

Democratic Disconnect in E-government Policy Initiatives of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has initiated several reform measures that have been extensively discussed in the media, policy-making circles, political arenas, and academia. Some of the policy initiatives are published in the form of policy documents, e.g. KP Youth Policy (2016), KP Industrial Policy (2016) and KP ICT policy (2015-2016), etc. These published documents give us a good idea of the government's vision, strategy framework, and understanding of relevant concepts and terminologies. This paper explores policy documents related to the e-government initiatives of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, i.e., 'Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ICT Policy 2015-2016' and 'The Integrated Development Strategy (2014-2018)'. Through an examination of policy design, this paper investigates the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government's vision for e-government as articulated in its policy documents. It elucidates how this understanding addresses the issue of citizens' participation in governance through information and communication technologies (ICTs). The policy documents are analysed through the e-government models, i.e. managerial, consultative and participatory (Bellamy, 2000; Chadwick & May 2003). This paper argues that the way the concept of e-governance is interpreted, goals set, claims made, and strategies devised in these policy documents, the government appears to be unequivocally restricting e-governance to managing citizens through Information provision and service delivery. In this managerial tradition, the government eschews public consultation and citizen input through ICTs, which creates a democratic deficit.

Keywords: e-government, democratic deficit, ICT policy, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

The contemporary world is distinctive for its dynamism primarily because of the unprecedented, rapid and profound transformation. The profound change has affected multiple aspects of our lives. The rapid spread and use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the contemporary world is the cause and effect of such a transformation. Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have modified our socioeconomic and political lives in multiple ways. Within the domain of politics, ICT has conspicuously reshaped political participation. ICT, in general, and the Internet in particular, has provided new forms and ways of political participation in democratic politics worldwide. Notably, citizens' participation in governance is also transforming. Citizens worldwide are demanding their governments hear them out through these newly invented means of communication. Governments are changing how they govern in response to such demands. These changing governance trends have more profound implications for representative democracy worldwide.

Representative democracy has been increasingly under attack in modern times due to the waning relationship between citizens and the government. This issue stems from citizens' declining interest in politics and the government's apathetic attitude towards engaging them in the governance process. Nonetheless, a vigilant citizenry is essential to representative democracy. In a democracy, citizens must actively participate in politics and governance. This requires a responsive government that adequately addresses its citizens' demands. Furthermore, citizen participation encompasses access to government-related information and government services, providing feedback on policy issues, political campaigning, mobilising, and fostering political debates. ICTs play a crucial role in facilitating citizens worldwide in all these forms of citizen engagement. As a result, ICTs are tackling a significant issue facing representative democracy in the modern world and promoting good governance.

In the contemporary world, citizens have become 'digital citizens'. They engage in politics and connect with their governments more frequently through ICTs. Given the noticeable impact of ICTs on democratic governance, it is essential to investigate how the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government (Pakistan) has shaped policies that reflect the

democratic ethos and aim to improve governance by utilising ICTs for citizens' engagement in the policy-making processes.

In the backdrop of the above utility of ICTs, the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has made a noticeable effort from the outset towards e-government. These initiatives include publishing ICT policy documents, efforts towards efficient service delivery, and open online access to information related to government services. It is striking that despite such discernible change in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government policies, with a few exceptions (Aman, 2022; Aman & Jan 2022), there has been no cogent effort on the part of the scholars to probe Khyber Pakhtunkhwa policy-making initiatives in the domain of e-government. Moreover, recently, some scholars have argued that there is a lack of a 'leader-focused' and 'people-centric' approach in policymaking at all levels of government in Pakistan (Jabeen et al., 2016: 420). Therefore, there is a need to look into promoting democracy (see Ali et al., 2015 for democratic challenges to Pakistan) through such e-governance policy initiatives in Pakistan. This paper aims to do so primarily by inquiring how the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government envisions e-government in its policy documents. And *how such understanding addresses the issue of citizens' participation in governance through ICTs*.

This paper first highlights two specific theoretical explanations (models) related to citizens' participation in governance through ICTs and explicates how these models provide a theoretical premise. The second section offers methodological details to demonstrate how this study was conducted. The sections following methodology include discussions based on content analysis and findings of this study. A brief conclusion is added at the end of the paper.

