

Committee: Special Conference

Issue: E-Democracy: Citizens' participation in the digital age.

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INTRODUCTION

Politics is one of the core values in civilization which has been present since the first homo sapiens that have existed. As the world changes day by day, it strives to be the best version of itself and many customs by which civilization follows have remained *status quo*. One of which is democracy. Over the decade public engagement has dropped, consequently rendering the need for the development of new democratic tools imminent. The new age of technology and communication facilitates the spread of information therefore the change of current in democracy as well as the modernization is crucial. The vision of E-Democracy is to involve and create communities using politics. Now more than ever, politics is an increasingly more bi polar subject (eg. Left-Right, Liberal-Conservative) which is why this type of stride has to be pivotal. The topic of Cyber Governance could not have come at a better time since politics are starting to be abundantly influenced by social media. The platform of E-Democracy is what can turn this project into a real and tangible reality. In 1990 Tim Berners-Lee in created the World Wide Web which commenced the popularization of the internet. Since then it grew in a way nobody had predicted and now it is arguably one of the most important components of the life of our population. This led to the development of new technologies to better help daily lives such as: research, communications and expediency. Moreover, the de-centralization of the internet has led it to become a forum for free speech, a platform to echo ideas, and sadly a way to interfere with elections¹. Nevertheless, this de-centralization allows for a free flow of information which prevents state-controlled media outlets hence a people guided and less partisan stream of information. That is a main reason why the UN, a centralized organization, hasn't been focusing on passing resolution for this cause or establishing committee's for this cause. Therefore, it is hard to gain proper funding due to the

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/14/business/eu-elections-russia-misinformation.html>

lack of governmental help. The downsides of it completely being automated online are the cyber-security threats.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

E-Democracy

Electronic Democracy (E-Democracy) is the habilitation of newly developed modes of communication technologies and information to enhance and in certain instances replace *status quo* democracy.

ICT

An acronym for Information Communication Technology. It is a concept that its purpose is connect citizens of the world through the internet. The concept is under constant development and is being tried to be implemented worldwide.

Liberalism

Political set of views that thinks that the main and central problem with politics the freedom and protection of an individual.

Conservatism

Political set of views that apply pressure to the traditional practices and institutions.

Globalization

An idealism that emphasizes the integration of: people, culture into modern society.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

History

The idea of E-Democracy sounds new, however the core values based on what it functions are relatively old. In the 1960s Political Theorists: Benjamin Barber, C.B. Macpherson, and Carole Pateman had set forth to create a participatory democracy that endured in the 21st Century. The main problem that led them to not succeeding was a platform, or lack thereof, that led to the idea being picked up by sociologist: Robert Bellah in the 1980s. Bellah found that individualism was of the recurring nature and tried to replace it

with a more communitarian value in society. Similarly like Amitai Etzioni the leader of the Communitarian Network values community over individual. Lastly, the third influential figure of the establishment of E-Democracy is Jurgen Habermas. He created the concept of a political sphere: said sphere is “an idealized autonomous sphere of communication in which citizens can freely engage in reasoned debate away from the controlling influence of the state, large media corporations, and structures of social inequality.”² It is this idea of a free medium of political discourse what made E-Democracy a conceptualized idea that could be put in practice. The birth of the Internet was much more than a tool, it represented free flowing information without government control. In a paper written by Thierry Vedel he states: “...the Internet is much more than an additional tool which provides new solutions to the problems of democracy.”³ This type of thinking is what led E-Democracy to 2019 with the continuous establishment of new organizations that facilitate debate on political affairs. Lastly, it is the work of all the aforementioned political theorists and sociologists that are what makes E-Democracy purposeful to be reminded of truly democratic procedure or ‘Athenian’ elections.

Issues

There are many issues that make investors and governments hesitant on providing platforms for E-Democracy. Although developing, E-Democracy hasn’t grown as exponentially as needed to certain issue it pertains. The main revolving topic that connects some of its issues is the internet.

In addition, another major threat is cyber security and privacy. A great example of where cyber security was under a great amount of scrutiny was e-commerce. When e-commerce was up and coming the consensus was that the customers wouldn’t feel safe putting their card number, name, date of birth, and address on the internet. That led to the development of technologies to prevent those types of theft and ensured safe transactions which led to the taking off of e-commerce in the late 1990s. In the case of E-Democracy citizens wouldn’t feel safe voting, discussing or managing government matters on the web. A poll carried out by Hart/Teeter shows that two in every one American would rather have the process of implementing E-Democracy take longer because of the cyber-security and privacy

² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/e-democracy>

³ <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01475858v2/document>

concerns.⁴ However on the other side of the Atlantic, Marc Strassman for the Citizens United for Excellence in E-Government said that Europeans tend to trust governments more which is why the integration process in Europe has moved quicker than in North America. Nevertheless, North America is miles ahead of Africa and Asian countries. Over the past years those continents have struggled with *status quo* democracy and jumping on the new E-Democratic train isn't a smart move.

