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CS 312

E-Democracy

E-democracy and e-government are real issues we are dealing with today. Freedom to use all of the internet freely is also among the issues. China is one of the countries that are controlling and censoring what their citizens can view online and how they use it. “There are now at least 54 people who have been imprisoned for emailing, setting up websites or exchanging pro-democracy messages online - a 60% increase from a year ago”¹. The new legislation enforces use of specific software to control the content at all of 110,000 internet cafes. There are also social police that regularly patrol the cafes.

E voting is another major issue that has stirred up controversies. It has been proposed by The National Institute of Standards and Technology, or NIST, to “voter-verified paper trails, which are printed slips generated after a person uses a computerized voting machine”². Help America Vote is an organization that has suggested to upgrade electronic voting system with 3.8 billion dollars of government grant to pay for the expenses. Research suggests that while establishing standards can help to somewhat secure e-voting but it can also result in favoring of one company’s machine. There is also severe security concerns over this method of voting.

An economist named Ronald Coase has said that “The cost of gathering information determines the size of organizations”³. With the invention of the internet this cost of gathering information has decreased tremendously. This is specially beneficial for

¹ China tightens web control. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3434115.stm>>

² Group Seeks E-Voting Standards. <http://www.wired.com/news/evote/0,2645,61617,00.html?tw=wn_tophead_4>

³ Q: What will happen when a national political machine can fit on a laptop? A: See below. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A58554-2003Dec12?language=printer>>

political situations and people associated with it. With the help of the internet it is now possible for not so well known or third party political candidate to organize successful campaigns. Dean is one of the candidates who fully took advantage of the internet in arranging his campaign. Political parties are for like minded people to push their ideas forward. Traditionally this meant having social organization to process political information. Using the Internet this can be done through a virtual party and a large social political party is not needed to communicate political ideas. "The ability to have "virtual political parties" is the greatest challenge the two parties have ever faced... being a Democrat or a Republican isn't enough of an advantage anymore -- there are simply too many other places where people can get political information and find political bedfellows in an age of low information costs"³.

Resources:

1. China tightens web control.
January 27, 2004. March 30, 2004.
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3434115.stm>>
2. Group Seeks E-Voting Standards. Kim Zetter
Dec. 16, 2003. March 30, 2004.
<http://www.wired.com/news/evote/0,2645,61617,00.html?tw=wn_tophead_4>
3. Q: What will happen when a national political machine can fit on a laptop? A: See below. Everett Ehrlich
December 14, 2003. March 30, 2004.
<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A58554-2003Dec12?language=printer>>