Citizen-government Interaction Through ICTs: Theoretical Underpinning

The question of public participation through ICTs in contemporary democracies is approached differently by various scholars. Some scholars have developed models that explain the democratic interaction between citizens and government through ICTs (Bellamy, 2000; Chadwick & May, 2003). These models provide valuable insights into how and why various governments use ICTs to reach citizens. Christine Bellamy has made a prominent effort in this direction (Bellamy, 2000). Bellamy (2000) has proposed a distinctive classification (models) of democracies in the information age. These models are *consumer democratic*, *demo-elitist*, *neo-republican* and *cyber-democratic*. Bellamy contends that the *Consumer Democratic* model presupposes the inherent value and effectiveness of existing representative institutions. They recognise the growing influence of contemporary state governments and bureaucracies and advocate for increased awareness among citizens regarding the intricacies of interacting with these administrative entities. It focuses more on the service-consumer relationship and emphasises public service delivery. By doing so, it aims at the adequate flow of information to consumers (Bellamy, 2000; 40-41). Consequently, they envision citizens as more active, informed, and purposeful users of public service information through ICTs.

The *demo-elitist* model posits that public opinion's primary function is to "constrain and legitimize government" rather than to "direct policy." (Bellamy, 2000, 42). The central argument of this model revolves around the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in bridging the gap between governing elites and civil society organisations. It underscores the vertical flow of information between voters and their representatives, as well as between the government and representative institutions (Bellamy, 2000).

The *new republican model* focuses more on the quality of citizen participation at the micro level of politics. This model advocates for organic and community-oriented citizenship, which emphasizes the cultivation of civic virtue through the active participation of citizens in decision-making processes and the restoration of emancipatory civil society (Bellamy, 2000, 46). The new republican model posits the potential of Information and Communication Technology to establish a virtual public sphere where political dissent and emancipation can transpire.

The *cyber-democracy model* assumes that ICTs can form post-modern virtual communities that are capable of '*sustaining new emancipatory politics of identity*' (Bellamy, 2000). Within these virtual communities, individuals can construct new identities in a liberating manner rather than being subjected to stigmatized or marginalized identities imposed upon them by external entities. Members of these communities can actively participate in novel forms of identity politics, thereby enriching and broadening their communities' capacity for pluralism and tolerance towards diverse perspectives (Bellamy, 2000).

In the footsteps of Bellamy, Chadwick and May have also developed their models of citizen-government interaction through ICTs (Chadwick & May, 2003). They contend that three distinct models of citizen-state interaction form the foundation of e-government practices: managerial, consultative, and participatory. (Chadwick & May, 2003). The managerial model proposes that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are primarily a quantitative enhancement over preceding technologies. It focuses on efficient service delivery to customers, improved information

flow to citizens and government, and improved efficiency of government officials. The consultative model strongly emphasises citizens' input and opinions, fostering effective communication between the government and citizens. It also emphasizes the importance of citizen input in policymaking to enhance the quality of policy formulation. Finally, the participatory model posits a more intricate interplay between citizens and the state, wherein the latter is viewed as a facilitator among multiple stakeholders in the governance process. It underscores the importance of meaningful interactions, deliberations, and discussions among citizens in guiding the policy formulation. It advocates for a genuinely participatory democracy by applying Information and Communication Technologies.

These models serve as the guiding framework for our study, enabling us to comprehensively understand the evolving dynamics of the citizen-government relationship through the utilization of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). They also explain how citizen-government interaction may shape the future. Taking insights from these models, we would analyse the policy documents of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to see if they show managerial, consultative, or participatory tendencies in their approach and understanding of e-government.

Besides the theoretical literature on the use of ICTs in governance, the scope of this study suggests that a succinct theoretical discussion is engaged around the area of policy analysis. The most relevant literature to this study in the broader policy analysis area is policy design. This is because the paper identifies and problematises how the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government designs the policy related to E-governance.

