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Influence of e-government on the level of corruption in some EU and non-EU states

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Abstract

The development and implementation of e-government was one of the most relevant and important evolutions for public administration. In recent years, the governments in many countries have made efforts to increase their openness and transparency. E-governance is used, being considered an efficient and effective mean to improve public transparency and reduce corruption. This paper explores the relationship between corruption and e-government in two moments: 2004 (2007) and 2012 in EU and non-UE countries. The analysis is performed on two groups of countries to determine if EU accession has improved the fighting against corruption with e-Government, seeking the practical role of e-Government in changing the level of corruption.

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1. Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICT) were the trigger factors for the economic, political and social changes since the invention of the digital computer (mid-1940s), which were accelerated with the advent of the Internet (the early '90s). Currently, the work of public institutions depends increasingly more on the technical and architectural choices that are made at the level of technology. Most of the principles of good governance are

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expressed in the roles of e-government; in other words, focus on transparency, openness, citizen participation, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, etc.

The information technologies are important for direct accountability: citizens can have direct access to information about the functioning of public institutions and use communication technologies for public debates (Northrup and Thorson, 2003). Northrup and Thorson (2003) argue that this form of accountability requires transparency and reduces corruption. E-government refers to the use of information and communication technologies by government agencies to transform relations with citizens (G2C), businesses (G2B) and government organizations (G2G). Information technologies have a variety of ends: improving service delivery to citizens, interaction with business and industry, increase public accessibility to information, more efficient government management, and eventually reduce corruption, increase transparency and reduce costs.

ICT offers a new approach to create transparency and promote anti-corruption, leading to improved transparency and accountability in the functioning of public organizations and allowing government to expand its role as a provider of services focused on customers, which is the essence of development activities for e-government.

2. Literature Review

Transparency and the right of access to public information is considered essential to international democratic participation, trust in government, corruption prevention, accuracy of government information and provision of information to citizens (Cullier & Piotrowski, 2009; Mulgan, 2007, Shuler, Jaeger, & Bertot, 2010). ICT can reduce corruption by promoting good governance, strengthening reform initiatives, reducing the potential for corrupt behavior, strengthening relations between government employees and citizens, allowing tracking activities and monitoring and control behavior of government employees by the citizens (Shim & Eom, 2008). In this respect, the Internet posting of documents involving monetary transactions by public institutions is crucial. An increase visibility for administrative activity is closely related to anti-corruption measures.

The relationship between e-governance and corruption has been analyzed by several authors (Anderson, 2009; Shim & Eom, 2008; Mauro, 1997 Martha and Ortega, 2010), but Mistry and Jalal (2012) were the first to establish causality for this important relationship. The results of their study suggest that the use of ICT in e-governance leads to lower corruption. The authors, in their analysis carried out during 2003-2010, have also found that the impact of e-government is higher in developing countries than in developed countries. Martha and Ortega (2010) use in their analysis a corruption model developed by Klitgaard in his study, which includes the factors: number of internet portals of government, monopoly power of the government, discretion of public servants and responsibility of bureaucracy. Using a period of six years (2002-2005 and 2008) for 187 countries and panel data analysis as methodology, they found that electronic government initiatives have reduced corruption worldwide. The authors recommend that international agencies support and promote electronic government projects, in addition to other anti-corruption measures.

Also, other case studies and statistical analyses indicate that the use of information technology has great potential and has already proven benefits in the fight against corruption, notably by enhancing the effectiveness of internal control and management of corrupt behavior by promoting government transparency and accountability (Shim & Eom, 2008). Analyzing changes in data corruption between 1996 and 2006 through the use of information technology - enabled e-Governance initiatives in this period - Anderson concluded that "implementation of e-government significantly reduces corruption, and by the control of any government initiatives to adopt the initiatives wrong" (Anderson, 2009). In turn, Bhatnagar (2003) and Shim & Eom (2008) showed that countries that use e-government have experienced a reduction in corruption; particularly in the areas of taxes and government contracts, e-government is seen as a solution successful corruption issues in many nations in Europe, Asia and America.

The use of e-government can substantially contribute to reduce corruption due to the positive impact on three indicators: monopoly of elements of government by the political class, the discretionary power of state employees, and accountability bureaucracy, indicators first identified as important by Klitgaard (1991).

Generally, the elimination of corrupt government officials does not eliminate corruption. Instead, a change in the organization of government and its decision-making processes is what would make possible to always reduce corruption (Rose-Ackerman, 1978; Dininio and Orttung, 2005). In this type of organizational reform, if the incentives to engage in corrupt activities can be reduced or even eliminated by methods such as increasing transparency of government actions or restrict the discretion exercised by bureaucrats, corruption decreases

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