Another critical element that needs to be smoothed over is training personnel as well as the citizens. For E-Democracy organization to become fully integrated they need to have adequate personnel which needs to be trained accordingly. There are two categories of personnel that have to be trained. One of the two categories is elected officials. It is in their best interest to familiarize themselves with voters on the platforms and it is important for them to learn the principles and for them to use the E-Democratic tools as proof of their leadership. The second category are government employees/volunteers which need to be trained to run the organizations. Their job is behind the scenes as they ensure that all the components run smoothly, and enhance the overall experience of E-Democracy. Lastly, the lastly a non-government related category: the people. They have to be educated on the fact how to use the E-Democratic tools to the best of their ability. E-Democracy was designed for the people and if said people don't know how to use the tools then E-Democracy proves itself to be redundant. Therefore, training is a salient issue that needs to be payed a relatively high amount of regard.

Acknowledging the future in technology subsequently means on acknowledging future strides in technology and the differing adaptation of the issue depending on what the people and governments need. As E-Democracy has hit a peak over the past years there has been the development of countless agencies tackling the same issue in semi-similar ways. However, as governments change and so do E-Governments, these organizations will quickly have to repurpose. That is why the level of flexibility of this technology is a major barrier which needs to be overcome.

Effect on the age spectrum

The age spectrum is a heavily instrumentalized topic when discussing voter demographics and therefore enhances its saliency when discoursing about E-Democracy. For

⁴ <http://esterkaufman.com.ar/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/e-democracy-around-the-world.pdf>

simplicity the age divide will be resorted to the millennial age group (22-37) and the middle-age and elder population (45+). These two vastly different demographics are contrasted thoroughly in the practice of E-Democracy.

Voter participation for millennials has dropped by approximately 10% in the last 30 years in Presidential Elections in the US⁵. This drop-in participation can influence certain elections due to voting patterns of the demographic. E-Democracy is a tool that would help with the familiarizing of policy to the younger populations. That would urge them to vote and involve themselves in the politics of their country. Social Media has become the medium by which millennials find their news. Therefore, formalizing the medium of social media could change the *status quo* in voting patterns for millennials.

Figure 1 shows voter turnout in the US during presidential and mid-term elections.

This contrasting evidence compared to the millennial evidence has posed a great conundrum in the world of politics. The *status quo* of politics with the older portion of the population works. Therefore, the implementation of E-Democracy is uncharted territory. Technology is a tool that is more familiar with the younger population meaning that the older population is at a

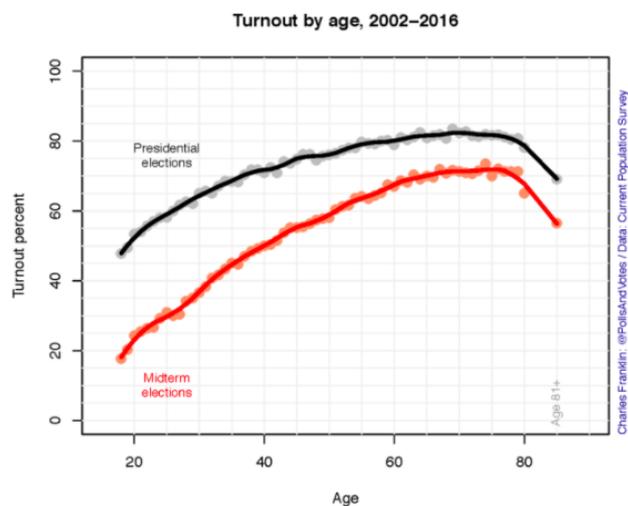


Figure 1

disadvantage when using E-Democratic mediums. Lastly, it is important to note that both parties can never be fully content but the ethical and moral question of whom is more important whether there should be any debate to import E-Democracy.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Sweden

The top ranked country in E-Democracy according to the PoliticsOnline survey from 2000 was Sweden. Its success was also from its proficiency in technology. It is interesting to

⁵ <http://civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youth-voting/>

Figure 1: <https://medium.com/@PollsAndVotes/age-and-voter-turnout-52962b0884ef>

see how they can carry out this agenda and have their society so involved in their politics. An example of an organization that helps with this conundrum is the International IDEA. The Stockholm-based organization is formed to discuss and promote new ways to enhance democracy around the world. In addition, it provides a public sphere for political and democratic discourse. Another agency in Sweden is the Votia Empowerment. This Agency works with Swedish communities to promote E-Democracy and online voting tools. To conclude, it is important to take note how successful countries solve the issue and strive doing so. Sweden is one of those countries and it is important to fully grasp how those organizations play a role in the spread of E-Politics and E-Democracy.

