

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AS A TOOL FOR CREATING AN EFFECTIVE E- GOVERNANCE SYSTEM IN IRAQ

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Abstract

In a resource abundant environment, the people of Iraq have no right in the governance system. Thus, Iraq faces significant challenges in E-governance. In order to enhance E-governance and transparency in Iraq there is a need for creating an E-governance system that can motivate citizen participation in governance in the long-run.

Citizen participation is not effective, similar to the case of many other resource-rich countries in the Middle East and Africa. Since 2003, the Iraqi government has tried to tackle transparency, open governance, e-elections and e-governance; however, it failed. The failure may be attributed to different factors but the most crucial and influential one is lack of citizen participation. If people nurture E-governance, their collective effort will support government's effort in building a strong E-governance system. The main question for this study is; how can citizen participation contribute in nurturing E-governance in the case of Iraq?

This study outlines the role of effective citizen participation in creating E-governance in Iraq; this is a quantitative study Primary data collected from 100 participants was analyzed for this purpose. This study is composed of three main parts; the first part highlights theoretical perspective of E-governance in Iraq, and citizen participation. The second part focuses on discussing the data on e-governance. The final session of this study deals with the findings, and conclusions.

Keywords: E-governance, E-government, Citizen Participation, Iraq

1. Previous Research and Theory

e-Government got different connotations in the literature, including: electronic government, electronic governance, digital government, online government.” (Grönlund, 2004, p. 1). The study of electronic government has recently become the main duty of many governments worldwide. Iraq lags behind most countries in terms of e-government implementation. In fact, there have been attempts by the Iraqi government since 2003 to work on e-Government but the outcomes are not as people wish. E-governance requires active involvement of citizens in the process of completing it. Because, people want transparent and accountable government; the more transparent the government is, the better people know about public information and services. As is stated, “Digital public services contribute to better transparency, in a sense that citizens are more likely to understand how policies and rules are applied to their particular situation, this adds the feeling of

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being involved for the people.” (Li & Gregor, 2011). In regard to e-government, and citizen empowerment, the United Nations E-government survey 2010, has highlighted the “the importance of e-participation in all its aspects ranging from e-information, e-consultation to e-decision-making. Politicians and political decision makers represent the voice of citizens within government.” (2010, 84).

This session focuses on examining the previous research studies exclusively to find the gaps in the literature and recommend solutions. Even though, many scholars and researchers have undertaken serious reviews on the topic of e-Governance differently, the review of literature in this studies looking at specifically the citizen participation and its effect on e-Governance. Few scholars deal with barriers of adopting e-Governance, as Delopoulos (2010) in his study on barriers and opportunities for the adoption of e-Governance services has discussed the main barriers to adoption of e-Governance; importantly, citizen readiness in adopting e-Gov has been one barrier in reaching e-governance effectively usage in many communities.

The main goal for adopting e-Governance is to serve citizen and facilitate citizen interaction with government by making public information accessible via website. (Ndou, 2004). Accordingly, for adopting e-Government, governmental support is required for successful implementation. (Akbulut, 2003). Based on Modinis study, the barriers to e-Government are as follows: “leadership failure, financial inhibitors, digital divides and choices, poor coordination, workplace and organizational inflexibility, lack of trust, poor technical design.” (European Commission, 2007).

1.1. Theoretical Perspective on Citizen Participation

Most scholars researching on citizen participation acknowledge that citizen participation is crucial for achieving shared governance system. Regarding active citizen engagement in governance in the resource rich countries like Iraq, the citizen participation is poorly structured, and citizens are not involved in decision making and governance. This issue is thoroughly linked to e-Governance, and e-Government in which the issue matters citizen to a great deal, however their participation is restricted.

Globally, the governments work on digitalizing the public sector. For this purpose, the focus recently is on developing e-Government. Regardless of the world’s best practices, there are many countries like Iraq where yet there is nothing tangible. This study focuses on the perspective of empowering citizens in the e-Government process, because in Iraq there is a gap in which citizens are not aware and involved in e-Government development; thus, one important pillar is missing. In her work Nancy Roberts in “the Age of Direct Citizen Participation”, tackles few questions, one of which is; “does direct citizen participation function at all levels of government, in all sectors, for all issues, during all phases in the policy process, with all mechanisms of involvement”? (2008, p.7). In the context of citizen participation, Sherry R. Arnstein in “a Ladder of Citizen Participation,” defines citizen participation in three terms, as citizen participation, citizen control and maximum feasible involvement of the poor. (1969).

