

Chapter 34

E–Government Politics as a Networking Phenomenon: Applying a Multidimensional Approach

Maxat Kassen

Eurasian Humanitarian Institute, Kazakhstan

ABSTRACT

Asking such a simple question as what e-government politics really is to policymakers, practitioners and other stakeholders in the sphere and all the more so in a cross-country and cross-institutional manner could be an extremely prolific undertaking since it allows to generate a myriad of unique stories and perspectives about this phenomenon. E-government is a universally well-known concept in public policy, public administration, political and economic sciences and beyond and related academic and professional literature is really rich with demonstrative cases that represent these narratives well from various viewpoints and fields. In this regard, the key purpose of the article is not to update a state-of-the-art in the sphere but rather an attempt to synthesize and systematize all available institutional perspectives on the development of this truly multidimensional networking phenomenon equally from stakeholder, cross-institutional and cross-country perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

Setting the Research Agenda: The Research Background and Context

The truly rapid development of e-government phenomena all over the world and active promotion of various digital solutions in the sphere provide an extremely rich empirical basis for related studies and executive reports in a wide range of academic disciplines and professional fields, enriching theoretical and practical understanding about the technological, economic, social and even political potential of this promising phenomenon (Ahn & Bretschneider, 2011; Guha & Chakrabarti, 2014; Fountain, 2014; Banister & Connolly, 2015) to advance public sector innovations (Gil-Garcia, Helbig & Ojo, 2014; Cordella & Tempini, 2015), encourage civic engagement (Vicente & Novo, 2014; Al-Hujran et al., 2015), battle

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corruption and red-tape (Elbahnasawy, 2014; Kim, 2014), foster public reforms (Jun & Weare, 2010; Cordella & Iannacci, 2010), save budget resources in executive agencies (Puron-Cid, 2013; Rose et al., 2015), promote public-private partnerships (Kaliannan, Awang & Raman, 2010; Hui & Hayllar, 2010), improve democracy (Lee, Chang & Berry, 2011; Van der Meer, Gelders & Rotthier, 2014), increase transparency (Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes, 2010; Carteret et al., 2016) confidence and trust in government, etc. (Pina, Torres & Royo, 2010; Morgeson, VanAmburg & Mithas, 2011; Colesca, 2015) Likewise our understanding about this concept becomes broader and more specific with the emergence of various case studies and survey research that aim to understand the e-government movement from the perspective of its various stakeholders and organizations both public and private, including in a cross-institutional and cross-border manner (West, 2004; Yildiz, 2007; Lee, Kim & Ahn, 2011; Savoldelli, Codagnone & Misuraca, 2014; Weerakkody et al., 2015; Maerz, 2016; Warf, 2016). All these and many other works and publications in the e-government sphere have created an extremely gigantic pool of related scientific and practical knowledge that allows to explore the concept from a variety of perspectives and viewpoints.

However, there is a real rarity of research in academic literature that explicitly focus on the synthesis of all perspective views in the sphere and generation of a more comprehensive and universal outlook to the promising multidimensional nature of e-government politics as a networking movement that is gaining an ever-increasing popularity in many countries. Moreover, the paradox of e-government as a concept reflected in modest results of its adoption in public sector reforms all over the world could be explained by the overwhelming attention that policymakers pay to the technological and operational matters of its implementation rather than to the institutional and, most importantly, political aspects of its promotion in society (Savoldelli, Codagnone & Misuraca, 2014). This partly explains the fact that e-government as a phenomenon is widely regarded as an under-theorized discipline, which, however, does not exclude a possibility of extracting a grander theory from the available pools of knowledge in the sphere (Bannister & Connolly, 2015). A more general schematic bird's eye outlook to the political and networking domains of the related decision-making processes in the sphere is also needed to advance the concept further in research and practice. In this respect, the key purpose of the research in this article is an attempt to review and systematize all available stakeholder and institutional perspectives on the development of e-government politics as a political phenomenon, analyzing, in a consecutive and consistent manner, the perspectives of individual stakeholders, namely, e-government policymakers and practitioners, citizens, businesses, developers, non-governmental organizations and media communities in order to identify the key public values, mechanisms of realization and strategic policies that they envision or prefer to see in the sphere; the perspectives of e-government peers, namely government-to-government, citizen-to-citizen and business-to-business peers in an effort to shed light on the invisible mechanism of e-government reforms at different institutional levels, and the perspectives of e-government ecosystems, namely, digital federalism and centralism in a tentative attempt to understand how various nations adopt these ecosystems to their local political and administrative conditions. All these three multilevel perspectives in this research are defined by the author of the paper as key aspects of e-government politics in, respectively, stakeholder, institutional and country-country contexts (see Figure 1).

Identifying the Research Questions

There are three research questions that will shape the whole analysis in the paper, namely: What are the key public values, mechanisms of realization and strategic policies that different stakeholders envision or presumably prefer to see in the e-government sphere? How e-government philosophy is changing

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