

E-DEMOCRACY: A PANACEA FOR ENHANCED PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY (NIGERIA IN PERSPECTIVE)

Ayo C. K. (Ph.D)*

* Dr. Charles K. Ayo holds a B.Sc. M.Sc. and Ph.D in Computer Science. His research interests include: mobile computing, Internet programming, e-business and government, and object oriented design and development. He is a member of the Nigerian Computer Society (NCS), and Computer Professional Registration Council of Nigeria (CPN). A Microsoft Certified Professionals (MCP), and a Cisco Certified Network Associates (CCNA). He is currently the Head of Computer and Information Sciences Department of Covenant University, Ota, Ogun state, Nigeria, Africa.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the voting patterns in Nigeria since independence till date, the growth of ICT in the country and its influence on the democratic process, and the e-readiness and prospects of e-democracy in influencing participatory democracy particularly in terms of increasing the number of voters.

The data used for the research was collected through online source from the Nigerian Communications Commission site and the Nigeria Congress Organization site among others. The resulting data was analysed using simple statistical methods and results presented pictorially.

Findings revealed that the success of e-government and e-democracy is largely dependent of the growth of ICT, which is still at its lowest ebb in the country. If the appropriate infrastructure is made available to implement e-democracy, it will arouse the interest of the populace in governance, increase the number of voters, and enhance transparency, probity and accountability, and participation in governance as well as help stabilize the nascent democracy.

KEYWORD: E-DEMOCRACY, E-GOVERNMENT, E-PARTICIPATION, E-CONSULTATION, E-CAMPAIGN AND E-VOTING.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The growing rate of ICT utilisation particularly the Internet has influenced at an exponential rate, online interaction and communication among the generality of the populace. The shortcomings notwithstanding, most people are connected through their cell phones, home PCs and others through corporate access and public kiosks. The patronage of the Internet all over the world is monumental and has remained on the increase from inception. From available statistics, it is the most widely patronised electronic technology even than the PC and telephone put together [1].

The Internet has changed the expectations of individuals. The wired citizens (Netizens) seek less interrupted, more efficient link to political power, as well as immediate responses to requests. In this regard, representative democracy has failed and hence has led to frustration and reduced trust in democracy but the Internet has re-enacted a ray of hope through e-democracy and must be practiced with caution [2].

There is a contemporary estrangement between representatives and those they represent [3]. After election, the elect alienates himself from the electorate having being sworn in. However, e-democracy bridges this divide by granting access to the electorate to keep a tab on the elect thus enhancing the level of participation and making the elect accountable in a way.

E-democracy is neither an alternative to the representative democracy nor a replacement for the existing one, it is rather complementing the way parliaments, local authorities and the

executive arms interact by offering new channels of dialogue and interaction between the citizen and government [4]. Furthermore, this technology promises an efficient participation in government through e-participation/consultation with the resultant objective of increased trust in democracy through participatory decision making [5].

2.0 IMPACT OF IT ON DEMOCRACY

The UN millennium summit made a declaration in the year 2000 called the millennium development goals (MDGs), which is aimed at fostering global efforts for peace, human rights, democracy, and good governance amongst others. By the year 2003 the body realised that the panacea for achieving the stated goals is by creating an information society through the use of ICT. Thus we have e-learning, e-judiciary, e-democracy, e-government, e-health, etc [6]. We shall limit our discussion here to issues of democracy and governance.

2.1 E-DEMOCRACY

This is aimed at developing digital citizenship (Netizen) through the use of ICT to create personal contact, dialogue and consultation among participants in democracy [7]. It offers a level playing ground and fosters communication among administrators, citizens, associations, public and private entities across the various tiers of government.

E-democracy, presents a new form of democratic practice carried out through information and communication technology [8]. The public nature of the Internet makes it a good platform for enhanced greater access to government agencies, and information; promote grass root organisation and

activism; and enhance speedy process of people-to-people (P2P) exchange of information, ideas and plan of action. The benefits of e-democracy include [9]:

1. enhancement of communitarian democracy;
2. enhancement of forwarding and redistribution information through e-mails;
3. enhancement of P2P interactive communication;
4. enhancement of on-line petitions and action alerts; and
5. reduction of running cost.

2.2 E-GOVERNMENT

This is the application of ICT to the business of governance. It is primarily aimed at reducing bureaucracy in the government operations as well as improving efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability [10]. Government businesses are transacted through the electronic media as against the mundane manual processes. Thus we have: e-tax, e-police, e-health, e-procurement, e-learning, e-housing etc.