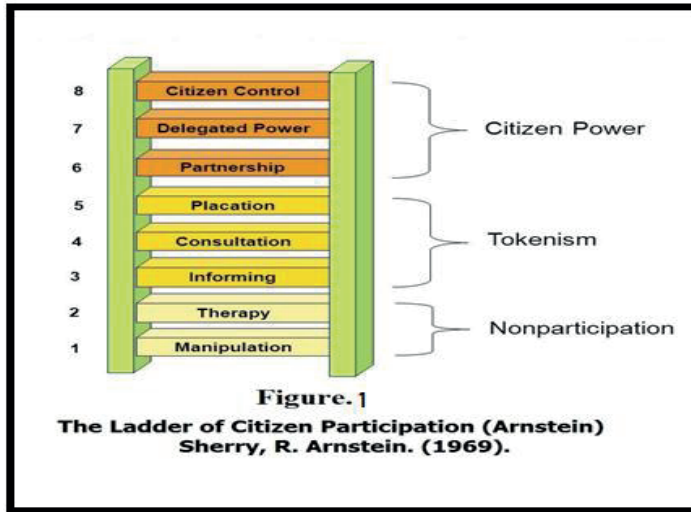


Figure 1. The ladder of Citizen Participation

In this regard, “citizen participation and empowerment have been acknowledged as the key factor for formulating national policies and their implementation.” (Brans et al. (2015). No doubt that citizens can be active facilitators in policy implementation even if they are not active participants of policy making. Paul Collier avers “governance conditionality as shifting power from governments to their own citizens.” (2007, p.127). In line with Collier, Kjar states that when power is transferred to lower levels, in which he means the public, decisions can be taken that are very responsive to the needs of the local community” (2004). that is to say, buying in people to decision making and power governance. In addition to that, Etzioni, addresses “the role of active society that encounter constraints that prohibits a society to be active and change”. (1968, p. 9). To emphasize this view, Arnstein adds that citizen participation is a code for citizen power. (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). Concerning, the voice of people and their role in governance, participation is considered as “a central element of democracy, citizen participation in economic policy is advocated as a way to make government spending more pro-poor.” (Drautigam, 2005, p. 37).

Drawing a speculative conclusion on this session, “citizen participation could be implemented to influence the capacity of citizens and agencies to participate in management,” (Lauber &Knush, 2000, p.21). There is a crucial point which is about public awareness on e-government, in which “better citizen interacts with the state’s administrative structure through e-government; people can learn that they can participate in systems and they get the benefit of it. (Komito,2005, p.41).

Lack of good governance, bad politics, poor infrastructure and poor human capital has all led to lack of active citizen participation in the e-Governance process in Iraq. There are many challenges and obstacles which until today Iraq could not overcome; among them are:

- a- The e-government infrastructure ICT is poor in terms of quality and quantity. Due to wars and instability in Iraq government could not have compatible infrastructure for initiating e-governance.
- b- There is lack of citizen empowerment in developing e-government project at different levels.

- c- Citizens barriers in which people alone cannot tackle them like; accessibility issues as Iraq has poor internet connections, and some regions do not have internet capacity or telecommunication is poor.
- d- There is lack of experience and knowledge in using e-government as there are limited programs and trainings for civic-awareness of the people.
- e- There is no trust in e-government from the side of the citizens, thus government has to work on building trust in e-government by enforcing rules and regulations of e-government at proper time.
- f- Citizen awareness is low and there is a need for boosting it for supporting better citizen readiness.
- g- The issues of privacy and security are at stake in Iraq as those are the obvious obstacles for citizens in using e-government. Government of Iraq failed in ensuring citizens with privacy rights and protection.

2. Data and Method

2.1. Method Analysis

This section discusses the methodological framework of the research and its data collection approach. The choice of this method was granted based on the scope of the study and importance of the methodology as a facilitating tool for bringing in scientific data and to draw conclusions on. For getting appropriate outcomes this study has used a quantitative method for collecting data.

2.2. Justification of the Using Quantitative Method

The main reason for using quantitative research method is to get data from different participants from different parts of Iraq, in which it gives data validity and fairness of researching on this sensitive topic. Moreover, quantitative data from diverse community members and getting various views on e-Government and its link to people was the goal for this method. Another rationale was getting to know how people in real terms think about e-governance and what do they know about it. Very crucially, this also avoids choosing those, and which participants the researcher wishes and vice versa, as this helps reducing individual bias in data collection process. This method, therefore, is open and fair in participation terms. Besides, it proves the usefulness of the findings and in drawing policy recommendations, would be more reliable, as e-Government is about the public more than the government.

