

E-Democracy

Strengthening the participation of citizens in government

Waltraut.Kotschy@dsk.gv.at

What is e-democracy?

- E-democracy represents the use of information and communication technologies and strategies by democratic actors within political and governance processes of local communities, nations and on the international stage. Democratic actors/sectors include governments, elected officials, the media, political organizations, and citizen/voters.
- To many, e-democracy suggests greater and more active citizen participation enabled by the Internet, mobile communications, and other technologies in today's representative democracy as well as through more participatory or direct forms of citizen involvement in addressing public challenges. – **Steven Clift**
- **And what is e-government?**

Essence of e-Democracy

Citizens' participation in government

on all levels of government

by expressing their opinion,

making use of **electronic communication**

Citizens being offered information

by making use of **electronic communication**

in order to form an opinion on political matters

Examples of e-democracy

- **Net-campaigning:**
Candidates or strategies are introduced to the public
- **E-democracy consultation:**
The public is asked for opinion on discussion papers, projects etc.
- **Briefing papers:**
 - The public gets informed about new developments...
 - Advice of how to make use of new benefits for citizens

What are the advantages of e-democracy?

- Citizens can be approached easily
 - Information can be transported in a more pointed way
- effortless way of communication
 - no need to physically move
- effective way of communicating
 - Cheap
 - Messages can be delivered to a great quantity of recipients without much additional effort
- Changing the „silent majority“ to active, articulate citizens, making use of their democratic capacities

Are there any dangers from a data protection point of view?

- What are the rules for using personal data in this context?
- How far is **anonymity** allowed, or even mandatorily to be guaranteed ?
- **When is it lawful to process personal data for e-democracy purposes? and**
- how are personal data to be handled?

Creating information

- In a democratic process of forming political opinions argumentation and information backing up the argumentation must be provided to the public
 - >need for surveys on sociological developments
 - >statistical research on developments usually need personal data as basis

Distributing information to citizens

- Personalized approach is usually considered as having greater impact
 - Traditional distribution of political messages:
 - Political information is very often sent to all persons contained in the voting lists
 - Targeting special citizens' groups brings on all data protection problems known in the context of **direct marketing**
 - However:
 - Approaching citizens via **electronic addresses** with information on political questions would **most likely be considered as spamming**; this is therefore not a widely used way of communication in e-democracy

Granting access to information

- E-democracy relevant information is usually published on web-sites
- Right of the **data subject to seek information anonymously**
- **No mandatory identification at gateways providing access to information**
- Access protocols only for statistical purposes
- Personalisation of access?
 - Only on demand
 - Remembering favorites - a threat to data protection?

Expressing political opinions (1)

- via e-mails in a point-to-point communication: usually
 - identified sender,
 - expects a personalized answer from recipient
- via web-form in a point-to-many communication:
 - Would this involve personal data?

Expressing opinions (2)

- Why would a citizen's **identity** data be needed in **web-communications** for e-democracy purposes?
 - **Number** of similar opinions important in a democratic society
 - How to assess the numeric significance of opinions conveyed electronically?
 - Faking identities is especially easy in electronic communications
 - How could misrepresentation be avoided?

Data protection safeguards (1)

- Is there an „etiquette“ how to treat personal data collected during e-democracy communications?
 - Interesting Example:
 - E-TRUST CHARTER of the U.K. e-democracy web-site:
 - Explains who will see the data and why
 - what will be done with these data and when they will be deleted
 - what are the citizens safeguards and remedies
 - Further use and publication based on consent

Data protection safeguards (2)

■ Austrian citizen card system:

Identification by sector-specific PINs which are cryptographic one-way functions of the person's original PIN

- Guarantees that a person is electronically always recognized as being identical or different to somebody already contained in a file, **without being able to get to know the person's name**
 - Ideal for research files on demographic and sociological developments
- Can be used for personalized storage of access data in gateways without revealing names
- Can be used for avoiding fake multiple identities in polls without making opinions traceable to identifiable persons
- **Represents and always recognizes electronically the same person, without having to know name, birthday etc.**

e-voting (1)

■ Problems of technical reliability of the environment where the vote is cast:

- How to keep vote secret - not traceable to one specific voter - against access to the voting machine?
- How to prevent falsification of votes by technical means?
- How to prevent attacks on the availability of the technical system?

E-voting (2)

■ Problems of sociological reliability concerning „free“ voting:

if the voter is not protected by being alone in the voting booth, will the independence of his voting decision be endangered?

Equality as a cornerstone of democracy

- Equality of access to information in „e-form“
- Equality of possibilities to voice an opinion in „e-form“
- Equality in making opinions count:
 - Does the visibility of e-communication result in unproportionate importance attributed to opinions transmitted in electronic form?
 - Is the distribution of opinions within the „e-community“ the same as outside?