2.3 E-CONSULTATION/PARTICIPATION

This involves the use of ICT to foster communication, dialogue and contribution between the electorate and the elect. The technologies involved are the Internet, telephone and GSM. Communication can be through e-mail, chat, SMS, and voice messaging. The Yahoo messenger presents a good platform as well as the ubiquitous cell phones for sending text messages. The electorate feels a sense of belonging because he is able to share his ideas, contribute to policy and decision making and he develops trust in the democratic system.

2.4 E-Voting

E-voting is the preferred platform for future elections in the developed and developing nations of the world. It is a system that has modernised the electoral processes and has improved the interaction between citizen and the government through ICT [11].

Electronic voting, be it direct recording electronic (DRE) or the remote electronic voting (REV) has the attendant benefits to reduce common mistakes; provide immediate feedback; reduce multiple voting; offer convenience to voters; accommodate absentee voters; offer confidentiality, trust and security; offer speedy processing of results and eliminate bribery and intimidation. However, improvement is sought in the area of security. For a successful implementation of e-voting, e-democracy is an enabler. Through e-democracy, the electorates would have succeeded in eliminating the phobia in relation to the use of ICT and the Internet in particular.

2.5 E-CAMPAIGN

This is an electronic campaign system that is carried out through the web. It was first introduced in Nigerian polity by the Peoples Democratic Party's major contenders: Olusegun Obasanjo and Alex Ekweme, shortly before the 1999 primaries. It is composed mainly of their respective websites with some details that would give them an edge over one another. Consequently, there has been an improvement in the use of ICT in politics. Some notable members of Senate, Senator Tokunbo Afikuyomi, has a permanent contact (Web link) on the Nigeria Online Today (Nigeria2Day@AOL.com), where members of his district can dialogue with him.

Generally, e-campaign entails more than the level of usage in Nigeria. It is a sophisticated group email campaign tool for corporations, ezine publishers, professionals, and mailing list operators to keep in touch with customers, subscribers, and members in an effective way [12]. It supports the following features:

- personalised emails to a group using mailing list.
- automatic bounces handling and unsubscribe features.
- WYSIWYG HTML message composing.

- embedded images/ and underground sounds in HTML emails.
- opt-out handling.
- fast email delivery.
- encrypted SMTP connections (SSL).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data used for the research was collected through online source from the Nigerian Communications Commission site and the Nigeria Congress Organization site among others. The resulting data was analysed using simple statistical methods and results presented pictorially.

4.0 ANALYSIS OF PAST ELECTIONS DATA

| Year | Registered voters | Total votes cast | % Votes cast |
|------|-------------------|------------------|--------------|
| 1979 | 47,433,757 | 16,846,633 | 35.5 |
| 1983 | 65,304,818 | 25,454,166 | 39.0 |
| 1999 | 57,938,945 | 30,280,052 | 52.2 |
| 2003 | 60,823,022 | 42,018,735 | 69.1 |