2.3. Data Collection

The data collection process in this research is based on quantitative method in which an online survey-questionnaire is created and circulated from the Internet via social media links especially Facebook, Gmail, and Linked-in. The main objective of this method was reaching as many participants as possible for getting data from different parts of Iraq and from different individuals. The time frame for collecting data was December-January 2019. The phase of the sample was 100 participants. This survey might be among the few practical studies, which has been conducted yet. The questionnaire was composed of 13 questions, 4 general questions on participants' background

and 9 main questions on the topic. For some questions Likert scale was used and some were options and one open-ended question was asked to define e-Governance.

The target population for this research was highly educated citizens, because this topic interests those who know about governance, government, technology and development in the 21st century and are concerned and aware about developments in Iraq especially in digital terms.

Participants Demographic Analysis:

According to the data 74.70% of participants were from the public sector who are mostly government employees, while, only 14.30% of the participants were from private sector and only 11% from other sectors. In terms of gender 73.90% were male participants and 26.10%, the minority were female participants. The age groups were as 76.10% were 26 to 40 years which means majority of participants was from young generation and 12 % were less than 25 years, 9.80% were between the age of 41-50 years and only 2.10% were elder than 50 years. Regarding education level of participants in this study, 41.30% were MA/MSc holders, 28.30% were PhD holders, 21.70% were BA/BSc holders and 7.60% were students and only 1.10% from other levels. This indicates that participants of this study were knowledgeable about e-government to some extent since, in present times, most among the young generation are aware about technological developments in governance.

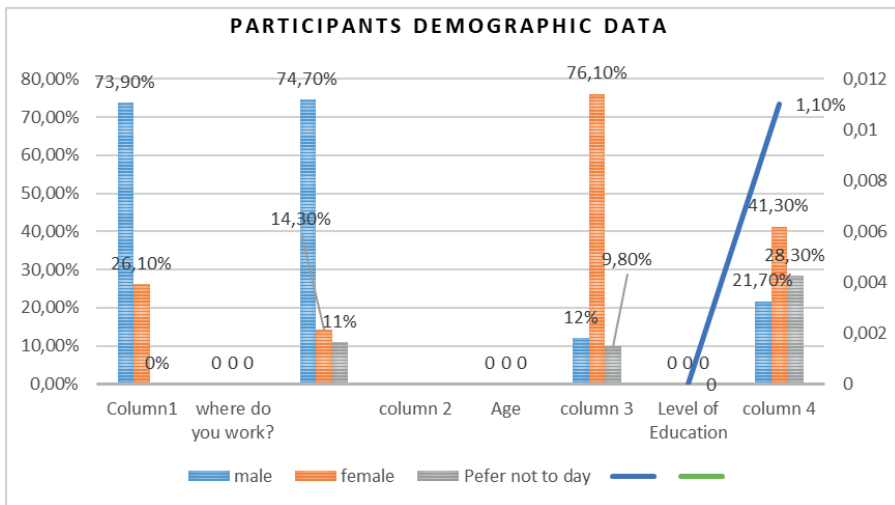


Figure 2. Participants demographic data

2.4. Discussions

The first question of this survey was “what is meant by the concept of e-Governance? As there have been many given definitions about e-government, the following are the most repeated **ones which were given by the participants including:**

E-Governance is a well-structured system that connects citizens to government
Using the electronic devices to cover the governmental works and procedures
Electronic governance: using technology to run government institutions
E-Governance Is the integration of information and communication technology in all the processes, with the aim of enhancing government ability to address the needs of the general public.
Electronic based method of governing
Delivering government services through electronic means
E-Governance means to change the concept of running the public sector from its current paper based state to an electronic one
A government that runs public affairs via internet and facilitate people's business online

Table 1. E-Governance

For the statistical part of the data, the questions are subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS. In accordance to the barriers of e-Government implementation in Iraq, the participants have had different choices, yet all the points were considered as serious constraints to e-Governance. According to the following chart 49% of respondents acknowledged that they agreed that the public can nurture e-Governance and a collective effort will support government in building a strong e-governance system in Iraq. 10% of participants strongly agreed with the statement. While 30% of respondents were neutral about this issue, a minority of the participants i.e. 8% disagreed with the issues whereas 3% of the participants strongly disagreed.

