Chapter 14
E–Democracy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a review and analysis of e-democracy conceptual models, terminology, methodologies, case studies, outcomes, future issues, and research opportunities. A critical assessment of credible research studies is provided to support a determination as to why and how information and communication technologies (ICT) can be utilized to expand the role of citizens in providing input to government representatives. The approach envisioned involves deliberation by citizens on issues of concern with subsequent dialogue between citizens, the government, and elected officials. The chapter addresses e-democracy in the context of governments seeking to utilize ICT to support a means of communication with citizens.

E-DEMOCRACY

This research essay is a critical review and synthesis of extensive research on e-democracy (electronic democracy) as a means to strengthen the democratic relationship between citizens, their government and elected officials. E-democracy is founded on citizen participation through information and communication technologies (ICT) in order to support legitimate representation of citizens in a democratic society. It is based on providing an online opportunity for citizens to obtain information about issues and express their position. The approach envisioned involves deliberation by citizens on issues of concern with subsequent dialogue between citizens, the government and elected officials. The goal is to use ICT to improve representation and decision-making through strengthened democratic participation.

BACKGROUND

E-democracy is based on providing citizens with the opportunity to have their voices heard. Consultation

with citizens by elected officials is important to support legitimate representation in a democratic society. A long-term goal of the government in a democracy is to represent and serve the citizenry. E-democracy, as an extension of democracy, is an integrative framework between the government and those it governs. Through online communications, society can be better reflected in the practices of public institutions that depend on communication with citizens for legitimacy. At its core, e-democracy is based on providing citizens with the opportunity to have their voices heard. It is through this communications process that respect is conveyed, positions are understood and an elected official can legitimately stand as a representative for constituents.

Providing channels for democratic participation is in the interest of citizens, their government and elected officials. Citizens benefit from the enhanced means of communication providing the opportunity to express personal opinions, preferred actions, potential consequences, associated values, etc. The government that draws on citizens' input strengthens its legitimacy and its capacity to govern. Elected officials that draw on their electorates' input strengthen their ability to validly represent their constituents' perspective.

DISCUSSION

There is a wealth of information available delving into facets of e-democracy. E-democracy is based on consultation with citizens in order to support legitimate representation in a democratic society. The OECD calls for improvements in how governments facilitate engagement of citizens to strengthen democracy, and they provide valuable advice to this end. The OECD's delineation of information provision, consultation and active participation provide a variety of methodologies to support open communications channels. The OECD's influence is evident in the majority of relevant literature. In summary, authors discuss

how ICT can support integrating society with governing organizations through the following activities:

- Information provision, such as government-to-citizen online communications, termed e-government,
- Consultation, such as government-to-citizen and citizen-to-government dialogue, termed e-consultation, and
- Active participation, such as multi-party communications, termed e-participation.

E-democracy is the use of technology "as a tool to provide people with the capacity to participate and influence decision-making" (Macintosh, 2004). An information system can serve as a tool to pursue the goal of supporting democracy. An information system is "a set of interrelated components that collect, manipulate, and disseminate data and information and provide a feedback mechanism to meet an objective" (Stair & Reynolds, 2003, p. 665). This integrative approach recognizes the capacity of information systems to be a driver and enabler of new organizational forms and functions. E-democracy is based on citizen engagement leading to participation to support legitimate representation in a democratic society. It provides an online opportunity for citizens to express their opinion. The legitimacy of democracy depends on communication between citizens and elected officials. E-democracy can be supported through such means as email, online feedback forms and online discussion forums.

Conceptual Models

Model 1: E-Government

E-government (electronic government) is based on a unidirectional communications flow. E-government is described as "the use of ICTs, and particularly the Internet, as a tool to achieve better government" (OECD, 2003). E-government

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