United Kingdom

The UK is also a technologically adept country that is trying and has incorporated a high amount of technology with in its government. Firstly, the UK former Prime Minister Tony Blair took a large first step and declared that by 2005 all government services had to be online and accessible for the public. The creation of the UK Online Citizens Portal is a platform where citizens have a forum for them to take part in government consultations. In 2001, the UK government invested 43 million pounds into digitalizing their court system. Not only has the UK worked with E-Democracy at the national level they have also established an organization called Communities Online for smaller counties. This platform allows citizens to discuss county issues online with mediators such as the incumbents of office. Although still part of the UK, the aforementioned agencies were in England. It is important to note the use of technology in democracy within Scotland. For example, the Scottish Parliament has been present on the web since the year 2000. In Edinburgh there is the International Teledemocracy Center. The center provides a wide range of tools for helping the Scottish citizens understand what E-Democracy is and how it works. Like Sweden these pioneer countries are crucial, and it is important to remember that learning from them is essential to solving the issue.

The U.S. Participation Playbook

The U.S. Public Participation Playbook is an initiative taken by the U.S. government to act as a resource for government managers to construct better relationships and evaluate better services through Public Participation. The U.S. Open Government National Actions Plans is an organization in the United States which main goal is to increase public involvement and integrity with in certain government projects. The U.S. Public Participation Playbook's structure is formulated in a way to indicate performance metrics for government employees

and servants to serve the citizens whole fully. The creation of this organization was from an unprecedented partnership that includes: 36+ federal programs, nearly six dozen federal managers, and 12 expert organizations such as: World Bank, Deliberative Democracy Consortium, Sunlight Foundation, OpenGov, and the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation. The public can contribute in form of new plays (goals to strive for) and give financially. Lastly, in the words of The U.S. Public Participation Playbook: “[The U.S. Public Participation Playbook] was created in an open, transparent process that included three public comment periods.”⁶

The Centre for E-Democracy

This Canadian organization is one of the pioneers in E-Democracy. They have a clear purpose which is to translate and share more knowledge about politics to younger audiences. They want to achieve that by rejuvenating the spread of said knowledge by creating forums and newsletters. As a part of their vision they want to become the main research hub for E-Democracy which consequently will have an impact on the real and practical world. The organization plans on releasing mini-reports that would give a detailed outline in simple and plain language on important topics chosen by the people of Canada through a program called AskingCanadians: an organization created by the same person behind the center. However, the true beauty of this organization is that it is completely in the private sector thus a lower amount of political bias and free political discourse.

E-Democracy.org

With one tool and scope E-Democracy.org is a forum based organization that connects 30,000 individuals on community created forums to discuss local and global topics. E-Democracy.org has a simple mission statement that encapsulates the strength of online tools help local communities in the public scope and to re-construct democracy. It has also set three goals for itself to stay on ask and follow their mission statement. Goal one: Inclusive Engagement, Goal two: Active Citizenship, Goal three: Effective Practices and tools. Goal one perfectly aligns with the age spectrum as broadening the horizon and reachability is a crucial step to solving the issue. Goal two links to training and empowering government officials and volunteers, as well as citizens to become active members of society. Lastly, Goal 3 ties hand in hand with the core premise made by the founding E-Democracy which is the use of technology or any effective tool to spread and modernize democracy.

⁶ <https://participation.usa.gov>

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1960s	Establishment of demanding inclusiveness in a new participatory democracy by political theorists: Benjamin Barber, C.B. Macpherson and, Carole Pateman.
1980s	The re-invigoration of a sense of community instead of the mainstream sense of individuality. This motion was brought forward by sociologists: Robert Bellah, and Amitai Etzioni.
1990	Tim Berners-Lee created to the internet as we know it today which is what makes E-Democracy a reality.
Early 2000s	The integration of a new sense of community and inclusive democracy led to the pairing with the internet as its platform to launch the E-Democratic movement.
2000	The creation of the EU CyberVote project which consisted into creating software for online elections guaranteeing full privacy.
2005	Estonia embraced E-Democracy and had an election where it was possible to vote online.
2006	Although founded in 1994, e-democracy.org became a proper E-Democracy tool around 2006 where it started opening their forums and being the first organization to do so.
16 February 2017	The European Parliament passed a resolution tackling E-Democracy under the European Union: potential challenges.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

The United Nations every day is bombarded with pressing problems that require an abundance of attention, money and energy. Therefore, with E-Democracy also being a new issue sadly, there hasn't been much done by the UN. Nevertheless, this issue hasn't been totally ignored and the UN has released a five volume compendium regarding the "Innovative E-Government Practices," and the UN Global E-Government Readiness Report of 2004 and 2005.

