

Digital Transformation

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In the context of politics and for the purpose of SHAPEDEM-EU, digital transformation (DT) refers to **adaptation and implementation of digital technologies into political and social processes**. Recognizing its multidimensional and complex nature, DT first and foremost points to enhancing democratic procedures by incorporating new digital possibilities for citizens participation in political acts. Thereby, more sustainable practices for maintaining operational, transparent, and accountable democratic institutions can be implemented.

Thus, in democratic states, DT aims to improve existing institutional, interpersonal, organisational, political, and societal systems and structures, thus **enhancing participatory democratic practices, representation, and decision-making**. In other words, DT has the potential to positively impact the level of transparency and accountability of the state, thereby increasing trust in its institutions. It has the potential to empower citizens to engage with/in the political system in more direct and approachable ways, thereby enhancing meaningful participation. In the field of politics and public life within democratic societies, scholarly work usually focuses on the role of DT in governance, public service delivery, engagement with civil society, and other aspects that enhance democracies (CDDG 2021).

However, leaders of non-democratic states closely monitor digital innovations and new technologies, with the aim of using these to their own advantage. For example, **authoritarian rulers use DT for online censorship, digital surveillance, spreading false information and particular ideologies, and collecting citizens' personal data**, wherever they may be in the world. Accordingly, scholars refer to the rise of “**digital authoritarianism**” (Jones 2022), pointing to autocrats using DT within an increasing information warfare and adapting to digital communication. Thus, DT can not only enhance democracy, but it can equally be a powerful tool for contesting democratic norms and practices.

Key texts

European Committee on Democracy and Governance, CDDG (2021): Study on the Impact of Digital Transformation on Democracy and Good Governance. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available online at <https://rm.coe.int/study-on-the-impact-of-digital-transformation-on-democracy-and-good-go/1680a3b9f9.%20Retrieved%20March%209,%202023,%20from%20https://rm.coe.int/study-on-the-impact-of-digital-transformation-on-democracy-and-good-go/1680a3b9f9>, last accessed on 25/03/2023.

Jones, Marc Owen (2022): *Digital Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Deception, Disinformation and Social Media*. London: Hurst Publishers.

Vial, Gregory (2019): Understanding Digital Transformation: A Review and a Research Agenda. In *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems* 28 (2), pp. 118-144.