Scholars of public policy (Birkland, 2015; Dye, 2012) have identified goal setting as a key element of policy design and as a process; it is guided by a 'problem' concerning public affairs (Birkland, 2015). A problem '*can be defined as a condition or situation that produces needs or dissatisfaction among people and for which relief or redress by governmental action is sought*' (Anderson, 2003). After identifying the problem, means are identified to address those problems (Aguiar, et al., 2022). This paper investigates the problems identified, goals set and means adopted by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ICT policy documents. It suggests that the problem of poor governance is recognised as a problem, and efficiency in governance is a goal. We already know from the literature that achieving efficiency in governance is a central goal that guides a policy design (Stone, 2012). Efficiency is defined as '*getting the most output for a given input*' (Stone, 2012). Moreover, in these policy documents, the government adopts the ICTs to achieve the goal of efficiency in governance. The paper suggests that by choosing efficiency over public engagement through ICTs, the e-government policies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa represent a democratic deficit.

Method

This study primarily derives its findings from a research project conducted by the author with the support of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, carried out between 2015 and 2017. The decision to select Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was mainly due to the absence of comprehensive research on e-government policy initiatives in the province. To the author's knowledge, no study has yet investigated the democratic aspect of e-government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The author chose Khyber Pakhtunkhwa because of the substantial media and academic discourse surrounding the governance of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), which ardently advocated for a paradigm shift in Pakistan's governance practices. Furthermore, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has been explicit about employing technologies in governance from the outset, as reflected in its reported slogan, "*Technology Hamari Nae Pahchaan Hai*" (Technology is our new identity).

Key policy documents available online and in print were chosen for the above purpose. Published. These include the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ICT policy 2015-16 (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2016). This comprehensive document explicitly outlines the ideological leanings, vision, and strategies of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to foster the development and promotion of information technology within the province. The second document is the Integrated Development Strategy 2014- 2018. The government also regards this document as vital for its overall governance and development strategy. Lastly, the paper identifies the manifesto of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), which encapsulates the party's political vision that has governed the province since 2013 (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2014). Understanding that the manifesto is not a policy document, it is still an important text that elucidates the context and assists us in deciphering the embedded goals, discourses, and values contained within other policy texts issued by the PTI government. Notably, the paper does not include the digital policy 2018-2023. This study extensively reviews policy texts published by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government regarding the use of ICTs in government, drawing conclusions about the citizen-government engagement priorities outlined in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's policy documents.

Methodological tools such as the 'goal mining process' are used by various scholars (Anton & Earp 2004, Vlas & Lee 2016) to understand the embedded goals in policy documents, particularly IT-related policy documents (Vlas & Lee 2016). These studies systemically do goal mining through a process involving goal identification, goal classification,

and goal refinement. This is mainly done by analysing the text of the policy documents. In some ways, this is identical to the content analysis technique to identify goals in the text (Vlas & Lee 2016). This study also follows the technique holistically without the systematic rigour involved in the procedure adopted by these studies. This is broadly for two reasons: first, the study intends to focus on one primary objective, and that is, the ‘democratic aspect’ of ICT-related policy, and second, this study goes beyond just goals but looks into the embedded values and discourses of democratic governance in the text of policy documents published by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As such, the text of the policy documents is analysed to identify goals first (goal identification), followed by sifting of the goals to see if there is a visible democratic aspect (goals classification) and finally, analysing the goals to reflect on the nature of these goals, the embedded values and discourses for democratic content.

Policy Documents and E-government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Content Analysis

Policy analysis encompasses a diverse range of approaches, but our primary focus here lies in analyzing the content of policies. This entails examining the underlying values, assumptions, and ideologies that shape the policy process (Codd, 1988). We undertake this research because existing studies have demonstrated that the apparent rapid pace of e-governance reforms is frequently rooted in institutional values and discourses that provide a specific ideological framework for these initiatives (Chadwick & May 2023). Therefore, it is vital to analyse the types of claims made and the discourses influencing policy initiatives to comprehend such a change. It is also essential to recognise that policy documents are guiding texts for government actions. As such, they can be considered textual interventions in the practice of governance (Stephen & Ball, 1993). Consequently, the necessity to analyse policy is also motivated by the wish to examine the actions and reforms inherent in policies. We have selected three policy documents that provide us with a clear understanding of what the provincial government aims to achieve.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ICT Policy 2015-16

