

ICEST 2021**II International Conference on Economic and Social Trends for Sustainability of Modern Society****INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AS GROWTH FACTOR IN
POLITICAL STABILITY**

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Abstract

The paper dwells on the role of information technologies in the development of e-democracy, e-government and document management. As of today, the problem of information society development poses a rather topical issue as never before. Global quarantine and lockdowns prompted a necessary breakthrough in information technologies. During the pandemic, the number of Internet users has grown along with the involvement of general public in information technologies. The authors consider information society a key factor of government steady development and political processes stability. Special attention is paid to the possibilities of e-democracy and e-government. E-government in the modern world has an impact on a large number of processes in every modern state. From the level of its development, the degree of involvement of citizens in it, we can draw conclusions about the development of the state as a whole. The authors analyze the potential of modern information technologies to influence the development of democratic institutions of society and the state.

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1. Introduction

Statistics, provided by “We are Social website at the start of 2020”, shows that the number of Internet users accounts for 5.54 billion people globally (We are social. Digital around the world, 2021). The main device used to access Internet is now a smartphone rather than a computer or a laptop. Due to their availability (low price segment and high mobility range), budget-friendly up-to-date mobile internet plans, and user-friendliness, current smartphones are gradually driving out computers and even tablets that were popular with active Internet users not so long ago. When compared with the latest statistics, published as of January 2021, we see growth in all categories (We are social. Digital around the world, 2021). For instance, the number of active Internet users has increased by 12 million over the year. There has also been a significant rise in the number of social network users. Globally, more and more people turn to mobile phones, applications, communicate via instant messengers and meet new people through social networks. The coronavirus pandemic has made certain adjustments to the life of the global population. Remote work and distance education within isolation and global lockdowns have contributed to the rapid growth in the number of new users of information and communication technologies. The need to rely on latest technologies for hosting conferences and teaching classes, delivering lectures via ZOOM or MS Teams prompted qualitative and quantitative changes in the society. Better computer literacy and skills to use new media resources and applications by general public have become the key focus of the modern government. Higher government services quality and developing digital democracy play a significant role in transforming internal and external actions within the public administration system. The state considers the formation of information society in the concept of e-government as one of its main goals within the framework of global processes related to the transition to a new economy. Still, information age addresses other issues apart from the society’s economic domain. We witness global adjustments in politics as well, and many process change drastically. Information society creates new forms and mechanisms for the citizens to engage in the political process. Electronic voting, electronic ballot-boxes, optical scan voting systems, and electronic democracy have become a reality and stopped being just a fantasy.

1.1. Electronic Democracy

Electronic democracy (e-democracy) is a form of democracy characterised by the use of information and communication technologies as primary means to ensure collective thinking and administrative processes (information distribution, joint decision-making, e.g. electronic voting, decision execution control) at all government levels (Omelichkin, 2014).

The development of information and communication technologies makes it possible to bridge the gap between the political elite and the public, and enables every citizen to ask questions and easily access information on public issues in a suitable form. Information and communication technologies allow citizen to engage in discussions with experts, people who make political decisions as well as with common fellow citizens. Such a democracy provides new interaction channels for policy actors, expands political audience and offers new opportunities for informing people and arranging their self-organization.

Electronic democracy allows to:

- Take interaction between citizens and the government to a qualitatively different level;
- Initiate the process of informing and involving citizens into politics;
- Consider Internet voting (some countries have already implemented this feature);
- Discuss and make joint decisions regarding crucial government decisions or laws (e.g. citizens extensively discuss and propose amendments to the legislation);
- Exercise civilian control over political/government decisions;
- Ensure effective coordination between government institutions and non-governmental and international organizations;
- Enhance information links between non-governmental organizations and other civil society institutions;
- Develop civil society.

1.2. Modern Civil Society

Modern civil society is a society that comprises government independent socio-political institutions which reflect various social interests in production industry, political and spiritual sphere, personal and family life.

The key features of the established civil society are as follows:

- Middle class that proportionally makes up for the majority of the society;
- Diversity of ownership forms;
- Diversity of political parties and views, political pluralism;
- Free market and fair competition based on reasonable advantages;
- Individual freedom and personal autonomy;
- Popular sovereignty and people's supremacy;
- Protection of civil rights and liberties;
- Citizen awareness of government and society actions;
- Free public opinion formation;
- Protection of human rights to information, high education level of the population, freedom of speech and conscience.