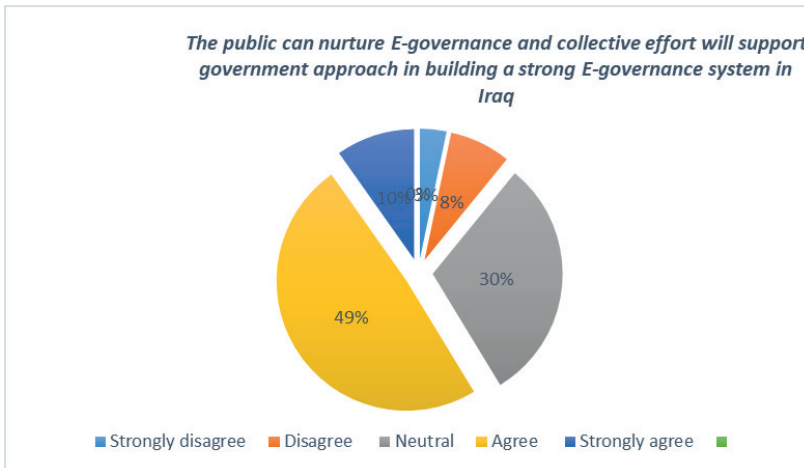


Figure 3. Support for E-Governance approach

In this survey the data showed that people are not sure about trusting e-Governance, thus, the ratio for trusting is low compared to those not trusting it. And that is all due to security, privacy and lack of data protection. The data shows that the issue of trust is not tackled well, and people have fear of using e-government services, which comes from issues linked to safety and privacy of data in using e-government. Based on the respondents' answers 25.9% of the respondents have mentioned that they fully trust e-government if government supports it, while majority of respondents counted as 58.8% were indifferent and stated they do not trust it at all, while ratio of 15.3% said that they trusted it to some extent.

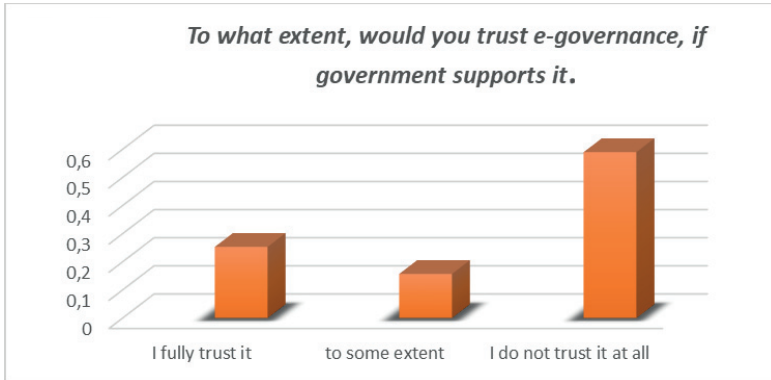


Figure 4. Trust in E-Governance approach

Trust in e-government, and e-governance is a critical point for people, and particularly for developing countries since exposure to digitalization was received late in Iraq. Yet, “trust is rarely given unconditionally especially to governments composed of unknown and unaccountable individuals. (Rothman, 2003). Though, in Iraq this may be true to certain extent yet there is lack of interaction of people and government due to lack of participation.

An essential prerequisite for enhancing transparency and accountability of government is through e-government process. As this bar chart shows on the topic of e-governance and its link to transparency and accountability, 50% of respondents agreed that e-governance can enhance transparency and accountability in Iraq. 11.7% strongly agreed with the statement. Whilst, 24.5% echoed that they are neutral about this topic, and few respondents 8.5% and 5.3% stated disagree and strongly disagree.

