

## **Electronic Government and Invasion of Privacy**

**Abdullah Ural, PhD.<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

The concept of privacy is mentioned with confidentiality and security of personal information. While governments create electronic tools to observe the environment and to provide their citizens a more secure environment, it might cause an individual's private area to shrink.

As Foucault mentioned; knowing means being strong and rulership keeps information to hold power. Today, not only governments but also corporations collect information to observe citizens. So, in many cases, individuals face social and psychological insecurity problems. Therefore, individuals and societies should be informed about these issues and ways to protect individual freedom.

Building of personal databases by the state and private businesses otherize the individual in many fields, and cause them feel weak. Political alienation which may emerge as a result of othering, may deepen the representation crisis which includes liberal democracy contrary to the assumption that e-state would increase participation.

**Key words:** Electronic government, privacy, Invasion of Privacy, liberal democracy

### **1. Introduction**

Today; records of cameras and phone calls, signals of mobile phones, IP numbers, e-mail tracking systems, satellite based systems, Google Earth also GPS applications are only some of the tools which can be used to violate privacy being easily reached. While the mentioned tools are used for observation, they can cause private area to be constricted. That's why, some of the ethical issues listed above may appear:

Does the government list citizens?

Do individual privacy and freedom exist?

Does observing process conform to democracy?

Even though the governments have become more sensitive on the mentioned issues recently, it is not possible to define them as sufficient. In the study, as discussed in democracy theory, we propose that a strong government which is furnished with information might always cause a threat to individual freedom. In addition; the issue will be examined through liberal democracy complaining about huge corporations which are threatening democracy by interfering individuals' privacy.

---

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, University of Yalova, Turkey, uralabdullah@gmail.com

## 2. Electronic Government

Technology caused the services provided to citizens being faster, more transparent, more equitable, more reliable, cheaper and having better quality. When the public administration is taken into consideration, technology has revealed a new management model by the opportunities it provides. The internet and web technology oriented applications which brought forward this new understanding in terms of public administration have been conceptualized in different sources and in different ways. For instance, Fountain (2001) used the term “virtual state” describing web and internet based applications in public administration, besides some authors such as Atkinson and Ulevich (2000), Garson (2004), Mullen (2004) have preferred to use the term “digital state”. In addition to the mentioned terms, “electronic government” term is used in the literature (Howard, 2001; West, 2004; Evans and Yen, 2006; OECD, 2003; Worldbank, 2008; De Benedictis et al., 2002). With reference to widespread acceptance in literature, electronic government has been adopted to conceptualize new management approach in public administration.

There exist many definitions developed on the understanding of electronic government in the literature. We are confronted with some parts of the definitions are narrow sense but some parts of these are wider scoped definitions. Within these, the selected main definitions of e-government can be listed as follows: It is to serve up government information and services to citizens online through the use of the internet and other digital tools (West, 2004: 16). It is the use of information and communication technologies particularly the internet in governmental issues to produce service (Howard, 2001: 6) for citizens and businesses as well (OECD, 2003: 23). It is the use of information and communication technologies to improve public services and democratic functioning and to secure the support of public policies in public administration which is combined with organizational change and new skills (United Nations, 2003: 7).

It is understood by the definitions in common that a system allowing all information and data are to spread with less cost, the relationship of goods / services work between individuals and institutions is practised more effectively and productively with the help of online methods (Köseçik and Kark n, 2004: 119-120), bureaucracy is reduced, the state governance has become more transparent (Erdal, 2004: 1), expenditures are diminished, information and communication technologies are used for offering public services as a tool, public administration is restructured on behalf of citizens' satisfaction.

## 3. Privacy

Privacy is closely related to the concept of supervision. The concept of supervision can be discussed in two ways. While supervision, by its first definition, means the enciphered knowledge that can be used to manage human behaviours, by its second definition, it is watching human behaviours directly (Giddens, 2008, 24). Today, not only governments but also private sectors collect personal information to conduct a supervision function as governments.

Privacy, however, generally means an area that people can stay on their own, that they can think and behave however they wish as they can decide themselves besides when, where, how, and to what extent they can communicate to others; and the right they have on this area (Yüksel, 2003:

182). It is their own choice for them e.g some of their behaviours or secrets be known or unknown by friends, other people or public, including the government.

The invasion of privacy is getting more probable while there exist a more effective process of e-state when information spreads easier via communication technologies. While an individual's private information used to spread only in a local region through the people's conversations with the possibility to be forgotten in a short time; nowadays that kind of private information will be open to everybody in the world by a picture, a video or a part of manuscript and that may be duplicated many times so it will exist forever in the virtual world (Tataroğlu, 2009, 96).