Table 1: Presidential elections statistics

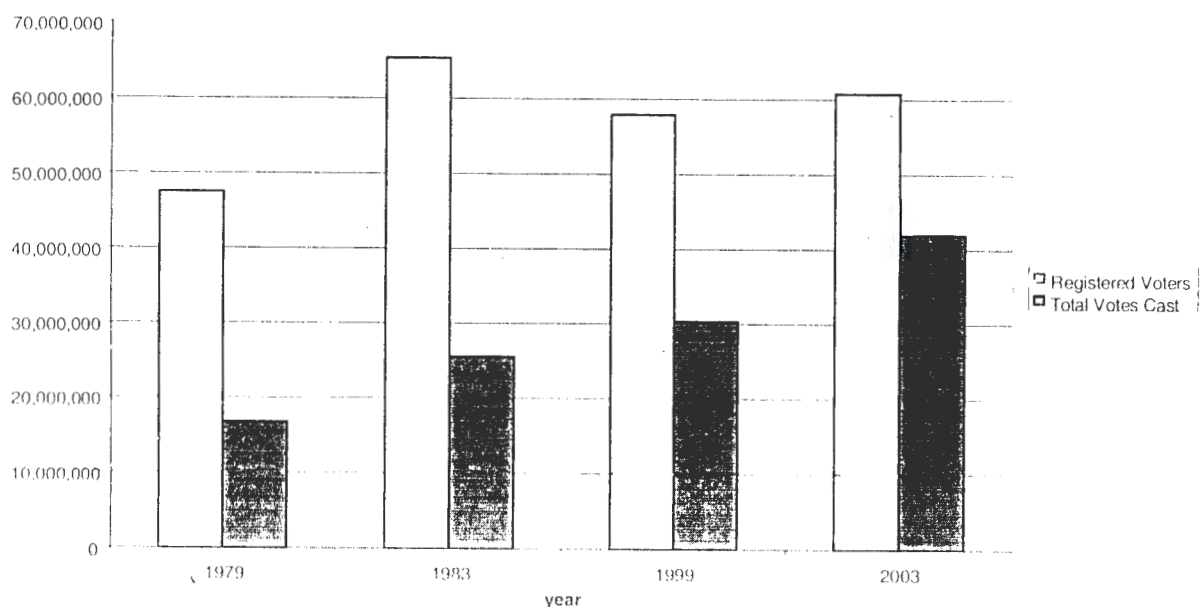


Fig. 1: Distribution of Registered Voters and Voters in Presidential Elections

Sources¹ [a, b, c, d, e]

DISCUSSION

It is obvious that a lot of registered voters abstained from voting. The percentage votes cast indicates a steady improvement from 1979 to 2003. However, there has been a decline in the number of registered voters since 1983 to date. This may be due to military incursion in politics from 1983 to 1999, and lack of trust in government.

5.0 THE GROWTH OF ICT IN NIGERIA

The recent liberalisation of the telecoms industry has brought about a tremendous development in the sector. Statistics revealed that Nigeria is one of the fastest growing telecommunications market. NITEL, the national carrier has embarked on installing optical fiber to link major cities of the country while a number of operators, public and private have installed a large number of VSATs for internet services.

a. National IT Policy

The Nigeria National IT policy formulated in the year 2000 is responsible for the monumental developments in the sector. The vision is to make Nigeria an IT capable country in Africa and a key player in the information society. Its primary mission is to "Use IT" for: education; creation of wealth; poverty eradication; job creation; governance; health; agriculture: etc. [13].

On-Going ICT Projects

Mobile Internet Units (MIUs)

These include busses equipped with ICT facilities such as PCs, peripheral devices

and VSAT which are used to carry ICT education to rural areas.

ii. WIN Project

This project is tagged "Wire Nigeria". It is intended to provide ICT infrastructure to all the nooks and crannies of the country by the end of the year 2005. The project includes the provision of VSAT to the 774 local governments in the country, and the installation of the necessary infrastructures particularly, fibre optic backbone across the nation.

iii. E-Government Project

This is part of the civil service reforms which is designed to make the Nigerian civil service proactive and respond quickly to the needs of the general populace. The project is a joint initiative between the public and private sector operator under the aegis of National e-Government Strategies Limited (NeGST) and the national information technology development agency (NITDA).

The project is designed to reduce the bureaucracy that attends government businesses in the country through the introduction of e-tax, e-learning, e-traffic, e-procurement, e-pricing, e-mail, e-tourism, e-payment, e-revenue, e-legislation, e-policing, e-judiciary, e-health, e-agriculture, e-services, e-kiosk, e-buka etc [14].

b. Telephone Usage in Nigeria

| SERVICE CATEGORY | NUMBER OF SUBSCRIBERS | | | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|---------|---------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 15 June '05 |
| NITEL | 450,172 | 497,019 | 540,662 | 555,466 | 555,466 | 507,268 | 498,471 |
| PTOs | 23,144 | 56,355 | 59,659 | 146,534 | 333,068 | 520,251 | 605,018 |
| Mobile | 35,000 | 35,000 | 266,461 | 1,569,050 | 3,149,472 | 9,174,209 | 13,316,597 |
| Total | 508,316 | 588,374 | 866,782 | 2,271,050 | 4,038,006 | 10,201,728 | 14,420,086 |
| Teledensity | 0.42 | 0.49 | 0.72 | 1.89 | 3.36 | 8.50 | 11.44 |