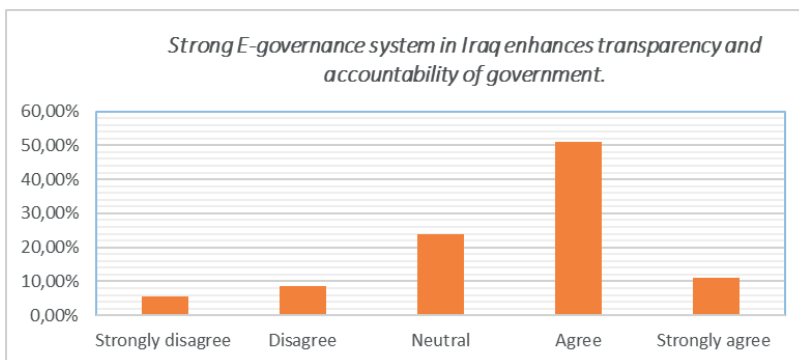


Figure 5. Strong E-Governance system and transparency

Concerning the main barriers and obstacle of e-governance, among the main barrier that were discussed in the data collection process were barriers linked to citizens and barriers linked to government. In the light of the results, 18% of the respondents agreed that government commitment was observed as a main challenge for people in e-government development. However, the majority of respondents 44.7% sounded that all the mentioned barriers in the chart were the reasons for poor e-governance in Iraq.

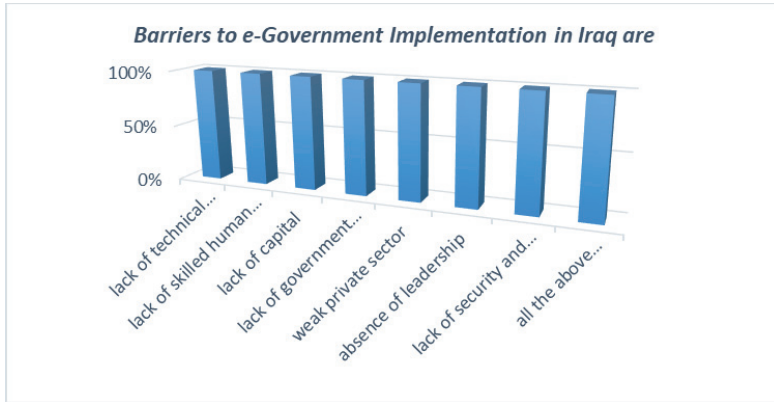


Figure 6. Barriers to e-Government

Another question, which was stated in this survey, was about government role in developing e-government, and investing in e-government progress. Based on the following data, majority of respondents stated disagree. There is a controversy in this question and the answer in part is about government commitment, and the other part is citizen capacity of adopting the services.

