Chapter 6
From Initial Idea to Piecemeal Implementation:
Switzerland’s First Decade of Internet Voting Reviewed

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ABSTRACT
The formal genesis of e-voting in Switzerland can be traced back to a series of motions deposited by parliamentarians in 2000. At the time the Swiss were not alone in trying to roll out e-voting programmes in the early 2000s. Indeed, a large number of European countries were pursuing similar e-voting policy agendas. A decade later very few countries can be said to have implemented e-voting. One of these, Estonia, has fully generalised e-voting as a mode of participation for a range of electoral contests. While much has been written about the Estonian case, less is known about the Helvetic route to implementing e-voting. In this chapter, the authors analyse the piecemeal approach to implementing e-voting in the Swiss case. The fact that the Helvetic route to implementing e-voting involved three competing systems offers a comparative anchor for examining the sustainability of each system. It is in this sense that Switzerland offers a useful political laboratory for analysing the problems of modernising elections in the digital era and provides insights that may be generalisable to other cases.

INTRODUCTION
The formal genesis of e-voting in Switzerland can be traced back to a series of motions deposited by parliamentarians in 2000. At the time the Swiss were not alone in trying to roll out e-voting programmes in the early 2000s. Indeed, a large number of European countries were pursuing similar e-voting policy agendas. A decade later only two European countries can be said to have implemented e-voting. One of these, Estonia, has fully generalised e-voting as a mode of participation for a range of electoral contests. While much has been written about the Estonian case, less is
known about the Helvetic route to implementing Internet voting. In this chapter we analyse the piecemeal approach to implementing Internet voting in the Swiss case. The fact that the Helvetic route to implementing e-voting involved three competing systems offers a comparative anchor for examining the sustainability of each system. It is in this sense that Switzerland offers a useful political laboratory for analysing the problems of modernising elections in the digital era and provides insights that may be generalisable to other cases.

This chapter is divided into three parts: The first provides the comparative setting in which the Swiss Internet voting agenda was launched in the 2000s. In the next section we focus on the process of introducing e-voting and some of the problems that have been encountered by public officials in a polity where elections are very decentralised affairs. The third part is more quantitative and focuses on the political behaviour aspects of introducing new voting channels - especially on rates of participation. Based on the evidence provided, the discussion in the concluding section focuses on the sustainability of e-voting in the Swiss context and identifies some potentially generalisable insights from the Swiss case as other countries implement programmes of electoral modernisation.

The Comparative Setting

During the late 1990s and early 2000s a host of European countries outlined plans to introduce e-voting. Indeed, a paper in 2003 listed 13 Western European countries experimenting with e-voting (Svensson & Leenes, 2003). Most of these programmes were initiated in the early 2000s yet well over a decade later only a handful of countries can be said to be at an advanced stage of rolling out e-voting as a generalised mode of participation (Mendez, 2010). Some of the most notable backtracking in terms of initially pioneering experimentation with e-voting that was subsequently shelved include the UK, the country to have been the first to launch binding e-voting in 2002 and 2003 on a relatively extended scale on the local level, and The Netherlands, the first country to have provided e-voting to some of its citizens abroad for the European Parliamentary election of 2004. In both countries, which appeared at the forefront of e-voting in the early 2000s, a number of political problems effectively put an end to their e-voting programmes. Two other countries that had relatively advanced e-voting programmes during the early 2000s were Switzerland and Estonia. Whereas Switzerland, as argued in this paper, has adopted a piecemeal approach to e-voting Estonia has fully implemented e-voting as a generalised mode of participation. Critically, it has done this at the national level when in 2007 Estonia was the first country to offer e-voting for the more salient national elections to the entire electorate. In addition, the Estonians were also the first to offer e-voting to an entire national electorate for the 2009 European Parliament elections. The comparative insights from Estonia in terms of political dynamics are perhaps somewhat more limited for this paper given the country’s very small scale and the fact that it is a unitary state. Instead our focus is on introducing e-voting in very decentralised political settings.

From the perspective of introducing e-voting in a more decentralised setting with special attention to the local setting developments in two other countries, Norway and Canada, in the latter part of the 2000s are more relevant than some of the failed cases from the early 2000s. In the case of Norway, after a thorough planning phase by public administration and experts including study trips abroad remote voting via the Internet was introduced for ten trial municipalities in 2011 on the occasion of local elections (Norway Report 2006). Besides an unsuccessful parliamentary motion in November 2010 to stop the trials no further public debate seemed to have taken place (Pammett & Goodman, 2013, p. 23). In September 2011 more than 167,000 people had the option to vote via the Internet (Bock Segaard et al., 2013). 26.4% of votes
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