Table 2: Distribution of Telephone Usage in Nigeria

Source: <http://www.ncc.gov.ng/subscriberdata.htm>

Distribution of Telephone Subscribers in Nigeria

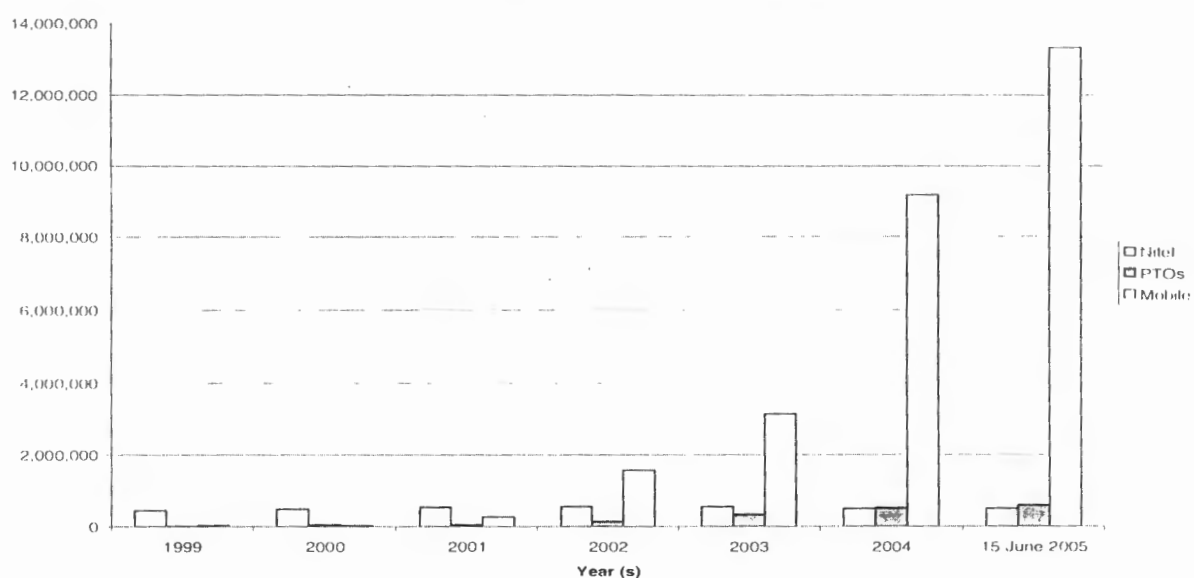


Fig. 2: Distribution of Telephone Subscribers in Nigeria

DISCUSSION

The deregulation of the Telecoms industry in the year 2001 is responsible for the growth of telephone subscribers. It shows

an improvement in teledensity from 0.72 in 2001 to 11.44 by mid-year 2005. The GSM is a major contributor to the growth.

c. Internet Usage in Nigeria

| SERVICE CATEGORY | NUMBER OF SUBSCRIBERS | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
| Internet Users | N/A | 107,194 | 153,350 | 420,000 | 1,613,258 | 1,769,661 |
| Internet Penetration | N/A | 0.1% | 0.1% | 0.3% | 1.3% | 1.4% |

Table 3: Distribution of Internet Usage in Nigeria

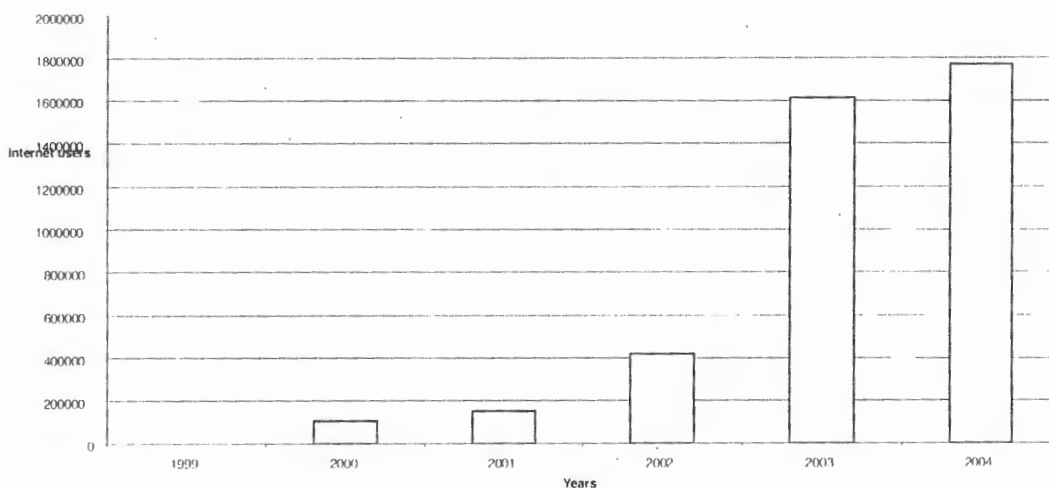


Fig. 3: The Growth of Internet users in Nigeria

DISCUSSION

There is a tremendous and encouraging growth between 2000 and 2003. However, the marginal growth between 2003 and 2004 can be attributed to lack of infrastructure and poverty. The operators

do not have the infrastructure to serve the teeming populace and at the same time, the cost of the facilities has placed it beyond the reach of the common man.

