participation in political process and policy-making.

In e-governance, we are basically interested to see the active Participation of e-citizen as a means to engage him in political Process and bring excitement and enthusiasm to the political process.

E-CITIZEN

David Held defines citizenship as: "... (A) status which bestows upon individuals equal rights and duties, liberties, and constraints, power and responsibilities..."⁽⁵⁵⁾ The introduction of Internet has changed the nature of government worldwide. Contrary to what some scholars argue, this new phenomenon has revolutionized the relationship between governments and governed, it is not exactly "business as usual". E-citizen does not limit himself to his country or region. He is a global citizen who lives in the shrinking global village. From his desk station through the mouse or the keyboard of his laptop, he can reach the world through the nerves of the web. He is connected to other e-citizens, e-institutions, e-government, and e-market and makes the best of the opportunity he has. He knows that the marketplace of the electronic global village is the "buyer's market" and the producer has to take his (buyer's) taste and preferences into consideration. He is further aware that the same is applicable to the public sector. He requires the public sector to satisfy his needs, taste and preferences. He questions the authorities and breaks away from the monopoly of information by the government and media through the web.

Internet elevates the ordinary citizen to the level of an E-citizen. An e-citizen (unlike a citizen) is not limited by the geographic boundaries. He is a global citizen, whose interests are global. He is daring and adventurous, He constantly searches for new electronic territories. He is willing to share his knowledge with other e-citizens and learn form the other e-citizens' experience e-citizen can enter the chat room, group room, etc. and discuss the issues of the day, exchange views about their rights, nature of government, international issues, etc.

Having said that, we might want to see how committed is he to his civic duties? The data might be quite disappointing and disheartening at first.

People are more interested in internet as a huge shopping mall and entertainment center.

A report about the internet usage in the United States shows that 68% of American have access to internet at home, educational institutions, or workplace. Of these people, 10% are online at least once a day. This report also shows that 66 percent of American online used credit card on internet, and 60 per cent gave information to a commercial website to get a product or service.⁽⁵⁶⁾

How does this relate to E-democracy? That is what percentage of people in the United States use internet for political activities as compared with the use of internet for commercial use. Although in the highly industrialized countries of the world, the internet usage is 60 percent or more, its usage for e-government purpose is different from country to country. According to a European report

26% globally have used the internet to either access government information, provide personal information to the government, or transact with e-government services.

E-government usage varies globally: Norway and Denmark have the highest e-government usage at 53% and 47.5% respectively, Finland 46%, US 34%, France 18%, Germany and Korea 17% , and Great Britain 11%.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Some e-citizens take their activities to such an extreme which is harmful to both the institutions they oppose and the general public. These individuals resort to hacking, which has been coined as “hacktivism” by some scholars. They combine direct and physical activities with electronic assault on the nervous system of the institutions they consider to be the enemy. In this kind of political action which may be called electronic terrorism (e-terrorism), hacker engages in a war of attrition against the nerves of government and corporations they opposes. Deleting files (partially or completely), entering viruses, downloading false information, and the like, create confusion and sometimes huge financial damages to the Leviathan (the state) or big serpents (big corporations).⁽⁵⁸⁾

E-GOVERNANCE IN THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH

Post-industrial societies have arrived at the information age and use information technology for policy-making and running the machinery of the state more smoothly. Koffi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, believes that e-governance is the best way to eradicate poverty and

Promote development in the South.⁽⁵⁹⁾ President George W. Bush asserts that “Implementation of E-Government is important in making government more responsive and cost-effective”.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Mel Cappe, Canada’s head of Public service comments about the subject: “E-Government is not just “electronic government. It is “enabled” government-government that delivers different and better programs and services to Canadians”.⁽⁶¹⁾ The importance of electronic government to the Australian policy-makers was to such an extent that according to the British based gov.uk: “The 1997 announcement by Prime Minister John Howard that all government services would be provided online by 2001 has provided significant impetus to progress”.⁽⁶²⁾ According to Steven Clift, Australia and New Zealand are very well advanced in term of e-government and e-democracy and are committed to constantly improving their services in these two areas.⁽⁶³⁾ The Government of Singapore also provides various services to its citizens through its E-Governance site, including consulting about getting married, filing taxes, pollution, and arbitration.⁽⁶⁴⁾ England has also very advanced e-government program and according to the United Nation is the number one country in the world in relation to offering online services to its citizens.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Contrary to the giant steps taken by developed countries and newly emerging industrial societies of East Asia, developing countries have a long way to go. A United Nations report about 173 governments online indicates that while Britain and the United States are at the top of the e-governance list, many developing countries either have not developed effective systems, or seriously lag behind.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Among developing countries, the United Arab Emirates and Chile are ranked 38th and 40th in this report, respectively. Among countries of the Middle East, the United Arab Emirate tops the rank followed by Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, but Iran, Syria and Algeria are far behind. In order to overcome its digital divide, Iran has selected Kish Island

as a pilot project for electronic governance. Some Iranian experts point to the inadequate electronic infrastructure of the country as the main reason for its underdevelopment in this regard.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Cuba, Saudi Arabia and China are very cautious about the impact of internet on their social and cultural fabric as well as their political stability.⁽⁶⁸⁾

CONCLUSION

The internet revolution has changed the nature of government and political process. Even the authoritarian and conservative regimes have found it necessary to turn to internet as an instrument of policy-making and delivering services to the citizens. As might be expected, there is a direct relation between the level of development, on the one hand, and the advancement of e-governance and e-democracy, on the other hand. The more developed a country is, the more sophisticated it is in term of providing online services to its citizens and promoting e-democracy. Overall, internet has decentralized policy-making process by allowing citizens to directly participate in political process and policy-making.

Although the number of citizens who use internet to reach government is not significant, it is gradually changing. Governments from India and Singapore to Canada and Australia involve citizens in policy process by requesting their input. Despite the fact that government still are suspicious and distrustful of citizens and are mainly interested to have them (for example) file their taxes online, rather than how it is supposed to be spent, the process has begun. It is no more “politics as usual” and elected officials feel obliged to respond to the e-citizens needs and requirements. What makes this trend irreversible is the e-citizens active participation in establishing community networks and informing each other about certain policy issues, pressure, and petition their respective governments to involve public more in policy-making process. During this process, the old form of “doing business as usual by governments” will give way to an electronic participatory democracy and a more effective e-governance. ❖

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