

Contribution from Mr Jason Kitcat

Dear Speaker's Commission

As an elected representative I passionately believe in the power of digital channels to improve engagement, participation and accountability. Social media, open data and the web all have the power to increase confidence in democratic representatives and public bodies.

However I am concerned by suggestions that electronic voting could be seen as a solution in this mix of channels. The UK's extensive experience of pilots showed that turnout wasn't boosted and the problems seen were many. Overall the risks of e-voting far outweigh the possible benefits. This is a conclusion that many countries have independently come to including Ireland, UK, Netherlands, Italy, and Germany. Norway have just concluded a very careful and extensive process over years to consider introducing e-voting — their conclusion was against proceeding. The Canadian province of Quebec has concluded similarly.

The best research I have been able to find indicates that how easy it is to vote has little or no impact on turnout. Far more important factors are whether someone thinks their vote will count and how close they think the election result will be in their area.

Whilst many things can be done online successfully, like shopping and banking, none of them need to be secure, verifiable AND anonymous in the way voting needs to be. With commercial transactions one can check a receipt or statement to ensure payments were accurate, and if not a refund can be sought. This makes the risks of e-commerce manageable as fraud is detectable by users in most cases. Such a scenario is not possible for voting as that would undermine the secrecy of the ballot... and of course how would one refund a vote!?

I provide below some key links on this topic based on my experience which includes leading an accredited observation mission of the UK pilots in 2007 and of Estonian elections in 2013.

* Independent Report on E-voting in Estonia — An extensive peer-reviewed report finding serious security flaws in Estonia's online voting system <https://estoniaevoting.org>

* ORG Report on 2007 UK pilots — Findings of an Electoral Commission accredited observation mission https://www.openrightsgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/org_election_report.pdf

* Links to further academic papers and reports in this area <http://www.jasonkitcat.com/writings/e-voting/>

* Norway ends their e-voting trials

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-28055678>

http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kmd/press/press-releases/2014/Internet-voting-pilot-to-be-discontinued.html?regj_oss=1&id=764300

I would be happy to discuss these issues and my experiences in this area further.

Sincerely,
Jason Kitcat

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Cllr Jason Kitcat

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