d. **Telecoms Operators in Nigeria**

| SERVICE CATEGORY | NUMBER OF OPERATORS & SERVICE PROVIDERS | | | | | |
|------------------------|---|------|------|------|------|------|
| | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
| National Carriers | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Mobile (GSM) Telephony | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Fixed Telephony | 9 | 16 | 16 | 17 | 20 | 22 |
| VSAT Networks | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | 51 | 52 |
| Internet Services | 18 | 30 | 30 | 35 | 35 | 36 |

Table 4: Growth of the Number of Active Operators and Service Providers in Nigeria

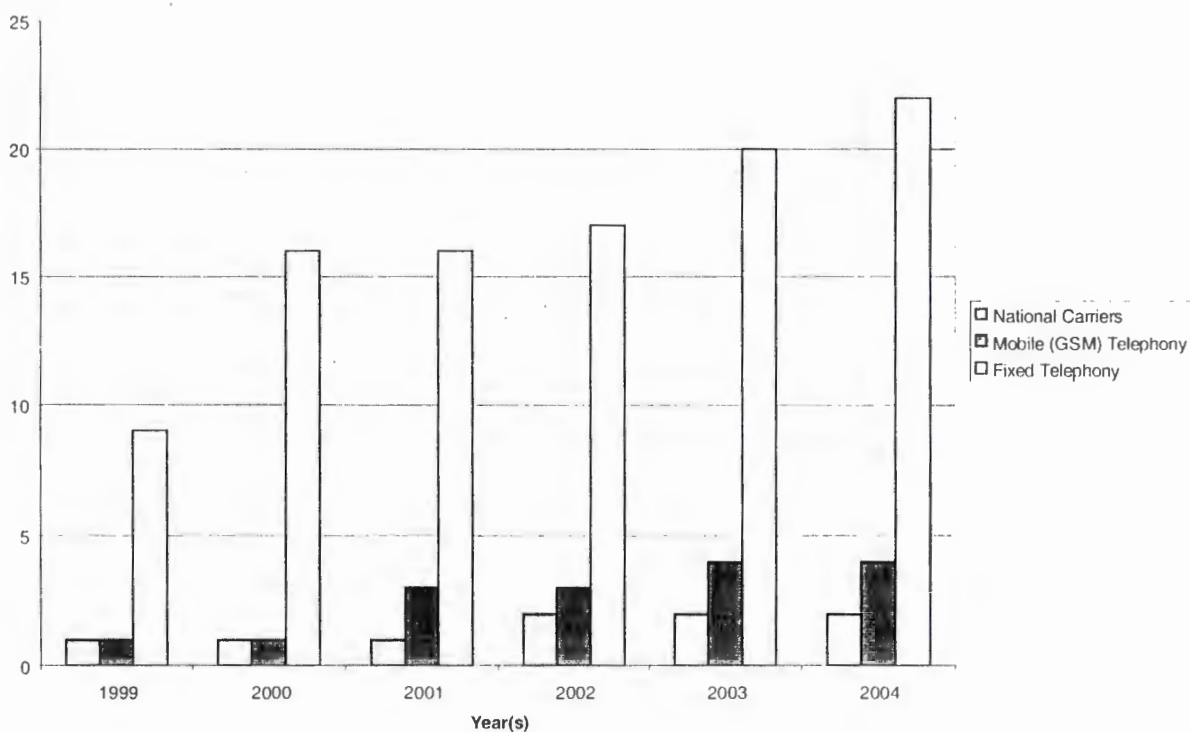


Fig. 4: Distribution of Operators & Service Providers

Discussion

Generally, from the year 2002 to 2004, there was a marginal growth in terms of the number of providers. Reasons may not

be far from the high cost of setting up a business in the country, which was reported as one of the highest in the world. A country with a population of around 137 million with

11.4 teledensity and 1.4% Internet penetration revealed that there is a lot of ground yet uncovered.