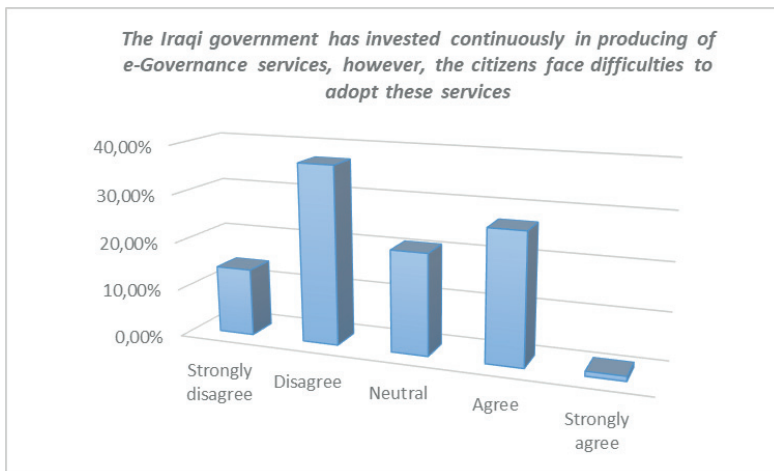


Figure 7. Investment in e-Government

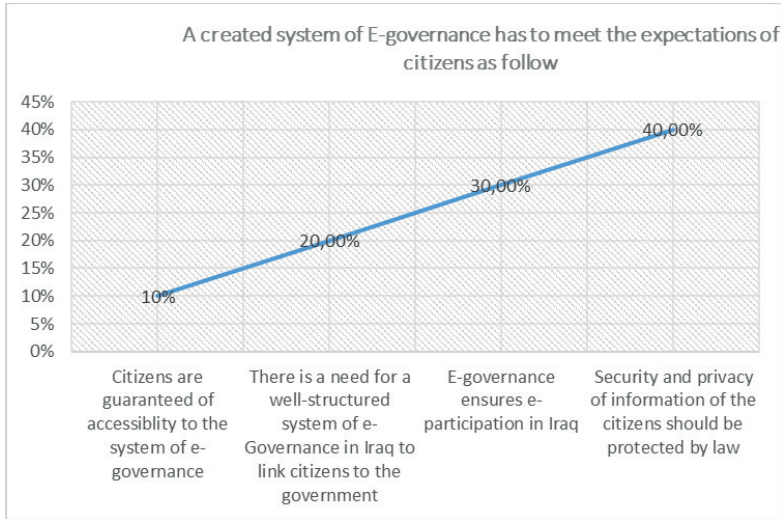


Figure 8. e-Government meets expectations

Another question in the survey questionnaire was “a created system of e-governance has to meet the expectations of citizens.” The main aim of asking about this statement was to seek the viewpoint of 100 citizens concerning e-governance. Four options were given among them the issue of security and privacy of information of citizens. 40% of participants agreed that privacy of citizens needs to be protected by law. While considering e-governance as an approach for ensuring e-participation has got 30% of participants’ agreement. The two other options including citizen accessibility to e-governance and creating a well-structured system for linking citizen to government got 10% to 20% votes. At this end, it shows that citizens are still concerned about privacy of data and trust compares it to their active participation in e-governance.

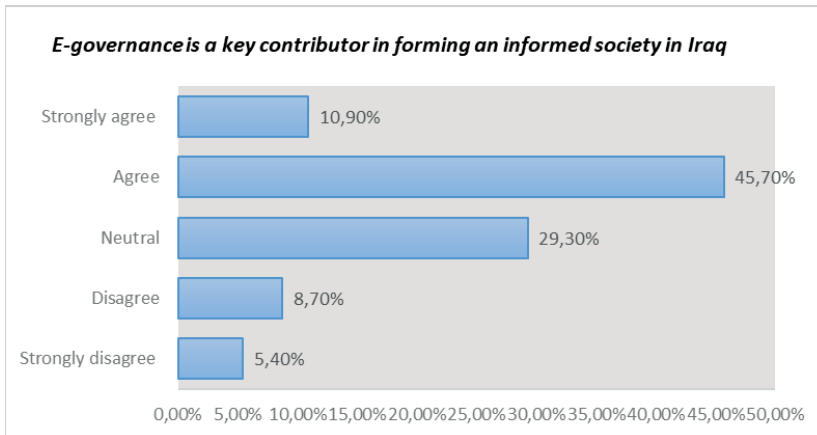


Figure 9. e-Governance and society

Data considering e-governance as a contributor to form an informed society in Iraq, 10 % of participants strongly agreed while majority of participants, as many as 45.70% agreed that e-governance helps in forming an informed society. 29.30% of respondents said they are neutral, and 8.7% disagreed that e-governance supports forming an informed society, and 5.4% acknowledged strongly disagree with the statement.

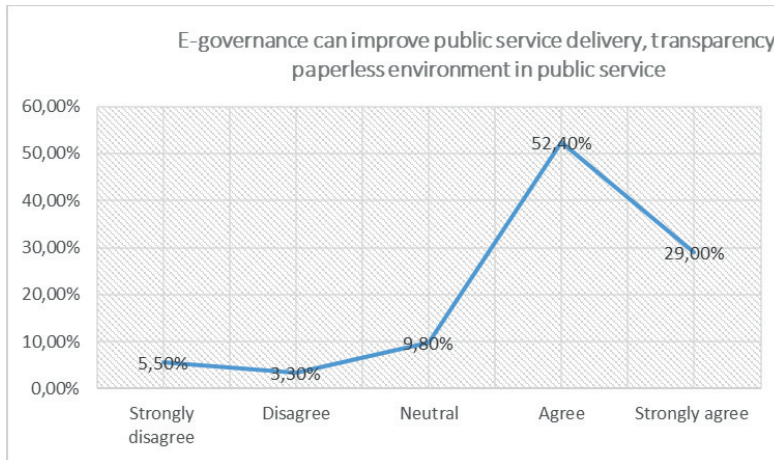


Figure 10. e-Governance and public service delivery

Data from 100 participants were sought, in which 29.00% respondents strongly agreed, and 52.40% of respondents agreed respectively, the majority of participants counted as roughly 80% were positive that e-governance can improve delivering public service, and transparency as well as it reduces paper work. A minority of the respondents, nearly 20% were negative about the statement in this survey.

2.5. Findings and Final Remarks

According to the findings of this study the following few have been selected as the top priority points to be tackled in the future by the Iraqi Central Government. The findings underpin that the government has to pay special attention for developing e-Governance systematically. This survey has revealed that there are certain challenges and barriers for the e-Governance development in which tackling them takes time and afford.

