ProVotE

Transition to electronic voting and citizen participation

An overview of the social impact of e-voting trials in the Provincia Autonoma di Trento, Italy





ProVotE - A systematic approach



See: Prosser, Krimmer (2004)

Investigating the social impact

SOCIAL IMPACT: any change occurring in the symbolic order or in the concrete behaviour of a population in consequence of the exposure to an external stimulus

AIMS:

- Evaluating if the shift to electronic voting is feasible from a sociological standpoint
- Facilitating the transition from paper and pencil ballot to electronic voting



The research design - I

"BEFORE"

- 8 focus groups young people, senior citizens, women and scrutinizers from rural and urban areas
- >2500 telephone interviews representative sample of the adult population in Trentino
- 160 supervised trials (ethnographic observation and questionnaires) potentially disadvantaged target (low educated, elderly)
- monitoring of turnout to open trials in the towns chosen for the first field test

The research design - II

"DURING"

- first field test: five towns, 6950 electronic voters
- second field test: one town, **336 electronic voters**
- (third field test: one town, 1134 electronic voters)

"AFTER"

- analysis of electoral data and comparison of electronic and paper-and-pencil results
- 1200 telephone interviews representative sample of the population involved in the first field test

Evidence provided during the focus groups:

The day of elections (Sunday) follows a routine in respect to:

relatives/friends/transport

- when going to vote *early/late/fit with services etc.*
- with whom going to vote
- "how" to vote for councillors

Undervoting is reported <- fear of writing names improperly

The **board of scrutinizers** "learns by doing" on the same day of elections - courses provide theoretical background, but experience and efficiency are learnt on the spot.

This professional culture is *accessible to anyone*:

⇒ accessibility to a procedure enhances feeling of **TRUST**...

The practice of voting - II

...voters TRUST that:

Each ballot is personal and secret (thus guaranteeing one's freedom of choice)

Each and every vote is actually counted (i.e., not "thrown away")

The ballot count truly respects the voter's will (also by being available for further controls and re-counts)

So what about <u>electronic</u> voting?

"Immaterial" practices

might require expertise in managing procedures

⇒ risk: sense of "loosing control" of the process

E-voting: expectations and fears - I

Interviewees...

...expect that

- e-voting will be introduced, sooner or later (technological determinism?!)
- e-voting will not increase the turnout
- distrust in politics as a whole will result in an apathetic or critical attitude

...fear that

- costs for elections will increase, compared to paper ballots
- the elderly will not be able to vote electronically
- age will impact more than education or skill

E-voting: expectations and fears - II

Interviewees project their worries onto senior citizens ("I will have no problems, but the (**other**) elderly...")

A paper proof of their ballots (VVPB) is understood as an unnecessary duplicate, which doesn't fit with the idea of "electronic" voting!!

BUT

a *simplification* in the procedures related to electors identification ballots count register filling would definitely be welcome E-voting requires "skills" that are not much different from those needed in using common menu-like devices

Through computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) the technological habits of the population were investigated

potentially impaired in e-voting:
an estimated 6% of the population,
mostly elderly people, retired, with no or very little education

Voting procedures should be changed, sooner or later (70%) E-voting is a **good idea**, **but** it is **difficult** to implement (58%)

Should e-voting be adopted in the next provincial elections, would you be...



Attendance in elections:	Always	Sometimes	Never
Very in favour	20,0	12,5	13,8
Quite in favour	37,1	27,1	17,2
Indifferent	17,3	34,0	51,7
Against	11,8	9,0	3,4
Very against	11,2	13,2	8,6
No answer	2,7	4,2	5,2
%	100,0	100,0	100,0
N =	2347	144	58

E-voting: attitudes - III

Professionals, students, highly educated, below 50



Size and level of development of a town have no effect

Education impacts only if it is very low, controlling for age and technological skills

E-voting: attitudes - IV

WHAT MATTERS is:

Belief that e-vote will:



feeling voting as a duty

feeling confident of own skills

And (hypothesis):

trust institutions

Developing an e-voting interface - I

GASPEROTTI GUIDO			
ROSSI BENITO Persionati	(eali		
		 TAVERNA CLAUDIO	
	()	 	
6	DELLAI LORENZO		
SIMILE		 ANDREOTTI CARLO	
FAC	CENTRO		100-100-010-000-000-0 000-000-000-000-00

Fac-simile of a paper ballot

Developing an e-voting interface - II



Screenshot of the touchscreen

Developing an e-voting interface - III





The e-voting machine

Developing an e-voting interface - IV



Trialling e-voting – I

8 May 2005

15375 potential electors in 16 electoral sections5 towns:3 small-sized1 medium(ca. 1500 inhabitants)1 large(ca. 110000 inhabitants)

Average turnout: **76%** (11723 voters)

of those, 6950 (59%) repeated their vote electronically

min. e-turnout: 39%; max. e-turnout: 81%

5534 interviews to learn about what could be improved in the voting interface

led to \rightarrow

6 November 2005

564 potential electors in a small town (650 inhabitants)

Turnout: **67%** (376)

of those, 336 (89%) repeated their vote electronically

330 interviews to both e-voters and non e-voters

A word of caution:

E-voters are a self selected sample!

Overall positive evaluation of the electronic system:

- <5% described it as "quite" or "very difficult"</p>
- 10% would be "quite" or "very" against voting only electronically already in the next provincial elections (2008)

"Scrutinizer effect"

Results of e-voting are consistent with paper ballots The experimentation did not cause drops nor rises in turn-out Telephone interviewing five months before the first trial

The sample is representative of the adult population in the province



Telephone interviewing four months after the first trial

The sample is representative of the adult population in the electoral sections that experimented e-voting



Telephone interviewing four months after the first trial

The sample is representative of the adult population in the electoral sections that experimented e-voting

	sample	testers	watchers	non-voters
very in favour	21%	32%	12%	9%
in favour	41%	49%	39%	28%
indifferent	17%	8%	20%	36%
against	14%	9%	19%	12%
very against	7%	2%	10%	14%
N	1206	503	372	146

After the trials - III



Final remarks: what did we learn?

Citizens are ready to accept e-voting: they don't show a negative attitude toward innovation and on the whole are confident with technology

BUT

the introduction of electronic voting requires synergy of



Adequate communication Open trials Public meetings

No "impose" but "propose" the transition to e-voting

Involvement of local administrators and opinion leaders

Voting is a symbolic and traditional ritual

Need to keep e-voting interface as consistent as possible with paper ballots

Final remarks: what did we learn?

We cannot expect that electors adapt themselves to voting machines

BUT

We have to ensure that <u>voting machines</u> are adapted to electors needs

... and citizens should be aware of this effort

E-voting is a challenge that can be won only when, and if, it'll make voting procedures simpler and truly "democratic"

ProVotE – Further information



provote @ soc.unitn.it

http://www.elezioni.provincia.tn.it/