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ICT Policy 2015-16 is a 30 pages long document. Political executives, such as the Chief Minister and the Minister of IT, reflect the policy maker’s political vision through their messages in the document. These messages illustrate the government’s comprehension of e-governance and its role in fostering citizen engagement. Furthermore, one can observe evident ideological inclinations and values in these interpretations. These messages unequivocally utilise and interpret the concepts of ‘e-government’, ‘the relationship between citizens and government’, ‘good governance’, ‘efficiency and transparency’, and ‘active citizens’ concerning efficient ‘service delivery’.

Interestingly, there is no single instance where the term “democracy” is explicitly mentioned or associated with either Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) or governance. However, the terms ‘development’ and ‘good governance’ are repeated multiple times in the draft. It is pertinent to ascertain whether the application and interpretation of various concepts within the text are influenced by the neoliberal ideology shaping governance principles in numerous developing countries.

In his message, the Chief Minister of the Province states that e-government is the use of ICT to deliver public services in a more ‘convenient, customer-oriented, and cost-effective way’ (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2016). He recognizes the utility of ICTs for service delivery and emphasises that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is going towards citizen-centric services through ICT use. (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2016).

Mr. Shahram Khan, the Minister of Science and Technology and Information Technology, concurs with the view above. In his message, he recognised the role of ICTs in socio-economic development and good governance. He discerned that good governance is an ultimate goal aimed at improving the living standards of citizens, while technological advancements provide them with quick, adequate, and timely services. (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2016). He adds that e-governance is not merely about providing computers but about transforming the mindset of the people and improving government procedures (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2016).

The policy (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2016) states the government’s objectives, responsibilities, and operational procedures in a consumer-centric and business/corporate language. The terms “improved business continuity” and “making transactions with the government” are repeated throughout the text. It occasionally employs development language such as ‘socio-economic revolution’, ‘socio-economic development’, ‘economic uplift’, ‘economic growth’, and so forth.

The text of the policy document outlines five key components of its ICT policy: governance, citizen services, business, ICT literacy, and research and development. Out of these key component the three most relevant to this study are elucidated below.

1. Governance: It is interesting that the IT policy associates governance with efficient service delivery. The IT policy describes governance as one of its central elements. Moreover, it explains that the government uses ICT to improve efficiency and transparency. (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2016). The interventions pursued through this policy component encompass both the promotion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) within government departments (to enhance coordination and efficiency) and engagement with the public (citizens) outside government institutions (to achieve transparency).

2. Citizen Services: The IT policy incorporates citizen services as a component and emphasises that the government intends to utilise ICT to improve direct interaction with citizens to deliver services to them (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2016). This component seeks to engage the public and government through innovative ICT solutions effectively. The primary objective of this engagement is to provide citizens unrestricted access to government information and services. (The concept of ‘Open Government’ has gained global recognition and is widely recognised as a catalyst for facilitating the accessibility of vital government information). The document indicates that the government intends to provide access and simplify the ‘transaction’ between itself and citizens by offering government services through widely used platforms such as mobile phones. Interventions in this area include the automation of government departments, the creation of a user-friendly web portal, and the establishment of complaint redressal mechanisms, the deployment of internet kiosks for citizen services, the creation of mobile applications for services and information, the utilization of local languages in ICTs, and the provision of support for individuals with disabilities (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2016; 14).

This policy document explains the government and citizens’ engagement in a narrow way by restricting it to engagement for efficient public service delivery. The citizen-government interaction is limited only to citizens’ feedback on government services. It envisions a ‘*citizen-driven government*’ where feedback is solicited on government services using ICT (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2016;13).

3. ICT Literacy: A significant addition to the policy document is ‘ICT literacy’. The policy aims to enhance citizens’ capacity building and IT skill development by introducing courses at all levels of education and training programmes. Nevertheless, these interventions aim to construct a workforce suitable for the job market inside and outside Pakistan (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2016;19-21). The policy lacks a comprehensive strategy to enhance citizen ICT skills, thereby enabling them to participate and actively contribute to more productive policy interventions.