The manifest barriers were many and among them the government commitment in the light of the findings, government has to focus on overcoming the barriers and obstacle to improve e-governance. This study reveals that the citizens in Iraq are concerned about security and privacy of data and they do not trust e-governance unless the government guarantees citizens with safety of data and information.

There is still hope in e-governance based on data most people think that e-governance can lead to transparency and accountability in Iraq which helps in ending corruption and poor governance in the long run. As, credibility of government is related to the level of transparency of the government and citizens can fully trust government while they know well about the governance process that is

conducted by government, thus e-governance can be a tool for building this strong linkage between government and citizens.

In addition, Iraq has to put high priority on investing more systematically in e-governance development, while there is a pressing need for developing and training human capital for e-governance sector to push Iraq to step on e-government development.

Overall, this study shows that Iraq is not yet ready for implementing e-governance and there is a dire need for working on e-governance development at different levels. Based on the current data in this study and previous studies in the literature, e-governance can contribute in forming an educated and informed society, on the one hand, and on the other hand it can help in delivering high quality of public service to the citizens with low cost.

3. Conclusions

This study has made a serious attempt to respond to few critical questions about the role of citizen participation in e-Governance in Iraq. As put forward, Iraq needs a strong e-governance structure; and there is a need for developing technological infrastructure and human capital which are both necessary for e-governance development. In this context, citizens will only be empowered well when they are familiar and trained well, and then they can use and adopt e-governance easily.

This study has identified the main barriers and obstacles and recommends urgent focus on overcoming the main barriers to create convenient environment for e-governance implementation, particularly focusing on citizen participation and approaches of active citizen learning of e-governance. There is a pressing need for governmental commitment in e-governance development, as well as building trust which can help in bringing citizens into e-governance in Iraq.

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Appendix I

Survey- Questionnaire Form

Citizen Participation as a Tool for Creating an Effective E- Governance System in Iraq

Dear Respondent, I am a researcher and university lecturer at University of Raparin, I am conducting a research on (e-governance and citizen participation). Kindly asking you to answer these questions based on your knowledge and experience regarding this issue. Ensuring your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for research purpose. Your kind cooperation in this regard will be highly appreciated. Thanks in advance

Kind Regards,

Paiman Ramazan Ahmad

Section A: Demographics:

1- Gender

A. Female. B. Male. C. Prefer not to say

2- Age

A. Less than 25
B. 26 to 40 years
C. 41 to 50 years
D. More than 50 years

3- Level of Education

A. Bachelor
B. MA/MSc
C. PhD
D. Student
E. Others

Where do you work?

A. Public Sector, B. Private sector, C. Others.

Section B: Main questionnaire questions:**1. To what extent, would you trust e-governance, if government supports it.**

A. I fully trust it, B. To some extent, C. I do not trust it at all

2. What is meant by the concept of "E-governance"?**3. The public can nurture E-governance and collective effort will support government approach in building a strong E-governance system in Iraq**

Strongly disagree, B. Disagree, C. Neutral, D. Agree, E. Strongly agree.

4. Strong E-governance system in Iraq enhances transparency and accountability of government.

Strongly disagree, B. Disagree, C. Neutral, D. Agree, E. Strongly agree.

5. Barriers to e-Government Implementation in Iraq are ...

- a. Lack of technical infrastructure
- b. Lack of skilled human resource
- c. Lack of capital
- d. Lack of governmental commitment
- e. Weak private sector
- f. Absence of leadership
- g. Lack of security and stability
- h. All the above mentioned barriers

6. The Iraqi government has invested continuously in producing of e-Governance services, however, the citizens face difficulties to adopt these services.

Strongly disagree, B. Disagree, C. Neutral, D. Agree, E. Strongly agree.

7. A created system of E-governance has to meet the expectations of citizens as follow:

1. citizens are guaranteed of accessibility to the system of e-governance
2. there is a need for a well-structured system of E-governance in Iraq to link citizens to the government
3. e-Governance ensures e-participation in Iraq
4. security and privacy of information of the citizens should be protected by law

8. E-governance is a key contributor in forming an informed society in Iraq.

Strongly disagree, B. Disagree, C. Neutral, D. Agree, E. Strongly agree.

9. E-governance can improve public service delivery, transparency, paperless environment in public service.

Strongly disagree, B. Disagree, C. Neutral, D. Agree, E. Strongly agree.