#### **4. Invasion of Privacy**

One of the major problems of today's democracies in many western countries is the representation because of the low participation rates in elections. The citizens' trust on the representative institutions of democracy and politicians is decreasing gradually. It is discussed whether the e-state, by the help of technological means, would bring solution to the political alienation by increasing the participation in the democratic processes. Therefore, it is suggested that it can support the state and its institutions by means of participatory democracy.

Information and data technologies may present a solution to the representation crisis of democracy with its role in participation. On the other hand, it may include many threats in terms of democracy because of the fact that activities carried out on an electronic spectrum can be recorded, all the personal information can be known, all the activities may be recorded by others.

The information and communication technologies, with their means to watch and to inform, may provide a great power with governments. It leads to an over centralization of the power in bureaucracy. The information technologies, today, support an organization aimed at increasing bureaucratic control mechanisms. Power may transform into a totalitarian identity when it lays a focus on a certain area. This situation may threaten the democratic regimes and governments to have a tendency toward repressive, totalitarian and anti-democratic works.

The term "thought police" that Laidler has drawn attention expresses the possibility to know the people's political views from their activities on internet. It is not only possible to find out the political tendencies of people by detecting what sites they have visited on internet, what newspapers they have read, what books they have bought by their credit cards, but also to draw their personal profiles, and determine their illnesses, weak and strong sides. Moreover, these records may be transformed into personal data bases.

Besides, the invasion of privacy may be not only from the administrations but also from private individuals or companies. In addition to the state institutions, the private institutions communicating with people for some purposes, service and so forth, mostly make it a pre-condition for the individuals to tell both their personal information and, most importantly, their credentials, in a commanding position. It can be regarded almost impossible for people's personal information to be kept secret. It may come to mean that surfing the net or doing something on it,

shopping by credit card, paying highway fines, or even carrying a mobile phone with you, will cause your private information to be unveiled and monitored.

The managers can do some monitoring practices with the intention of decreasing the risks at workplaces. They feel obligated to examine the employers' internet use, e-mail traffic and phone calls because of some reasons such as performance evaluation, productivity measurement, and safety concerns. These practices mean the invasion of privacy of employers' private lives.

The privacy violations of companies make it necessary to question the fundamental values of the liberal democracy. Liberalism owes its existence to free market and the individual who set him free and apart of state. Privacy in liberal thought is the field that an individual is set free or, necessarily is set free, comprehends in whatever way he/she wants, develops himself/herself, and pursues his/her own goodness. This field must be protected from any kind of intervention.

It is not possible to mention free will, if the individual isn't able to possess field of privacy or is afraid of being followed or is exposed to different interventions. The foundations of democratic society are based on the existence of public interest in supervision of governments and the privacy right which protects the individual and common life (Tataroğlu, 2009, 100). In the same way, the society may cause pressure on the individual but the perception of society for liberal thinkers is evaluated within the context of believes, traditions and values. In this case, as the national or international companies are not accepted in state sphere, will they be accepted in the public sphere, or are they units of individual sphere which emerged as a result of free will and free enterprise?

No matter what we accept, it is true that companies intervene in individual privacy keeping a kind of "consumer tendency statistics". The market, which restrains the state from repressing the individual by balancing the state power, may also invade the area of freedom and privacy of the individual whom it protects. The free and autonomous liberal individual who can preserve itself by means of economical power it owns can intervene in other individual's privacy in order to increase the economical power once more.

### **5. The Effect of Privacy Invasion on Individuals**

Privacy invasions may cause changes in individuals' psychological states and behaviours. Knowing the possibility that governments might use these technologies - even if they do not - may create effects on the thoughts and behaviours of individuals. The self-confidence of individuals who think that they are constantly under supervision begin to corrode in time. Their personalities depreciate and they may have to behave submissively and in a way that they are told to. The individual who supposes that he can always be monitored – even if they are not – develops a self-control mechanism on his own and starts overseeing himself. Individuals, who know that the government owns the technologies to constantly monitor him or her, begin to feel that they no longer have privacy and adopt a self-censorship application which will cause them to stay away from behaviours and thoughts that can mean opposition. Naturally, their reference of values may be the choices, ideologies, or the words and behaviours which the government or the people who monitor them will appreciate (Tataroğlu, 2009, 111).

The negative effects of monitoring on the employees are; demoralization, the constant rise of workloads, using the data for the purpose of punishment, stress, and the illnesses caused by stress according to Y Imaz's (2005:12) research which he conducted in firms.