The involvement of two consultancy firms, Arcana Info and Expert Systems, in the design of the policy document suggests a government inclination towards public management through consultancy services. The provincial government notified to invite a consultant for any government project valued at over Rs. 100,000 to enhance transparency (Information & Public Relations, 2017) despite the criticism of the opposition parties of that time. Interestingly, this policy document is unavailable on the internet or any government website. Consequently, it remained inaccessible to citizens. However, the document can be produced on request as it is available with the directorate and Ministry of IT. During my inquiries from public officials other than the ST and IT departments, virtually no one explicitly stated that they possessed the document. However, they had either encountered it in some location or had received information about its existence.

2. Integrated Development Strategy 2014- 2018

The government document about the reform initiatives in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Reforms Implementation Cell, 2014; 11) claims that The Integrated Development Strategy is an ‘overarching strategic’ policy document that lays down a guiding framework for sustainable development through coordination of all government priorities in the province (Reforms Implementation Cell, 2014). Like the ICT policy, this document commences with a message from the province’s chief minister. In this message, the Chief Minister acknowledges that “good governance” is the “most significant challenge.” (Reforms Implementation Cell, 2014;4).

The main text of the policy document identified priorities such as ‘good governance’, transparency’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘service delivery’. There is a significantly greater emphasis on fostering a strong relationship between citizens and the government, which is crucial for building trust. Citizen-government engagement is primarily envisioned through providing local government services and the inclusion of citizens in local decision-making processes. (Reforms Implementation Cell, 2014). Furthermore, the relationship between citizens and the state concerning transparency and accountability in governmental affairs is also elucidated. It is claimed in the document that these objectives will be achieved through the Right to Information Act and the Right to Service Act. It aims to digitalise government departments such as land records and audits, along with several other e-governance initiatives (Reforms Implementation Cell, 2014).

A notable feature of this strategy document is its strong emphasis on the citizen feedback mechanism. Furthermore, it underscores the need to implement a citizen feedback mechanism (CFM) to enhance the citizen-state relationship. The CFM has been operationalized and piloted, and it is intended to improve the capacity of CFM personnel. (Reforms Implementation Cell, 2014:75).

This mechanism is designed to gather feedback from the public regarding government services. While it provides an opportunity for the public to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with any service, it does not facilitate citizen engagement through comprehensive policy input. Furthermore, it is encouraging to note that the Punjab Government implemented a more efficient feedback mechanism before the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Bhatti, 2015).

In summary, like ICT policy, this document interprets e-governance as a means of efficient and transparent service delivery. However, unlike ICT policy, it emphasises citizen feedback mechanisms related to service delivery. Consequently, the Integrated Development Strategy 2014- 2018 also fails to provide a precise mechanism for meaningful citizen interventions in the policy-making process.

3. PTI Manifesto

The PTI manifesto, which was released before the 2013 elections, dedicated a specific section to the topic of e-governance. This emphasis suggests that e-governance has been prominently featured in the PTI reform agenda. However, the explanation of e-governance and the emphasis on its components suggest that the main aim is to attain efficiency in service delivery. It is also noteworthy that the entire manifesto is replete with developmental terminology. While transparency and efficiency are clearly emphasized, there is a notable absence of any reference to democratic governance. This negligence also reflects the priorities established by the PTI for its provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The policy documents discussed above suggest that the concept of efficient service delivery is the predominant theme in the government's policy discourse on e-governance. A noticeable lack of the democratic aspect of meaningful citizen participation is apparent, which can be suitably addressed through a comprehensive range of actions. These actions include practical policy consultations, encouraging the development of citizen capacity to engage effectively with the government, dismantling the power monopolies of political and administrative executives, and so on. However, there is no incremental strategy in these policy documents that aims at achieving the broader objectives of democratic e-government. However, such inclusion would require a clear and compelling vision to promote democracy through increased citizen participation in government operations. This vision could have been effectively communicated had the government presented the ICT policy in the provincial assembly for deliberation. Because discussions were restricted to cabinet meetings, the provincial government's intentions were clearly lacking in democratic spirit. Despite this failure, we must acknowledge the provincial government's commendable initiative to incorporate an explicit e-government strategy within a well-defined and distinctive IT policy.

