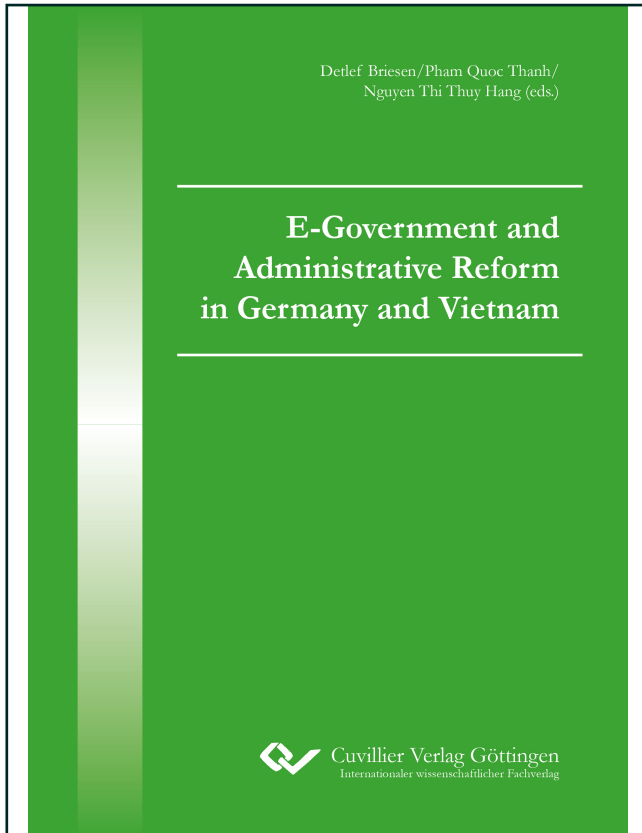




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## **E-Government and Administrative Reform in Germany and Vietnam**



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# Introduction: E-Government and Administrative Reform in Germany and Vietnam

*Detlef Briesen/Pham Quoc Thanh/Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang*

This anthology is based on a conference held in Hanoi in March 2018 by a German-Vietnamese working group on the topic of e-government and administrative reform in Germany and Vietnam. The venue was the University of Social Science and Humanities, Hanoi, VNU (USSH). The conference was generously sponsored by the German Research Association (DFG) and supported by the Rector and Vice Rectors of USSH, Prof. Pham Quang Minh, Prof. Nguyen Van Kim and Prof. Hoang Anh Tuan respectively. Michael Baurmann (Düsseldorf) and Detlef Briesen (Gießen) applied for funding for the event. The conference brought together academics from the following disciplines in particular: political science, law, administrative science, media studies and contemporary history, as well as many other representatives from Vietnam's media and administration. The German side represented the Universities of Düsseldorf, Gießen and Potsdam, the Vietnamese side the USSH, but also the University of Economics and Business and the School of Law, both Hanoi. Such a group of participants also indicates the focus of the conference. After all, e-government and administrative reform are complex and multi-faceted topics that refer to a multitude of factors: socio-cultural, organizational, economic, legal and technical. The conference thus focused on socio-political and legal issues in the presentations and intensive discussions.

The conference had a pilot function and, together with the essays now published here, contributed to opening up a new field of research: The focus is on the question to what extent digitization can create new opportunities in politics, business and society beyond technical changes and cost savings – in other words, options for action for governments, civic participation, social mobilization and communication, with which new perspectives for the democratic quality of social processes can be created. Or whether the risks predominate here, which could range from the asymmetrical use of the new options for communication and participation to tendencies of social segmentation and polarization to loss of control, data theft, espionage or even terrorism.

At first glance, such an event and the subsequent joint publication of a German-Vietnamese working group on e-government and administrative reform may seem surprising. Both countries still differ significantly in terms of important general indicators, such as the political system, the level of economic development, infrastructure and per capita income. However, in some areas these differences are by no means as serious as such indicators would suggest. If we compare economic development, for example, this has been exorbitant in Vietnam, especially in the last three decades, even though it is still based on catch-up development, which is hardly surprising after a war of more than 50 years. The economy of the Federal Republic of Germany is also continuing to grow, but growth is much more difficult to achieve there than in Vietnam, for example, due to the already very high level of development. Population development is also converging,



because it is not only in Germany that the last phase of demographic transition, the change from a young, growing society to an old, shrinking one, is taking hold. Both countries are now moving in the same direction.

