E-Voting in Brazil – The Risks to Democracy

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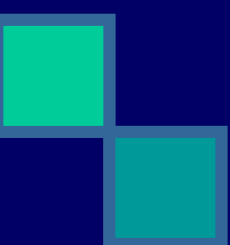
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Abstract:

Literature has shown that countries with strong democratic tradition are not yet using electronic voting systems intensively, due to the concern for and emphasis on security. This work shows the implications of a market-driven approach to information technology and the imperative of a democratic voter-centered approach for the development of an electronic voting system.

Voting Counting Systems in Brazil

From:

Traditional or manual voting system (Paper Ballot)

- Voters mark ballot by hand
- Ballots counted by hand
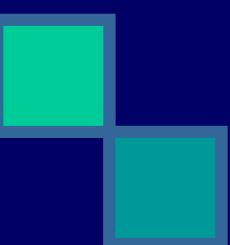
Voting Counting Systems in Brazil

To:

Electronic Voting System (E-Voting)

- Direct record electronic system – DRE (1990s)

- Electronic version of the ballot paper

- No physical ballot

- Ballot on screen

- Voter casts vote by touch screen

Direct Record Electronic System (DRE)

- First used in elections for cities over two hundred thousand inhabitants (early 1990s);
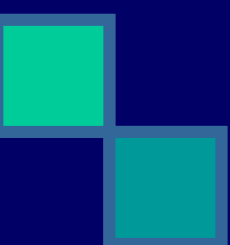- Large scale elections (1998).

More than one hundred million Voters Elect:

- President of the Brazilian Republic;
- Senators;
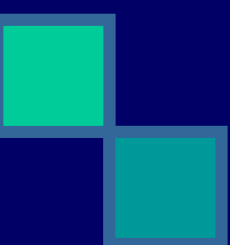- Federal Deputies;
- State Governors and State Deputies.

Manual Voting System Faults

- Elections subject to corruption and frauds;

- Large parties used to conspire to change the outcome of elections;

- Many evidencies of vote embezzlement.

Electronic Voting System Faults and Distrusts

- There is no free-error electronic voting system;
- Existing technology does not provide a completely "secure e-transaction environment";
- Vote embezzlement can occur without leaving any evidence;
- No paper ballot; Close elections;
- Tampering in the voting process;
- Litlle understanding of election process;
- Some vendor's machine are very hack able.

Electronic Voting Systems

- **Debates – Technicalities**
  - **Risks of the DRE technology;**
  - **Lack of security;**
  - **Technology failures and tampering in the voting process.**

- **Limited Debates**
  - **Other risks and challenges involving: Cultural, political and sociological issues, including the digital divide and different forms of alienation.**
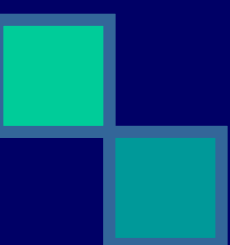
Digital Divide

- **Traditional Top-down approach:**
  - **Participation in the digital economy and not in favor of political and social inclusion;**
  - **Inequalities in access to computers and the Internet;**
  - **Inequalities are reproduced significantly (access).**

- **Critical and Reflexive approach:**
  - **Reformulate a conceptualization of the digital divide;**
  - **The shift paradigm-from equality of physical access to equity of access.**
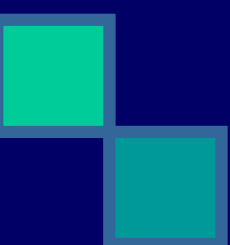
Digital Divide and E-Voting

- **Access created by Market-Driven forces;**

- **Corporate actors VS Compulsory Vote;**

- **High investment in E-Voting *versus* frequency of technology use – every two years;**

- **Definition of priorities – E-Voting can be seen as a toy of the rich and privileged;**

- **Availability of most services on traditional, non-electronic format, is not guaranteed to everyone.**

Market-Driven Approach to E-voting

- There has been a heavy predisposition in governments, in the developed and developing world, to ignore the socio-political and cultural implications of ICTs;

- Costly technological systems are being imposed on citizens in lesser developed countries;

- Question:

  - If e-voting technology is not discussed with the society, will it strengthen the powers of the elites, the rich, the educated and the corporate actors at the expense of the ordinary people?

Market-Driven Approach

- **The discourse of e-democracy has to be reframed beyond the dominant and mainstream rhetoric, so that the aspects of ICTs meet the real needs of the 'democratic deficit';**

- **The high costs of e-voting can reinforce the digital divide, especially when access is created by market-driven forces or corporate actors;**

- **In a market-driven approach, it is imperative to identify and assess the risks to democracy;**

- **Without a market for e-voting systems in the developed world, corporate actors have turned to developing countries. Let us resist e-voting as it is now.**

- **Elections have to be free, fair, opened and transparent – (Transparency is for the whole democratic system).**

Voter-Centered Approach to E-Voting

- If the voting process is an important component of democracy, the democratic system should call upon the voters to develop the most appropriate voting system;

- If there is hope for a voter-driven voting system development, any technology-driven or market-driven voting system should be seen with suspicion in a true democracy;

- Without the full participation of voters, the development of e-voting systems will put democracy in jeopardy;

- Negotiating behind closed doors, without public dialogue, is not the alternative for the development of an electronic voting system;

- The praxis of e-voting must encompass the issues of e-equity, justice and social inclusion and the voter or citizen should be seen as an emancipator or radical political agent.