We also assume that the above-discussed policies guided e-government interventions, mainly because '*policies do not normally tell you what to do; they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed*' (Stephen & Ball, 1993).

Democratic Deficit in E-Government Policy of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The above analysis shows that the design of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government's E-government policies identifies problems, sets goals, and suggests ways to address the problem. These documents identify weak service delivery as a problem to be addressed by bringing efficiency to service delivery, and efficacy is sought using ICTs. The entire policy design represents a lack of focus on meaningful citizen engagement through the e-government policies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This aspect is referred to as democratic deficit in the study. The following paragraphs explicate the phenomena in detail.

From the above critical view of the policies, it is proposed that the provincial government's policy documents demonstrate a managerial form of e-government, as explained by Chadwick and May (2003). The following sections explain how policy documents manifest characteristics of a managerial interaction model between citizens and the state.

1. The cornerstone of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government's e-governance policy is transparency, accountability, and efficiency in public service delivery. Chadwick and May assert that these efficiencies are achieved through advancements in previously employed technologies within the managerial model. Therefore, similar trends can be observed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

2. The provincial government treats citizens as ‘customers’- passive recipients of government services- rather than as partners in governance. The policy documents mentioned above often refer to citizens as customers. The ICTs are occasionally utilized to solicit citizen feedback on government services or complaint redressals regarding government services. The idea of citizens as customers is the critical aspect of Chadwick and May’s managerial model
3. The policy documents place great emphasis on information provision. This is often thought to ensure transparency in governance. Government websites provide information about government services. However, if necessary, citizens can obtain further information via the Right to Information Act. Notably, the information that the government highlights is generated through formal processes within established government institutions. The government does not anticipate the creation of discursively produced information through interactions between citizens and the government
4. As outlined in policy documents and official discourses, the government's role remains that of a manager overseeing the relationship between citizens and the government. The state primarily assumes the steering role in this matter. While civil society engagement is encouraged, even the government governs such engagement. Consequently, the relationship between citizens and the government is directly governed by the government
5. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is implementing changes to create an information society. These changes are abundant and varied, yet they are being introduced gradually.
6. This emphatic and exclusive understanding of the citizen-government relationship leads to the view that citizens’ participation is limited to utilising the services provided by the government and obtaining the information they need through ICTs. Despite this, a thorough analysis of government policy documents and a comprehensive examination of government websites reveal a conspicuous absence of any direct involvement of citizens in the governance process by the government. Government actions in this regard are confined to gathering feedback on the services provided and conducting occasional opinion polls, which are not systematically analysed or reported.

Through these findings, this study adds to the limited yet growing literature on E-governance policies in Pakistan (Kayani, 2011; Hassan & Lee, 2015; Khan, 2020) more broadly and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa particularly (Aman, 2022; Aman & Jan, 2022; Amin et al., 2021; Bahadur et al., 2021; Ud Din et al., 2017).

Conclusion

There has been a recent surge in direct and meaningful participation of citizens in the governance process. This has been done through ICTs around the world. Governments worldwide have been taking noticeable initiatives to improve governance through citizens’ input. All this is done through e-government initiatives. Therefore, there is a discernible understanding of e-government as a mechanism through which citizens formulate policy. However, the e-government understanding reflected in the policy documents issued by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government lacks such democratic content. The policy design of the e-government policies adopted by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government shows that lack of citizen engagement in governance is not identified as a problem. Therefore, the ICT policies set goals and adopt means representing a democratic deficit. In these policies, E-government is seen exclusively as providing information and delivering service to citizens. It is not envisioned as a conduit through which citizens are engaged in meaningful deliberations on policy issues. Such deliberative input from the citizens through ICTs is reckoned crucial for democratic governance in the contemporary world. On the above grounds, this study suggests that the government design ICT policies focusing more meaningfully on citizen-government engagement. Such an engagement can include citizen input in every step of policy formulation and adoption and consistent and systematic analysis of feedback gathered from citizens.

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