Chapter 2
E–Democracy Systems and Participation Outcomes in Urban Governance

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ABSTRACT

The concept of democracy has a long tradition of research in the political science domain. In recent years, advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have provided opportunities for governments to deploy systems to actively engage citizens in the agenda-setting and decision-making processes for urban governance. Consequently, e-democracy and e-participation efforts have emerged and attracted researchers’ attention in the Information Systems (IS) field. Information systems lay the foundations of active citizenry, which may impact on the participation outcome. However, in order to maximize the potential of this evolving form of democracy, researchers and practitioners need to address a number of challenges in the design of participation structures for city governance. This chapter sets out to explore e-democracy systems and their impact on a number of e-participation outcomes. Outlining both promoters and barriers of ICT use for e-democracy, the authors also uncover gaps in the previous literature and identify an agenda for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Democratic processes can be enabled by information systems (IS) to provide communication and coordination means for governments to involve multiple participants. These capabilities attract scholars to study the impact of IS on government. One stream of such research has focused on the capabilities of IS to improve the efficiency and effectiveness with which state-provided services, such as social security, housing and health care, are delivered to citizens. Generally referred to as e-government research, this stream has focused on e-government as a platform for exchanging
information, providing services, and transacting with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government (Sahu, Dwivedi, & Weerakkody, 2009) and on integrated platforms enabling citizen-centric services (Weerakkody, Janssen, & Dwivedi, 2009). The issues investigated in this stream of research and the theoretical frameworks employed closely parallel those investigated in the research on the impact of IS on organizational effectiveness and the adoption and implementation of IS applications.

Another stream of research has focused on the impact of IS on the relationship between the citizen and state. Many scholars have long speculated on the possibility of employing IS to transform the functioning and governance of democratic governments (Behrouzi, 2005; Macpherson, 1977; Päivärinta & Sæbø, 2006). In particular, the capabilities of modern IS enable a much higher level of citizen participation in the agenda-setting and decision-making processes of government than are currently evident in even the most liberal western democracies operating today. This has important implications for the governance of urban areas, which has become a key issue for governments as half of the world population now lives in cities (UN, 2011).

The outcomes of the e-democratization process are closely linked to the design, development, and implementation of IS underpinning e-democracy. E-democracy initiatives can serve as two-way communication between government and citizens, educate citizens about the rationale and complexity of policy-making, legitimize government decisions, and provide opportunities for mutual learning (Coleman & Gøtze, 2001). Furthermore, they can enhance accessibility by overcoming the offline physical constraints of time and space (Phang & Kankanahalli, 2008).

While IS provides the capabilities to introduce more participatory forms of democracy and high levels of citizen engagement (Habermas, 1999), practical considerations suggest the need for participation limits in the interest of achieving closure on decisions. Thus, a number of participation-limiting structures may require to be imposed e.g., limit discussion on an issue to a certain time frame and mandate voting on an issue on a certain date.

E-democracy raises important issues for IS researchers as the information systems created for transforming political and urban governance will both be shaped by such considerations and will, in turn, shape the processes and outcomes of those transformations. These issues are at the intersection of IS and political science research.

This chapter describes democracy concepts, e-democracy systems and tools, theoretical lenses to study e-democracy phenomenon, and e-democracy outcomes. Furthermore, it outlines challenges and provides directions for future research.

### DEMOCRACY CONCEPTS

#### E-Democracy

The rapid development of new technologies, particularly networks and the WWW has impacted on the traditional means of government communication with citizens and increased the interest in IS for participation in political processes (Dijk, 2000). The exploitation of information and communication technology (ICT) is being extended to the democracy sphere, such as in increasing citizen involvement in policy-making and soliciting citizens’ inputs in planning (Moon, 2000). Consequently, the concept of e-democracy emerged as the employment of ICT in political debates and decision-making processes, whether complementing or contrasting to the previous and traditional ways of communication, e.g., face-to-face interaction or one-way mass media (Sæbø, 2006). Here, in this chapter, e-democracy is defined as a form of government in which the technological capabilities of modern IS is employed to support citizen participation in the agenda-setting and decision-making processes of government. Similarly, it defines e-democratization as the
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