The development of civil society is closely related to political regime modernization. Sophisticated and strong civil society, effective control of government actions by the people pose as qualitative characteristics of a democratic regime.

With growing information technologies, we see a qualitatively new stage in the development of democracy that indicates a return to direct democracy with its lack of intermediaries in the person of elected representatives, political parties and other structures. Introduction of new information technologies allows citizens to be more involved in the political process.

We should emphasize that increasing globalization of the modern world has a great influence on the modern government structure. It weakens the control of nation states over communication recourses and facilitates unhindered dissemination of political ideas and democratic experience.

Still, we have to point out that such changes cover only technical means of boosting information processes and service delivery while preserving existing social ties and relations. At the same time, the nature of administration and governance stays the same. Low level of political culture and citizen activity can invalidate the potential of the latest information technologies.

A world that turned into a digital one expands the boundaries of social institution engagement in governance. The mechanisms and forms of interaction between the government and the society in the digital age possess various legal characteristics which are based on different levels of involvement in government administration – from simple provision of information to cooperation and partnership. The universal feature of these institutions lies in their function which is to bring democracy closer to real public demands”, says researcher. (Perepelica, 2020, p. 14)

1.3. E-participation Technologies in E-democracy Implementation

Firstly, let us define the terms that are going to be used in this paper. All of them have relatively recently entered the vocabulary of the academic circles and at the moment are interpreted rather loosely. Thus, according to Chugunov (2017), “e-participation is a set of methods and instruments that ensure electronic cooperation between citizens and government agencies in order to take into account citizen opinion on public and local administration when making political decisions including answering citizens’ appeals on wide range of issues” (p. 60). Social networks, which have become widespread as of late and have attracted millions of users globally, are turning into discussion platforms for deliberating topical issues in various life spheres of the society that concern the general public. Experts believe that “the analysis of discussions that take place on such Internet-platforms is now a crucial indicator, mechanism and instrument of e-participation” (Misnikov et al., 2016, p. 53). Collective comments and posts left by citizens on crucial political and social topics are nowadays considered as information from original sources when studying public opinion.

1.3.1. Transition to E-democracy

A radical shift from a representative democracy to a direct one is highly unlikely, as we already see the formation of a “hybrid model” that uses Internet to ensure higher transparency of the government and citizen participation when making certain decisions (e.g. the aforementioned Internet voting).

By looking into political aspects of the digital citizenship we are able to identify certain possibilities and problems related to the ongoing transformation of social relations. Digital communication offers new opportunities for political activity and discussion by increasing the value of citizen participation in social life. The Internet has opened up the world of information and communication platforms, becoming the second action space for people (Pyrma, 2019).

The underlying principles of e-democracy are recorded in such an important international document as Recommendation CM/Rec (2009) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on electronic democracy (e-democracy). The Appendix to these recommendations defines primary aspects and standards of e-democracy development. The document states that the main goal of e-democracy is to support democracy and enhance democratic institutions and process, and stresses that the objectives and principles

of e-democracy include transparency, accountability, responsiveness, engagement, deliberation, inclusiveness, accessibility, participation, subsidiarity, trust and social cohesion. (Recommendation CM/Rec, 2009).

The Strategy for the Development of the Information Society in the Russian Federation for 2017-2030 also stresses the crucial role of information technologies implementation. Thus, The Main Objectives of implementing information and communication technologies in order to enhance the social sphere, public administration system, cooperation between citizens and the government are to:

- develop technologies for e-participation between citizens, organizations, government agencies, local government agencies while preserving the possibility of citizens interacting with the aforementioned organizations and agencies without using information technologies;
- use new technologies that increase the quality of government administration in Russian Federation government agencies;
- improve mechanisms of e-democracy;
- ensure that information and communication technologies are applied when conducting opinion polls and population census (Strategiya razvitiya informacionnogo obshchestva..., 2021).

We should point out that the Internet prompts the development of citizen participation in politics and provides new ways of cooperation with government agencies.

1.4. Information Technologies and Political Stability

The term «political stability» has yet to have an unambiguous definition. It is rather challenging not to remark that the search for a comprehensive description of political stability has been unsuccessful so far. In general, political stability implies gradual, step-by-step growth in certain social activity indicators that characterize the society as a cohesive well-functioning system which lack political upheavals, revolutions and shifts in power. We believe the definition suggested by Savin (2003) to be more accurate and it interprets political stability as such a situation in the society's political sphere when it is ensured that material and spiritual resources would be reproduced and a certain order of political relations would be upheld. Political stability is characterized by relatively stable political institutions, existing political culture that supports the system, effective and legitimate power in the society.

