

Internet Politics and Digital Divide Issues: The Rising of a New Electronic Aristocrats and Electronic Meticians

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Abstract: The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) from the beginning of 1990 until today has brought important changes on function and structure of both public sector and governments. Within the framework of application and use of e-democracy, new technologies enhance the citizens' democratic participation in public affairs, by using e-voting, e-ballot, while by using e-mail, citizens can develop and consolidate the digital Ancient Agora by exchanging their views with each other or with the elected representatives. Information systems and Internet is today a powerful tool for governments and citizens aiming at the collective decision-making and the reduction of democracy shortcoming. This paper conclude that the access impossibility of citizens to digital democracy services, in the form of digital divide, can be easily compared with the right of vote in Ancient Athens, a right that only privileged citizens had.

Key words: E-democracy, e-participation, ancient Athenian democracy, aristocrats

INTRODUCTION

Computer and information science is constantly changing all social activities, ever since its initial appearance in the 17th century as calculating devices, up till the new generation of computers in 1950 and up till today^[1]. This change is obvious not only to international financial exchanges financial and political frames of each state^[2]. The governing of a country, a definition that belongs to the wider sector of political science, with the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is now adopting an electronic feature, thus the definition e-governance mentions the appliance of new technologies to political processes.

The first steps towards e-governance are fulfilled in 1993 in the USA, under the Clinton presidency, when a huge governing program was established, the so-called National Performance Review (NPR) that aimed towards the use of informative systems in order to create a government that would rule in low expenditure, still more effectively^[3].

Apparently, since the creation of the Internet in 1960 until its use upon the various governing methods in 1993 in the USA, all governments use new technologies so as to achieve the most effective operation of the public sector and the enforcement of political-democratic procedures^[4]. E-Governance may

give the force to better the affairs among the public, enterprises and governments^[5]. Researchers claim that it is a dynamic tool for the participation of the public in the public matters and the collection of valuable demographic, social and economical data that will lead to a successful and transparent procedure of decision-making^[6].

Background: The first type of democracy appeared in Ancient Athens between 500-321 B.C. in the form of direct democracy. All modern liberal-democratic systems are featured as it follows: the existence of more than one political party, the open access to political processes along with the open participial activity, the fixed and regular performance of elections in order to elect representatives and also respect the public's rights^[7]. Today's democratic governments face issues of political corruption and apathy by all voters.

Anthony Giddens mentions that "Over the last few years, governments face categories for corruption... Despite their alleged transparency, in many countries the liberal democratic institutions base their function on backstage agreements and customary affairs"^[8]. The use of ICT in political-democratic procedures along with the lowest cost of the whole convention will save the public from excessive expenditure. The Internet can give an end to the domination of television and radio

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transmission that cut down political parties and made the political procedure terribly expensive, should we consider the capitals that had to be assembled^[9]. USA President Bill Clinton and the Vice-President Al Gore would welcome the public's opinions by the American citizens-voters with through e-mail and this lead to the expansion of the citizens' political action^[10]. With the use of e-mails the citizen is able to require information, submit questions and comments or objections. The governments are able to create a new shape and procedure for the participation of the public through electronic meetings and discuss about future governing actions or evaluate the public opinion upon social matters^[11].

E-Governance has the power to create a new model of service supply, where all social organizations are entitled to provide better quality of services in a more modern way and eliminate the old-fashioned one way affinity (us-versus - them) and create a new mutual affinity between the government and the public, based on reliability and trust^[12]. As for the dispute about the consequences of the new technologies on democratic procedures, any reliable remarks and results mostly depend on the level and the degree that the government incorporates new technologies^[13].

The rising of a new electronic Aristocrats and electronic Meticians: Many countries are described by the weakness to embody informative systems due to social, political and financial conditions. This resulted in the imparity of access to the Society of Information services, to the new digital economy and the procedure of economical globalization. Nowadays, this imparity is called digital divide.

In his attempt to depict the digital divide better, Pascal Boniface mentions that: "Poor countries are found bound by this global economy, where new informative technologies are dominant. In 1999, a report of a programme that belongs to the United Nations proves this jostle. So, by offer 19% of the global population, 29 countries of the Organization about Economical Partnership and Development cover the 91% of the Internet users (Americans represent the 50%)"^[14].

Imparities in access among the countries and citizens about e-voting or the globalization process do exist nowadays. The inability to access the electronic economic globalization and the electronic democracy urges us to adopt an internationalized model of the

ancient market in Athens in an electronic pattern. During the ancient Athenian democracy, aristocracy had only the right to vote and carry official postulates and administrative places contrary to meticians, who were not able to access democratic procedures and did not hold the right to vote.

The existence of the digital divide resulted in the creation of a technological ruling class and the division of the countries-citizens into two basic categories: the electronic aristocracy that is able to access the services of the electronic democracy and the electronic meticians. Electronic meticians (due to economical, social and political conditions) cannot access the basic features of electronic democracy, such as e-voting, unofficial electronic plebiscites for public opinion, e-communication with the elected representatives and regular screening of the political affairs on the Internet. According to Noam Tsomski, "There are two basic functions in a democracy, the skilled class and the responsible people who have taken on the performing function, which means that they think, draw and understand the public weal. Then there is the giddy flock that also holds a place in the democracy. Its role is to observe not to act"^[15]. Within an electronic democracy, viewers are normally the public and the countries that are described by the lower access degree in the Society of Information, empowering the model of ancient Athenian market, which we consider to be global. So, today there is a form of democracy, the electronic democracy without electronic citizens-democrats.

According to a survey held by Hansard Society on June 21-26, 2001 in Great Britain, only a small percentage of citizens-voters has access to electronic democratic procedures and to digital political information. This minority that has the access privilege consists of people who belong to higher financial layers, have studied and received a degree and are mostly young people: only one third of the participants have access to the Internet and e-mail at home, 69% hold a cell phone, 32% use text messaging and 13% have access and use interactive services of digital TV. Only 18% of the whole specimen of the asked ones used the technologies that had to do with national elections in Great Britain, a percentage that represents one fourth of the people aged less than 35 years old^[16].

CONCLUSION

Within a constant changing and competitive international environment, the modern democratic structures of states try to create the suitable conditions

for economic and political development, using ICT as a factor of power and development.

Information systems and Internet is today a powerful tool for governments and citizens aiming at the collective decision-making and the reduction of democracy shortcoming. Within the framework of application and use of e-democracy, new technologies enhance the citizens' democratic participation in public affairs, by using e-voting, e-ballot, while by using e-mail, citizens can develop and consolidate the digital Ancient Agora by exchanging their views with each other or with the elected representatives. Modern countries and international organizations through Task forces and economical policies attempt to reduce the width of the digital divide. However, there are still going to be economical-social imparities among the countries and the public, concerning the quality of the Internet access (access speed ISDN - ADSL and the possession of knowledge and use of ICT).

The access impossibility of citizens to digital democracy services, in the form of digital divide, can be easily compared with the right of vote in Ancient Athens, a right that only privileged citizens had. Thus, we can now claim that nowadays, by the use and integration of new technologies in modern democratic procedures, but also with the impossibility of access to e-voting, the model of Ancient Athenian democracy (Aristocrats and Meticians) reappears in a new electronic form.

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