



CROWDLAW FOR CONGRESS SERIES

# RAHVAKOGU

TURNING THE E-REPUBLIC INTO AN E-DEMOCRACY

<https://rahvakogu.ee>

BRIEFING NOTE

**Owner:** Office of the President, Estonia

**Location:** Estonia

**Years in Operation:** 2013

**Implementation Level:** National

**Platforms:** Web, Offline

**Method:** Online brainstorming

**Participatory Task:** Ideas, Opinions

## RAHVAKOGU | TURNING THE E-REPUBLIC INTO AN E-DEMOCRACY

### How Does It Work?

Rahvakogu (The People's Assembly) was a digital initiative to crowdsource policy proposals for improving the state of democracy and mitigating political corruption in Estonia. Five specific issues (the electoral system, the functioning of political parties, the financing of political parties, public participation in political decision-making, and the politicization of public offices) were selected beforehand as the topics for engagement.

Rahvakogu was conducted in four phases: Proposals, Grouping, Synthesis, and Deliberation:

1. **Proposals** - Proposals enabled the public to make policy proposals pertaining to the themes of political reform via the project website, which used the Your Priorities platform developed in 2008 by the Icelandic nonprofit Citizens Foundation. During the three weeks that the portal was live, from January 7 through January 31, the Rahvakogu webpage garnered over 60,000 views, with over 2,000 users posting 2,000 proposals and 4,000 comments.
2. **Grouping** - In February, during the Grouping phase, policy professionals read, summarized, and then grouped the proposals into 59 "bundles." Then, 30 experts in the fields of political science, law, and economics analyzed these bundles and provided an impact assessment of what effect the proposals would have if enacted.
3. **Synthesis** - A series of five seminars was held during the Synthesis phase in March, at which time political representatives, experts, and citizens who had submitted proposals in the crowdsourcing process were eligible to participate. Participants then drafted proposals and discussed them in small-group meetings to synthesize their proposals into 18 discrete bills in preparation for the face-to-face Deliberation Day.
4. **Deliberation** - The live Rahvakogu event -- the Deliberation Day -- was held on April 6, 2013. The total group of 314 randomly selected and representative citizens was divided into smaller groups of ten to facilitate discussion. Armed with briefing materials prepared by the expert group, and overseen by a moderator, each group deliberated and cast a formal vote to either accept or reject the proposals.

### Why Is It Interesting?

Given its short life span of only a few months, Rahvakogu was one of the most immediately impactful CrowdLaw projects, resulting in legislation that created Rahvaalgatus, a permanent CrowdLaw mechanism for sourcing new policy ideas that is still active today.

## What Worked?

A hybrid approach to use of technology - while policy ideas were submitted through an online platform, the other tasks involved in Rahvakogu, including a Deliberation Day, were done in-person. This allowed the organizers to fill some demographic gaps in participation, and allowed for policy experts and analysts to weigh in on the submitted policies.

## What Are The Outcomes?

In total, 15 of the 18 proposals were accepted by the People's Assembly, which were then passed along to the Riigikogu (Estonia's unicameral parliament). Since there was no formal legal mechanism for the Riigikogu to vote on laws drafted by an outside source, the President had to use his power to introduce the 15 bills to parliament. The Riigikogu eventually passed three of the proposals as law while "four proposals have been partly implemented or redefined as commitments in the government coalition programme."

## What Does It Cost?

The hosting service for the tool used for Rahvakogu (called YourPriorities) costs \$390 per month for medium-sized projects (up to 5,000 users) and \$2800 per month for large cities/governments (up to 250,000 users).

## What Are The Benefits?

- The focused and well-defined set of themes (and a process that limited debate only to those topics) ensured that participation remained topical.
- The combination of online, self-selected participation with the selection of an offline representative sample of the population helped achieve the best of both diversity and legitimacy.
- The five-stage process that combined public and expert input resulted in actionable and implementable laws and policies.

## What Are The Risks?

- The one-off nature of the experiment and Estonia's small size (population 1.3 million) means that results may vary.

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