



Technology for Government Accountability: Dangers & Opportunities

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Class Outline

**12:15-1:00 IT in Government
Lecture**

**1:15-1:45 Assignment 2
discussion**

1:45-2:00 Class Feedback

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Agenda

- ICTs' effects on governments and how they affect IR
- Technology Leapfrogging
- Digital Divide

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Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

- From business to communities to social interactions, changes in ICT are revolutionizing the world.
- Government is not exempt.
- Most government work is information processing (Hood, *Tools of Government*, 1983).
- As a result, almost every government has been involved in some form of eGovernance.

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ICTs are Changing Several Arenas of Governance

- **Corruption Reduction**
- **Government Service Efficiency**
- **Democracy**
 - E-voting
 - Policy Feedback
- **Bureaucratic Decision-Making**
- **Also affects politics through changing media structures**

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ICTs for Corruption Reduction

- **Especially important for international institutions, ICTs may be a valuable tool for reducing corruption:**
 - Provides easy access to government statistics
 - Replace humans with computers
- **Benefits:**
 - May reduce corruption
 - May guarantee better distribution of government services
- **Danger:**
 - Corruption will always exist, it will just take different forms, and ICT-enabled corruption may be harder to identify/catch.

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ICTs for Government Efficiency



- **Technology can produce better government services**
 - The “Online Driver’s License” example: Can get a license online rather than waiting in long lines
 - Better procurement of materials
- **Benefits:**
 - Saves money, increases production
- **Dangers:**
 - May have security dangers
 - May exclude certain people

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ICTs for Democracy: eVoting



- **Two types of eVoting**
 - Computer-based voting (U.S., Brazil)
 - Internet-based voting (Switzerland)
- **Benefits:**
 - Cheaper
 - Fewer intentional human errors
- **Dangers:**
 - Question of legitimacy (need paper trails)
 - Access

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ICTs for Democracy: Policy Feedback



- **Better People-to-Government feedback**
 - South African Environmental Regulations
 - “Email your senator” campaigns
 - Whistleblower Protection
- **Benefits:**
 - Government responds to the people
- **Dangers:**
 - Elites can dominate
 - Can a government become too democratic?

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eDemocracy: Consequences for IR



- Lack of legitimacy can cause a threat to state sovereignty
- Internet-based voting/policy discussion attracts younger audience
- May also disproportionately attract elites
- Decreased power for policy specialists and the decline of the meritocracy

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ICTs for Policy-Making

- **Past: Weberian Decision-Making in a Bureaucracy**
 - Vertical, singular voice makes decisions
- **Present/Future: Increased “Government Bargaining Model”**
 - More people are involved
 - More branches are involved
 - More governments are involved
 - The rise of the interest group...

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Changes in Policy-Making Affect IR

IR can be broken into security studies (SS) and political economy (PE)

- **Decisions made by many rather than a few**
 - The decline of groupthink (Iran-Contra example)
- **Increased cooperation between governments**
 - Decline of international institutions as countries can resolve issues and increasingly communicate between themselves
- **Better information available...**
 - How does this affect SS? “Know thy enemy and know thyself.” –Sun Tzu
 - PE?

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Technology Leapfrogging



ICTs might be a tool for countries to overcome development challenges and modernize more quickly

- Development challenges include:
 - ◆ Geographic limitations
 - ◆ Poor economies
 - ◆ Inequality
- Solutions include:
 - ◆ Government initiatives
 - ◆ Private initiatives: \$100 laptop, optical fiber lines

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Leapfrogging Technology



Ex: In a developing country with basic telephone infrastructure may experience “leapfrogging” as cellular phones or optical fiber lines may become more prevalent.

Countries can skip previous technology trajectories

- Better environmental policies
- More efficient technologies

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The Digital Divide

- The term “*digital divide*” describes the perceived increasing gap between those who have the ability to use ICT and those who do not.
- Why do these divides form? Why are they becoming exacerbated?

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The Digital Divide

Is the uneven advancement of technology inevitable?

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

From Yook, Soon-Hyung, Hawoong Jeong and Albert-Laslo Barabasi, “Modeling The Internet’s Large-Scale Topology,” (July, 2001). Available online:
<http://arxiv.org/abs/cond-mat/0107417>

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The Dangers of a Growing Digital Divide



- **Inequality within countries**
 - Inequality reduces stability and encourages war
 - Gurr's Theory of Relative Deprivation
 - War is contagious
- **Inequality between countries**
 - Animosity or strained relations between countries
 - North vs. South, West vs. the Rest, us vs. them mentality

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Combating the Digital Divide



- **International organizations are involved:**
 - 2005 WSIS in Tunis; UNESCO; to some extent World Bank and WTO
- **Private organizations are involved:**
 - NGOs, Bill/Melinda Gates & Bono
- **Multi-national corporations are involved:**
 - IBM, Coca-Cola...Anyone who outsources
- **Academia is involved:**
 - MIT Poverty Action Lab
 - MIT D-Lab

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Competing Theories of New-Power Politics



Q: How do ICTs shift power in decision-making?

Between countries:

- (1) Diffusion of power**
- (2) Concentration of power (hegemony)**

Within countries:

- (1) eDemocracy**
- (2) Elite dominance**

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Conclusions



- **The diffusion of technology and the incorporation of ICTs into government is inevitable**
- **There are many possible ways in which ICTs can change government structures and therefore government decisions**
- **ICTs also have the capability of disenfranchising, and we must be wary**
- **This can have dramatic IR consequences**

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