A compendium is a concise yet detailed and articulated guide that outlines a problem and does not include any bias. The purpose for the creation of the UN compendium is to invest into an initiative that promotes E-Government and E-Democracy. In addition, this compendium strives to publicize tools and services for governments to develop upon. The compendium is formatted in a way that includes a main topic for the volume and the sub-headings are countries and each section is an agency or event about the main topic.

The UN Global E-Government Readiness Report of 2004 and 2005 is a document written by the UN that includes two parts and provides a list of how ready UN countries are for E-Government and E-Democracy. The first part is the UN Global E-Government Readiness Survey and the second is a report regarding disparity in ICT (Information Communication Technology). The survey analyzes around 50,000 different tools of E-Democracy in 191 different UN member states. That is done to arrive to the conclusion of how ready a country is to become self-sufficient on E-Democracy. The survey has three main criteria to base their decision, and the criteria are: “website assessment, telecommunication infrastructure and human resource endowment” (UN Global E-Government Readiness Report). The USA has the highest readiness, followed by Denmark and the UK. However by region, Europe is first, followed by North America. Central Asia and Africa have the lowest readiness. The ICT portion of the report divulges into an *Access-for-Opportunity* Framework. *Access-for-Opportunity* is a way of saying of giving worldwide opportunity to access the internet and ICT technologies. The Report outlines that over 5 billion individuals stare through an important difficulty in succeeding in this technological revolution. It addresses the growing disparity between ICT presence in developing countries and how that could undercut the successfulness of the technology revolution—hence—E-Democracy. The aforementioned UN efforts are the only strides that the UN has taken worth mentioning. As previously stated this is a new issue that has come to light recently therefore UN bureaucracy has still to fully acknowledge it.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

There haven't been active attempts to solve the issue, as its ambiguity as an issue is hard to conceptualize. This issue isn't a resolvable matter; however, it is more of an issue that needs to be put in place through governments and such parties. One of the more prominent strides taken has been by E-Democracy.org that has formulated a ten point to-list for governments to implement. The list ranges from editing a website be more user friendly and inclusive about political movements in the country to develop legislation for E-Democracy.

Other previous attempts to solve this issue is the formation of centralized organization using a de-centralized platform. The U.S. Participation Playbook, is a multi-faceted plan that describes measures that should be taken by—in this specific case—the US government. They are focusing on using case studies to help provide more context for their goals. By using said context they report performance of E-Democratic participation to the government in hope to be fully institutionalized. There are countless organizations with their own unique specialization. Nevertheless, most of the solutions are similar and aren't solutions as much as they are suggestions. Thus why this section is short, meaning there is a need of new and innovative government related ideas tackling the issue of the problem.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

As thoroughly argued under the *Issues* sub-heading of the guide this section with discuss possible solutions to the aforementioned issues. Cyber Security is the biggest problem because of the low trust in government agencies, therefore it is crucial to shade light on some possible solutions. The main problem is trust and the solution to suppressing this issue is build a system where there should be trust but factual and tangible facts and evidence for safety. It is hard to find a rock solid solution to be used upon a de-centralized platform, therefore, strengthening cyber security is a viable option. Using professional hackers, as well as programmers there can be firewall's and data protection. Also, an alert system of when a cyber threat is detected could be useful to stop attacks while in the course of the action. This would require very well trained personnel and is not 100% failsafe. Sadly, it is not only hackers that want that information, companies that have access to that information could have the incentive to sell the information. Hence, a secondary plan has to be put in action. The creation of a legal framework that would lead to the finding and imprisonment of the culprit is crucial. Similar to the US' Constitution 4th Amendment where it protects the citizen from privacy violations. Evidently, this applies to companies and not only individuals.

The second issue was the lack of trained personnel and the need of trustworthy personnel for the safety and success of E-Democracy. There a multitude of way of creating more jobs and creating adequate personnel to fill those positions. The collaboration of government organizations with the private sector is crucial. There are endless possibilities such as: summits, training camps, and external training with in organizations. However, another issue is that people are needed to take those jobs. Therefore, it is crucial to also work

on incentivizing jobs for E-Democracy. The solution needed for this is salient as other solutions need qualified personnel for the success of said solution.

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