A Brave New E-World?
An Exploratory Analysis of Worldwide E-Government Readiness, Level of Democracy, Corruption and Globalization¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports research results on the relationship between e-government readiness and its components and the level of democracy, corruption, and globalization for 191 countries. A supply-side approach to e-government analysis using data about national government Web sites, telecommunication infrastructure, and human capital was taken rather than a demand-side approach, which is based on the real use of e-government Web sites by citizens, businesses, and government, or their perceptions of the online services delivery. Statistically significant differences in the level of e-government readiness and its components between three groups of countries classified according to the level of democracy were identified using ANOVA. It was also shown, using correlation and regression analysis, that e-government readiness indices are related to the level of democracy, corruption, and globalization.

Keywords: corruption; electronic democracy; electronic government; globalization; readiness

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to contribute to empirical research literature in the area of electronic government, focusing on socioeconomic and political factors that might have an impact on the country’s readiness for e-government. Before identifying these factors and setting up a theoretical framework for the analysis, we must begin by defining the core concepts and identifying the main issues.

The concepts of electronic governance (hereafter labeled e-governance), electronic government (e-government), and electronic democracy (e-democracy) have not been uniquely defined and used in literature. The term e-government is sometimes confused with e-governance; these two terms often are used interchangeably (Fountain, 2004). However, e-governance
is a broader concept that includes the use of information and communication technology (ICT) by government and civil society to promote greater participation of citizens in the governance of political institutions. Though most e-government definitions focus more on the use of technology and management and the delivery of public services (Edmiston, 2003), the strategic aspect of e-government initiative is even more important (Grönlund, 2003). We have accepted the definitions provided by Okot-Uma (2004). He uses the “good governance” concept to clearly explain the relationships between e-governance, e-government, and e-democracy. E-governance includes all processes and structures by means of which the new ICTs can be used by government to enable the administration of government and delivery services to the public (e-government); all forms of electronic communications between government and citizens with the aim of informing, representing, encouraging to vote, consulting, and involving the citizen (e-democracy); and transact business with its partners, clients, and the markets (government electronic business).

A country’s overall readiness to adopt, use, and benefit from using ICTs is called a country’s e-readiness. Knowledge of the factors that make a significant contribution to e-readiness and the country’s position on the e-readiness scale would help the country’s leaders to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the country’s current position and to concentrate on the areas where improvement and further integration of ICT could be made (Bridges.org, 2001). The label “e-government readiness” is used to describe government readiness to adopt, use, and benefit from ICT. Why is it important to study e-government readiness at the national level? Fountain (2001) argued that innovation often begins at the state level and diffuses to federal and local government. In other words, a country’s e-readiness shows the country’s potential for future diffusion of ICT to lower levels. The concept of e-government readiness is also important because of the opportunities it creates for each country in terms of benefiting from e-commerce activities, openness to globalization, and potential to strengthen democracy and make governments more responsive to the needs of their citizens.

The main objective of this research is to identify whether there are empirical links between e-government readiness at corruption and globalization. More specifically, the data gathered for this paper were used to address the following four questions:

- Has a country’s position changed in regard to e-government readiness from year 2001 to 2003?
- What are the empirical links between e-government readiness, participation, democracy, corruption, and globalization?
- What is the contribution of each component of the e-government readiness index (Web measure index, telecommunication infrastructure index, and human capital index described in Table 1) to the level of democracy worldwide?
- How robust is the relationship to the change of the e-government readiness index definition?

It is worth emphasizing that this paper has a limited scope because of the nature of the methodological approach used. It belongs to the corpus of exploratory studies resulting in “stylized facts” about the observed phenomena and, therefore, does not provide evidence of a causal relationship between e-government readiness and other variables.
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