A similar situation can be observed in an area that is generally considered to be one of the key elements for future industrial development 4.0, the level of IT and Internet development, measured, for example, in terms of broadband infrastructure coverage or the percentage of Internet users. The situation is less in Germany and more advanced than one might think in Vietnam. In short, the previous dual worldviews (here modern industrialized country, there developing country; here aging, shrinking society, there Southeast Asian tiger state) are not quite correct – and this can be said especially for the area on which the contributions in this publication concentrate, the connection between e-government and administrative reform.

Here again misunderstandings must be prevented: no one should claim that there are not (yet) significant differences between the two countries in governmental and administrative action, in constitutional procedures and in the equipment of authorities. What unites the two of them on this question, however, despite all the differences that also emerge here in the book, is the will on both sides to make e-government a permanent fixture in the administrations on the one hand and the confusion over e-government on the other. Whereas the main features and objectives of the current and future administrative reforms should be clear – administrative reforms should primarily increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the existing administration for reasons of budgetary consolidation and take into account the new requirements of a dynamic civil society and the contemporary changes in state, economy and society.

On the other hand, it is much more difficult to define e-government because the term refers to at least three interactions, firstly between different administrations, secondly between administrations and businesses and thirdly between administrations and citizens. These different facets of e-government play just as important a role as the fact that the term is part of a complex conceptual field. Its boundaries are not always drawn. Terms with connotations to e-government are, for example, e-democracy, e-participation, e-administration and e-voting, or as defined here in the anthology by Ulrich von Alemann based on the European Parliament (and focusing on services provided by public authorities to companies and above all to citizens):

“E-government refers to efforts by public authorities to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve public services and increase democratic participation.”<sup>1</sup>

It is no coincidence that this definition does not revolve around current conditions, but around efforts, because with regard to research it can be said that so far only a few countries in the world, if any, have fully developed e-government. This also opens up the possibility of summarizing the contributions in this volume.

Firstly, there are similar basic structures at the current stand and in the debate on e-government and administrative reform in Germany and Vietnam. In view of the studies by our working group on the situation in both countries presented here, it can therefore be

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<sup>1</sup> European Parliament (2015), 1.

concluded that there are similar basic structures in the state of e-government and administrative reform in Germany and Vietnam:

- The assessments to date have been disappointing. Although administrations use various IT support internally (more often in Germany than in Vietnam), citizens are usually not spared the personal trip to the office. In most cases, only information is available, but there are no opportunities to submit applications. E-government as a so-called “media-break-free”, completely digital service for the uniform handling of administrative procedures has hardly been available so far (e.g. contributions by Tran Bach Hieu/Tran Thi Quang Hoa/Tran Thi Minh Tuyet, Nguyen Duy Quynh/Nguyen Anh Cuong, Pham Quoc Thanh/Phung Chi Kien and Sabine Kuhlmann/Christian Schwab/Jörg Bogumil/Sascha Gerber).
- The offer available so far is not sufficient; it is too often not user-friendly. There are hardly any advantages for citizens to use it therefore, many existing offers are hardly noticed. This means that the high costs incurred by the introduction of electronic services are not at least offset by corresponding savings. In addition, there are legal uncertainties and considerable problems with data protection (Tran Kim Hoang/Bui Chi Thanh) and, especially in Vietnam, the inadequate equipment of the administrative offices themselves (Vu Dinh Phong/Detlef Briesen).
- Why should citizens and companies take advantage of e-government services at all? They often find applications, forms or notifications annoying obligations. Filling out digital offers, which are often too complicated, requires knowledge and time. Citizens therefore expect a concrete added value that goes beyond the saving of visits to the authorities; companies expect considerable savings, as they too often have to train and second out employees for activities that were previously carried out directly by the authorities (Ulrich von Alemann).