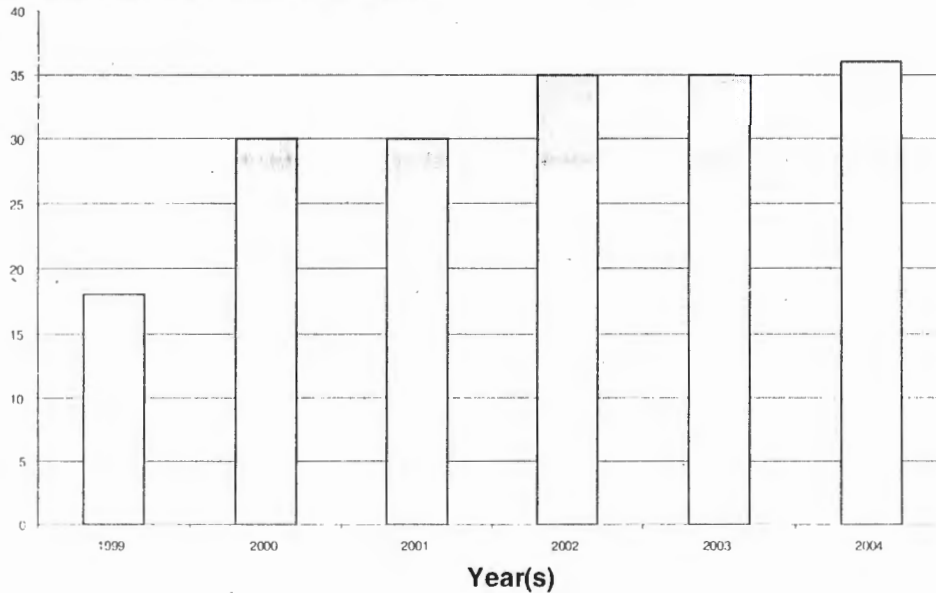


Fig.5: The Growth of Internet Service Providers

DISCUSSION

The growth of the Internet service providers seems to be stabilizing with the penetration a 1.4% from 2002 to 2004. Again, this is due to inadequate infrastructure and cost.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is obvious from available statistics that the country may not be able to meet the MDGs come 2015 due to inadequate infrastructure. From fig. 3 and fig. 5, there is marginal growth in terms of Internet penetration and service providers. Further deregulation of the sector is expected as well as a dogged commitment to the provision of infrastructure by government through the Private and Public Partnership (PPP).

The success of e-government and e-democracy is largely dependent of the growth of ICT, which is still at its lowest ebb in the country. ICT will encourage e-dialogue among the governed and the elect, thus, leading to enhanced closer tie, trust, as well as the level of participatory democracy. If the appropriate infrastructure is made available to implement e-democracy, it will arouse the interest of the populace in governance, increase the number of voters, and enhance transparency, probity and accountability in governance as well as help stabilize the nascent democracy.

REFERENCES

- Avi Rubin (2001) : "Security Consideration for Remote Electronic Voting over the Internet", [online], <http://avirubin.com/e-voting.security.pdf>
- Crabtree J. (2002): "The Internet is Bad for Democracy", [online], <http://www.opendemocracy.net>
- Crabtree J. (2003): "Civic Hacking: a new agenda for e-democracy", [online], <http://www.opendemocracy.net>.
- Walker D. (2002): "E-democracy's eleventh hour", [online], <http://www.edemocracy.gov.uk>
- Andreu R., Pual B (2003): "Bringing Confidence to Electronic Voting", *EJEG*, vol 1, issue 1. pp 43-50, <http://www.ejeg.com>
- World summit on the information society(2003): "Declaration of principles", [online], www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu_s/md/03/wsi/
- Flavio C. et al (2005): "E-Democracy: A solution for Disadvantaged Territories", *eceg2005*, Conference Proceedings, pp 101 – 109
- Claudia Lynch: "Electronic Democracy", [online], <http://www.unt.edu/UNT/departments/CC/Benchmarks>
- Leslie R.S (1997): "Citizenship in Converging Landscape", [online], <http://www.fis.utoronto.ca/research/>
- Agunloye O. (2004): "e-Government Strategies for West Africa: public private-partnership", <http://www.enigeria.org/>
- Boutin P. (2004): "Is E-voting Safe", [online], <http://www.pcworld.com/resource/>
- Walton T. (2002): "E-Campaign", [online], <http://fileforum.betanews.com/detail/ccampaign/>
- Ajayi G.O (2005): "e-Government in Nigeria's e-strategy", [online], <http://www.nitda.gov.ng/papers>
- Soun T. (2004): "Nigeria: Government/Private Sector Partner to deliver e-government", [online], <http://www.e-lo-go.de/html/>