## **6. Conclusion**

The state of chronic fear and anxiety caused by the individual's opinion that he/she is monitored all the time may become an obstacle for the individuals to improve and express themselves. Also, a number of instances at present show that recorded personal data cannot be protected. Almost every day, it is heard that data of one of the important websites have been stolen. The governments are primarily responsible for the issue. Maybe, one of the most fundamental principles of legality of the state is to protect the tangible and intangible assets and honour of the individual.

The fact that e-state has the opportunity to be able to reach personal data and to store it by means of communication it has may promote the tendencies to abuse this power and use it for repressive and authoritarian purposes. The possibility of electronic totalitarianism should never be ignored.

To overcome the problem of invading privacy, it is necessary for the governments to show sensitivity and do the required legislation but it is not enough. The governments constitute legal regulations and enforcements in order to protect the personal data from being used by the third parties and bureaucracy for illegal purposes. However, it is clearly seen that the governments cannot fulfil their responsibilities for privacy. Therefore, efficiency of the politically neutral supervisory and regulatory institutions is required to be increased.

The common argument for the ones who think that the government's monitoring as an electronic eye is not inconvenient is that "the ones who has nothing to hide shouldn't be afraid of being watched". This is a very common statement for governing parties throughout the whole world. This approach assumes that monitoring is related to the elements which are regarded as crime by law. However, the monitoring is in progress in much more different fields including physical, financial, familial, and intellectual. Building of personal databases by the state and private businesses otherize the individual in many fields, and cause them feel weak and helpless. Political alienation which may emerge as a result of this othering may deepen the representation crisis including liberal democracy on the contrary to the assumption that e-state would increase participation.

## References

- Atkinson, R. D., Ulevich, J., (2000). "Digital Government: The Next Step to Reengineering the Federal Government". Progressive Policy Institute Technology & New Economy Project. [www.ppionline.org/documents/DigitalGov.pdf](http://www.ppionline.org/documents/DigitalGov.pdf), 5. Date of accession: 12.02.2013.
- DeBenedictis, A., Howell, W., Figueroa, R., Boggs, R A., (2002). "E-Government Defined: An Overview Of The Next Big Information Technology Challenge, Issues in Information Systems", IACIS 3, 130-136.
- Erdal, M., (2004). "E-Devlet, E-Türkiye ve Kurumsal Dönüşüm". İstanbul: Filiz Kitabevi.
- Evans, D., Yen, D.C., (2006). "E-Government: Evolving Relationship Of Citizens and Government, Domestic, And International Development". Government Information Quarterly, 23, 207-235.
- Fountain, J.E., (2001). "Building The Virtual State: Information Technology and Institutional Change". Washington D.C.: Booking Institutional Press.
- Giddens, A., (2008). "Ulus Devlet ve Şiddet", (translated by Cumhuriyet Atay), Kalkedon Yayınları 1.
- Howard, M., (2001). "E-Government Across the Globe: How Will "e" Change Government?". Government Finance Review, <http://www.gfoa.org/downloads/eGovGFRAug01>. Date of Accession: 10.02.2013.
- Kösecik, M., Kark n, N., (2004). "Belediye Yöneticilerinin ve Meclis Üyelerinin E-devlete Bakışı Denizli Belediyesi Örneği". Türk İdare Dergisi, Say : 443,119-139.
- Laidler, K., (2008). "Surveillance Unlimited: How We've Becom the Most Watched People on Earth", Iconbooks, Cambridge
- OECD, (2003). "The E-Government Imperative". Paris: OECD Publications Service
- Solove, D.J., (2007). "I've Got Nothing to Hide and Other Misunderstanding of Privacy". San Diego Law Review, Issue No.44, 745-772.
- Tataroğlu, M., (2009). "E-Devlet'te Kullanılan Gözetim ve Kayıt Teknolojilerinin Mahremiyet Üzerinde Etkileri". Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi Cilt:2009/1 Say :18 , 95-119.
- United Nations-UN, (2003). "World Public Sector Report 2003: E-Government at the Crossroads." New York, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- Yüksel, M., (2003). "Mahremiyet Hakkı ve Sosyo-Tarihsel Gelişimi", AÜ SBF Dergisi, Issue No.58/1, 181-213.
- Yılmaz, G., (2005). "Elektronik Performans İzleme Sistemlerinin Çalışanlar ve İşletmeler Üzerindeki Etkileri", İstanbul Ticaret Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, Issue No. 4/7, 1-19.
- West, D.M., (2004). "E-Government and the Transformation of Service Delivery and Citizen Attitudes". Public Administration Review, Issue No.64/ 1, 15-27.
- Worldbank, (2008). "Definition of E-Government", <http://go.worldbank.org/M1JHE0Z280>, Date of Accession: 12.02.2013.