

Chapter 3

Exploring Citizen–Centric E–Government Using a Democratic Theories Framework

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors draw on Scott’s work on e-government and democratic theories to examine how governments engage their citizens online. The three theories they focus on—representative, pluralist, and direct—are the most prominent in the democratic theory literature. Using data from 200 U.S. local governments, the authors examine two research questions: What factors drive governments to employ each theory? Which theory predominates in the implementation of e-government? The assumption is that providing answers to these two questions will help set the stage for future research linking e-government and democratic theory. The authors also explore this theory in e-government amidst the rise of m-government, whereby users access e-government services via mobile devices. They suggest as well what governments can do to move forward with their e-government and m-government efforts based on these theories.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last 20 years e-government has been at the forefront of the management reform movement. Around the world, governments have launched websites and other Internet technologies to enhance government services and engage citizens in the decision-making process. Further, government continue

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3706-3.ch003

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to expand upon existing e-government portals to implement the newest technologies in order to provide a multitude of services to their constituents. E-government refers to

the use of technology to enhance the access to and delivery of government services to benefit citizens, business partners and employees. It has the power to create a new mode of public service where all public organizations deliver a modernized, integrated and seamless service for their citizens (Silcook, 2001).

According to Garson (2006), the adoption of e-government transforms the relationship between government and businesses and the resulting new improved transaction process leads to substantial savings for the government. Moreover, increased use of technology promises the reversal of the declining social capital in the United States.

Research on e-government has recognized the dual components of e-government and e-governance, where e-government refers to a one-way communication between government and its citizens, while e-governance pertains to a two-way communication. According to Garson (2006, p.19), the phenomenon of e-government represents the *provision of government services by electronic means, usually over the Internet, while e-governance points to a vision of changing the nature of the state*. E-governance moves beyond e-government; it represents

the co-evolution of the information and communication technologies with the political institutions, taking in particular into account how these political institutions and the state more precisely are evolving in the context of globalization and by doing so, crystallizing all other relevant function (Rossel & Finger, 2007).

E-governance itself is composed of digital government (delivery of public service) and digital democracy (citizen participation in governance). Citizens, advocacy groups, businesses, and other organizations can connect with government to influence decision making processes. There are greater levels of collaboration among stakeholders, then, who seek to influence the policy making process and their respective government (Eger, 1997). Democratic theories also advance the notion that governments which implement channels by which citizens can influence the government and participate in the policy making process benefit from these greater levels of engagement (Milakovich, 2010). Subsequently, with greater levels of civic participation decisions can be made which are more likely to be accepted by constituents as they represent their majority will (Heberlein, 1976).

The e-governance perspective also involves e-democracy, which will allow for greater government transparency and openness, which in turn leads to a better-informed citizenry. The phenomenon of e-democracy also denotes the potential for information and communication technology (ICTs) to improve the degree and quality of citizen participation in government decision-making. Although e-democracy has not been widely adopted by government in the United States and government worldwide, research shows that its use has the potential to create a more engaged citizenry. For instance, Garrett and Jensen (2010) found that local government officials who use the Internet to communicate with various stakeholders are more engaged with a more diverse array of stakeholders, which speak to the potential of e-democracy to improve civil discourse. What's more is that ICTs can enable direct democracy on a large scale, allowing for greater government transparency and openness, resulting in a better-informed citizenry.

In this chapter, we draw on Scott's (2006) work on e-government and democratic theory to examine how democratic theory relates to how governments engage their citizens on the Internet. We focus on the three most prominent theories in the democratic theory literature: representative, pluralist, and direct

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