

Chapter 7

ICT and eGovernance: The Citizen's Trust Facet

Christos Manolopoulos

Research Academic Computer Technology Institute, Greece

Dimitris Sofotassios

Research Academic Computer Technology Institute, Greece

Paul Spirakis

Research Academic Computer Technology Institute, Greece

Yiannis C. Stamatiou

Research Academic Computer Technology Institute, Greece

ABSTRACT

One of the cornerstones of Democracy is the participation of citizens in decisions that affect their lives. This participation, traditionally, is exercised: a) through national elections and the body of representatives, and b) through binding procedures such as referendums. However, there are decisions that affect citizens' everyday lives that require more frequent, day to day participation. Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) can create fast and secure communication channels, enabling politicians and citizens to engage in a mutually rewarding interaction leading to the development eDemocracy. However, lack of trust either between politicians and citizens or lack of trust of citizens towards ICT can raise barriers to this opportunity. In this chapter we discuss the issue of trust among government, citizens, and ICT. Our view is that it is nowadays possible to, at least, handle effectively the citizen-ICT facet of trust and provide the drivers for the convergence of eGovernment and eDemocracy realizing the concept of eGovernance. As a case study we present our experiences from the design and implementation of an eVoting system, which has the same strong relationship with eGovernance as traditional elections have with Governance.

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INTRODUCTION

We have entered in a phase where old-fashioned state practices are strongly challenged and citizens demand direct involvement to social collective and political issues. Both governments and citizens could benefit from the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). ICT can amplify citizens' empowerment and desire for effective involvement in state policies and decision making, overcoming more traditional practices based on indirect involvement through representatives or direct involvement at, usually long-spanned, regular intervals through traditional voting. However, despite the recent progress in technology, one of the main obstacles for the wide adoption of eParticipation tools, such as eVoting, is the reluctance of citizens to participate in or the reluctance of politicians to enable eParticipation services (see (Ekelin, 2007) and (Albrecht *et al.*, 2008)). This reluctance can be, partially, attributed to the, relatively, low penetration of technology among citizens (especially those of higher ages – see (Millward, 2003)) and, even, politicians.

However, our view is that the main reason behind this reluctance is the *lack of trust*. This lack of trust has three dimensions: lack of trust of politicians to citizen's ability to provide useful feedback to decision making processes, lack of trust of citizens to politicians that they will take their opinion and transform it into public policy reform actions, and lack of trust of both parties (i.e. citizens and politicians) in ICT as a vehicle towards a robust implementation of transparent eGovernment services that, in turn, will lead to a successful realization of eGovernance. Trust of the citizens and politicians among themselves, as well as towards ICT, is a basic precondition that can lead to a reform with an eye towards real citizen's needs, as they are expressed by themselves.

The emergence or non-emergence of trust between people or groups of people (e.g. politicians and citizens) cannot, unfortunately, be easily explained and may ignite endless discussions with

arguments based on even controversial views from political and social sciences. However, our point of view, which we will discuss in this chapter, is that trust in ICT as it is employed in eGovernance can be considerably enhanced by designing and building eGovernment systems in a way that demonstrates the respect in the privacy of citizens. This requires the application of tools and system representations that can be understood and checked by the specialist and, to a certain degree, by the layman citizen alike. Apart from the technology and engineering approaches, efforts for advancing eParticipation should be *gradual* and develop solutions hand-in-hand with in-field trials that increase (also gradually) in complexity and people inclusiveness, so as to handle the various forms of social trust inertia successfully.

This smooth process seems to work well: 1) it matches bureaucratic and legislative inertia (i.e. time is given to the government to adjust to the new ICT-based, governance model), and 2) time is given to citizens to increase their IT literacy, to understand, trust and finally accept the system used (both in terms of technology and usefulness) before using more complex services (e.g. elections).

It is apparent that voting is a fundamental process in any democratic system. Any effort to migrate from the conventional and long established voting procedures to an electronic voting system is thus very seriously affected by the lack of trust in ICTs and the Internet. Moreover, the abundance of cases of misconduct in electronic voting has resulted in severe decrease of *trust* among citizens (Antoniou *et al.*, 2007). However, eVoting, despite the critique it has attracted (see, for instance, Mercuri, 2007) because it implements one of the most sensitive processes in our democracy, seems to be, still, a hot discussion issue and, possibly, a worldwide reality in the future. Thus, any successful eVoting system should target at increasing *public trust*. Trust, however, is difficult to establish in the eVoting domain since eVoting is necessarily based on complex distributed information systems,

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