Secondly, however, beyond these commonalities, considerable differences can be observed, particularly in the perception of the potential of e-government for administrative reform:

- The Vietnamese authors are considerably more optimistic about the positive influence of e-government on political participation, the development of the rule of law, e-democracy and administrative procedures themselves than the German authors (see contributions by Nguyen Minh Phuong/Nguyen Thi Ngoc Mai, Nguyen Vu Hao/Nguyen Thi Chau Loan, Lai Quoc Khanh, Dinh Xuan Ly and Dang Anh Dung opposite Christiane Eilders as well as Sabine Kuhlmann/Christian Schwab/Jörg Bogumil/Sascha Gerber).
- The difference applies in particular to the quite divergent assessment of the deliberative function of e-government and online participation (Christiane Eilders, Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang).
- This may also be due to the fact that Internet-based communication has had a deeper impact on the existing communicative structures in Vietnam than in Germany (Christiane Eilders, Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang, Gerhard Vowe, Do Thanh Huyen/Edmund J. Malesky/Paul J. Schuler/Dang Hoang Giang and Nguyen Van Thang/Le Quang Canh/Nguyen Vu Hung/Nguyen Cong Thanh).
- Finally, there are some problem areas that appear to be specific to Vietnam, such as the fight against corruption through e-government and its positive impact on environmental monitoring (Do Thanh Huyen/Edmund J. Malesky/Paul J.



Schuler/Dang Hoang Giang and Nguyen Van Thang/Le Quang Canh/Nguyen Vu Hung/Nguyen Cong Thanh).

The results presented here, the similarities and differences, are astonishing for a first German-Vietnamese symposium on e-government, or even for the first kind of such an event in Vietnam. They become all the more remarkable when one returns once again to the beginning of the considerations made here – that today, after decades of very different social development, it has become possible, despite all the undeniable differences and disagreements that continue to exist, to organize such a symposium and to publish about it together. The editors would therefore like to thank everyone who has worked on this project or made it possible.

Hanoi/Gießen in April 2019.

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# I. Debates





# E-Government: Visions, Practices and Challenges

*Ulrich von Alemann*

The term e-government comprises a complex variety of definitions as well as interactions. While interactions between governments (G2G) on the basis of information and communication technologies enable a stronger and more efficient mutual consultation, the easy application of specific online services of public authorities encourage its usage by citizens, additionally. Due to this fact government to citizens (G2C) captures a further central interaction within the e-government structure and encourages elements of democracy. The relation between government and business (G2B) illustrates a further interaction, which needs to be digitized to grow with the present challenges and enhance fast, location-independent and efficient transactions. To shed light on the benefits as well as the challenges, which come across digitization procedures, the following presentation takes three different perspectives concerning this issue.

Digitization procedures do not end at national borders. Hence, at the first stage, the development of e-government at the international level will be illustrated, followed by a regional restriction, the European level. Finally, at the national level the case of Germany will be analysed and its developing strategies regarding e-government will be portrayed. The presentation concludes with future challenges, which encourage digitization processes but also which arise from them.

The presentation reaches the conclusion that continual developing conditions, its challenges and benefits, lead to a permanent expansion of e-government. Therefore, incentives to use information and communication technologies by public services, citizens and business need to be maintained.

## 1. What is E-Government?

The term e-government is based on several definitions: The definition of the European Parliament regarding the term e-government highlights the following:

“E-government refers to efforts by public authorities to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve public services and increase democratic participation.”<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the term e-government captures further definitions. The variety of definitions can be traced back to a common denominator, that e-government covers the dynamic transformation of government, which involves the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve the delivery of government services to

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<sup>1</sup> European Parliament (2015), 1.





citizens (G2C), to business (G2B), and to government agencies (G2G). Thus, the term e-government is strongly interwoven with these external components.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Reasons for E-Government

To shed light on the significance of e-government, the benefits and opportunities should be captured briefly, before we examine e-government at three different levels.

What are the benefits of the implementation of e-government? What can be provided by the digitization of government procedures in accordance with citizens, business as well as government agencies? Digitization doesn't end at national borders. This is a very fundamental new situation: In the past government and public administration command all interior communication and interaction from the state to citizen and business. In the present no state is an island any more. Therefore, it is fundamental for leading to advancing online services and bridging divides. For instance, through digitization of government procedures, bureaucracy will be reduced. Furthermore, it promotes policy integration. Digitization procedures affect more than one dimension. Thus, economic, social, environmental as well as political dimensions can benefit from the expansion processes. Transparency through open government data will enhance trust and credibility of policy processes. It also engages people through e-participation more easily. Hence, simple, fast and efficient public service independent of location and time are significant benefits of e-government.<sup>3</sup>

## 3. E-Government at the International Level

The vision of the UN captured the following: “The objective conducts a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want. (...) The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 169 targets that are at the core of the 2030 Agenda aim to advance people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships. Hence, governments, together with the private sector and civil society, will play a central role in the implementation of the SDGs.”<sup>4</sup> Due to this fact the continuous development, in particular regarding digitization and modernization of the government is essential to achieve these purposes.

