

Chapter 73

E-State: Realistic or Utopian?

Nnanyelugo McAnthony Aham-Anyanwu
Northumbria University, UK

Honglei Li
Northumbria University, UK

ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is known to facilitate governance and citizen participation in States' decision making processes. However, e-governance researchers have argued that beyond the current use of ICT to facilitate already existing means of governance lays the possibility of its use to fundamentally revolutionise public administration. There is the ideation and aspiration for ICT-based States (E-states) which exist without governments, and whose citizens can self-organise and self-govern without the need for institutions. This is a conceptual paper which discusses the viability and prospects of this aspiration. The study reviews literature in the areas of politics, public administration and Information Technology in the context of governance and public administration. This study ultimately argues that the possibility of establishing an E-state will be dependent on changing existing political ideologies and systems of governance to anarchism. As it is, ICT cannot be a substitute for governments and certain governmental institutions but can only help them.

INTRODUCTION

Existing studies have looked at how Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enhances information sharing between citizens and governments, how it facilitates governments' accountability and transparency and how it improves governments' delivery of public services. Most recently is the focus on smart cities which have been defined as the use of ICT to provide, manage, monitor and integrate the critical infrastructures and services of a city which may include road, bridges, healthcare, city administration, education, public safety, etc. (Bowerman, Braverman, Taylor, Todosow, & Von Wimmersperg, 2000; Washburn et al., 2009). There is indeed adequate focus on how ICT impacts on governments' business affairs and on their performance as it concerns relating, communicating and delivering services

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to all stakeholders in the State-whether citizens, businesses, employees or even other governments; but all these have been about how ICT has been used to enhance already existing systems of governance other than bring about a new system altogether.

It is under this light that a call has been made for scholarly research in innovative ways by which ICT can be used to fundamentally change States and existing approaches to governance and followership. The driving vision is that ICT can bring about self-organising and self-governing States without institutions and bureaus. As this is yet an idea and a vision, it is pertinent that it is investigated and tested for practicality; and that is the aim of this study.

The motivating question for this study is: Is it really possible for ICT to bring about a self-organised and self-governing State where the citizens can collaboratively make decisions about common assets or common matters without the need for government and bureaucratic institutions? For instance, is it possible to have a parliament which involves each and every citizen? Is it possible for the citizens to - at every step- decide the budget and expenditure of the State? Is it possible to have a State whose viability is the responsibility of the Citizens and not of elected officials? For brevity sake, the Researcher shall refer to this prospective State as an E-state.

To investigate the practicality of an E-state, the Researcher deemed it is necessary to ascertain: first, the political ideology which the said State would adopt; this is important as the idea will fundamentally affect existing social systems and forms of governance if implemented. Second, the Researcher shall ascertain the functions of governments; this is important as it will present a clearer picture as to the government functions which would become the responsibility of citizens if the E-state comes into existence, and would help envisage whether or not the citizens can handle such functions. And third, the Researcher shall ascertain the essence of and functions of governments; this is important in understanding the consequences - or lack thereof- of having a State without a government and institutions.

By answering the research question and investigating the factors mentioned above, the feasibility or possibility of aspiring for an E-state shall become clearer and there shall be a well-defined idea of what citizens of an E-state can or cannot achieve.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a conceptual one and was based solely on review and analysis of research from the literature. The Researcher adopted a three-stage approach in the collation and analysis of relevant literature for this study. To develop the key concepts in this study and locate initial references, the first stage involved conducting a search on the Google search engine with two main search terms: “functions of government” and “core functions of government”. The Researcher was interested in this as there was the need to first establish what governments’ tasks are in order to understand what the consequences of not having a government would be. These search terms did not return adequate information. Further search terms like “theory of the functions of government” and “theory of government” were used. The latter brought up John Mack’s article on ‘Classical Theory of Government and the Social Contract’. Based on the analysis of this article, the Researcher picked “Social contract” and “Natural Law” as starting points for further literature search and review. The second stage involved conducting a search on Google Scholar for the two core terms: “social contract” and “Natural Law”, especially for the works of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau which are popular in the area. Google Scholar was used as it presents search results from different academic databases (Jacsó, 2005). Articles were selected based on their

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