1.5. The Role of Information Technologies in Securing Political Stability Growth

Information and communication technologies can be viewed as an instrument of direct democracy, with the considerable number of social networks, open communication and information overflow. However, the blocking of the 45th US President Donald Trump's Twitter page makes it clear how powerful such communication channels have become and what their role is in the modern political process. Their role turns out to be extremely crucial and the relevance of these information resources is only growing and reaches global proportions. With the help of social networks, the same Donald Trump has won the elections by declaring war on all central television channels under the slogan «Fake news». Remembering the wave of «colour revolutions» that took place in several countries, we should point out the role of social networks

in their preparation and setting them in motion. Information technologies in the context of modern political process can be placed on opposite sides concerning stability. They either destabilize a seemingly conflict-free country, or, on the contrary, contribute to the development of democratic institutions by laying the groundwork for the successful and stable progress for the years to come.

Looking at Scandinavian countries, one of the most prosperous and wealthy countries, we should point out that they hit the top in such spheres as the most developed civil society, the most effectively functioning information society and e-government, one of the most democratic countries in the world with the highest living standards. All these attributes are of the same kind as they are obviously interrelated.

The formation of the civil society is impossible to picture without e-democracy, cooperation and control tools that are offered by the modern information society. The Russian Federation is yet to go through this complex process, comprising interrelated components, of formation and development of the electronic society, i.e. e-democracy, the developed information society and smooth-running government.

We believe that we already have all the premises for the optimistic forecast of the successful information society formation in modern Russia. The time will tell how stable its development would be without any internal and external major shocks.

2. Problem Statement

We believe that the information technologies can make government activity more transparent and open, if, obviously, people can exercise their political will. The more open the government is, the more opportunities there are for the public to engage in political decision making. Then, public participation via information technologies gives a chance for the political system to be stable. Such a process can be presented with the help of the following scheme: government openness – social engagement in politics – political stability.

One of the key information mechanisms that ensure political stability is “digital democracy” which we understand as a process of political and administrative decision making that appears as a result of cooperation between citizens and political actors within Internet network space.

Besides, we should point out increasing social network influence on the modern political process not only in Russia, but globally as well. Communication via social networks becomes an intrinsic part of social life and is carried out at different levels, including public officials and international community. The opportunity to openly voice a point of view, discuss, approve or object to political news or politicians’ statements attracts increasingly wider public, which makes politics more open and clear.

3. Research Questions

In course of the study the following questions were raised:

- How can public participation affect political stability of the society?
- What tools are most effective in building e-democracy?
- How do informatization processes of the society and stability growth correlate with each other?
- How are civil society and information society interrelated?

4. Purpose of the Study

The paper dwells on the nature, concept and information mechanisms of ensuring political stability.

5. Research Methods

Relying on the principles of systems approach, the authors apply the methods of analysis, synthesis, evaluation, benchmarking and comparison.

6. Findings

Due to the use of systems approach when studying political stability of modern Russia, we analyzed the most crucial factors that affect the said stability. When viewing the political stability within the framework of information technologies development, the authors examined: the civil society establishment and e-democracy development, e-participation technologies used by the citizens in politics. The paper proves that there is a strong relationship between the processes of civil society establishment and e-democracy development.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, we should point out that the Internet facilitated the development of civil engagement in politics by providing a new way to cooperate with government agencies. E-participation is a crucial component that ensures “feedback” for the entire system of electronic communication between citizens and government, including multilevel e-government infrastructure. As of today, this feedback does not function effectively enough as there is a number of institutional barriers created by the government to prevent non-systemic opposition from using e-participation technologies.

However, the government is clearly interested in using the information on the nature and direction of citizen appeals to routinely monitor the situation in regions and municipalities. The feature of information technologies development is that not only objective socio-political and economic factors, but the state of information space as well play a role in changing political lines and political system. Therefore, the mandatory condition that ensures the existence of a stable democratic state is constructive activity of information institutions focused on democratic norms and values that help citizens acquire essential socio-political knowledge and be informed of political life of the society.

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