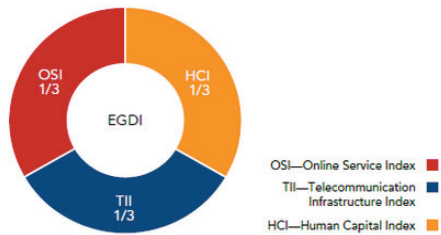
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<sup>2</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016).

<sup>3</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016), 1.

Figure 1: The Three Components of the E-government Development Index<sup>5</sup>



The worldwide E-government Development Index (EDGI) illustrates the degree of e-government evolution within the international landscape. The components of this index need to be described shortly, in advance. As figure 1 indicates, the index conducts the weighted average of normalized scores of the following dimensions: Firstly, the online service Index, which measures the scope and quality of online services. Secondly, the telecommunication Infrastructure Index, which indicates the status of the development of telecommunication infrastructure and finally, the Human Capital Index, which points out the Inherent human capital.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 2: Number of Countries Grouped by E-Government Development Index (EGDI) Levels, in 2014 and 2016<sup>7</sup>

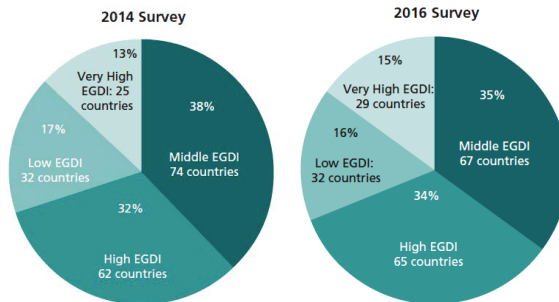


Figure 2 compares the number of countries grouped by the EGDI in the years 2016 and 2014. It becomes visible, that the number of countries with high-EGDI values (i.e., between 0.50 and 0.75) increased to 65, up from 62. Three countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Egypt and Fiji) dropped from high-EGDI to medium-EGDI. Ten countries, including Vietnam improved their e-government performance and made the leap from middle-EGDI to high-EGDI values (see Table 1 in the appendix). While, the number of countries with middle EGDI values (i.e., between 0.25 and 0.50) declined from 74 to 67

<sup>5</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016), 134.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016), 134.

<sup>7</sup> Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016), 108.

countries. Furthermore, in 2016 the number of countries with very-high-EGDI values (EGDI values greater than 0.75) increased from 25 to 29 (added countries: Slovenia (ranked 21st), Lithuania (ranked 23rd), Switzerland (ranked 28th), and the United Arab Emirates (ranked 29th)).<sup>8</sup>

Figure 3: Correlation of E-Government Development Index (EGDI) 2016 and the Global Competitiveness (2015–2016)<sup>9</sup>

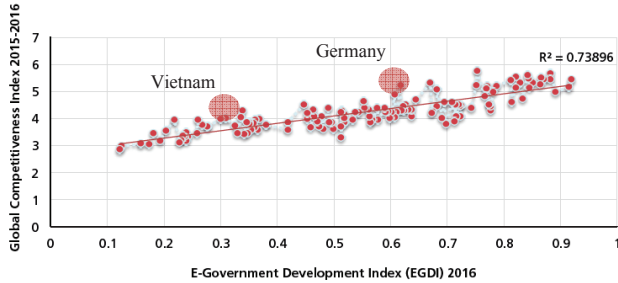


Figure 3 illustrates correlations between the global competitiveness and the EGDI. It indicates that countries that have performed in e-government development are more competitive. While from correlation we cannot conclude to causation the relationship builds on other conditions. Firstly, prevalent economic components are basic conditions that are conducive to progress in e-government. Secondly, a high level of technological adoption and communication and information technologies penetration in both private and public sector, including in e-government, has a positive effect on economic competitiveness. In the middle of the linear trend Vietnam is placed with an EGDI value of 0.514 and is consequently ranked on the 89<sup>th</sup> place of the e-government Development Index. According to the global competitiveness index it holds values of 4.30. In contrary, Germany takes the 15<sup>th</sup> position of the e-government development index with the EGDI value of 0.821. Within the global competitiveness index, Germany has a very high value of 5.53.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016), 108.

<sup>9</sup> Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016), 125.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016), 125.