

# Online voting system: what to address?

Proponents of electronic voting, particularly Internet voting, make a number of arguments in favour of its implementation. These are related to technology, social issues and election administration.

First, electronic voting has the potential to make the voting process easier and more accessible for electors. This is especially true for remote Internet voting given that ballots can be cast from any computer with an Internet connection or any working telephone. These latter methods substantially lower the cost of voting for many electors by creating many more access points from which they are able to vote. There is the potential to eliminate long line-ups at polling stations and better address accessibility issues for persons with disabilities, those suffering from illness, those serving in the military or living abroad, those away on personal travel, snowbirds and other groups of citizens such as single parents who may find it difficult to visit a traditional polling station. Additionally, remote methods of Internet voting, and in some cases kiosk Internet voting, afford electors the opportunity of being able to vote at any time, a feature that further enables electors' ability to cast a ballot.

With regard to special populations of electors, Internet (especially remote) may also be methods of engaging those voters who are considered the hardest to reach, particularly young people aged 18 to 30. These electors are most familiar with the technology, are the most frequent reported users and would likely benefit the most from the extension of remote types of electronic voting. Remote Internet and telephone voting seem to be especially useful ways of engaging young people away at university and who are not registered to vote in that particular constituency.

Second, Internet voting could allow greater secrecy for special populations of electors with disabilities (including visually or hearing impaired). By voting electronically and therefore unassisted, these electors are afforded a greater degree of anonymity when casting a ballot. Enabling secrecy for these groups enhances the equality of the vote.

Third, enhancing accessibility and creating more participatory opportunities for electors holds promise to positively impact voter turnout. Generally, the academic literature addressing electronic voting and turnout decline presents inconclusive

results concerning whether the extension of on-line voting has a positive effect on electoral participation. In most cases where polling place voting machines that relied on the Internet for operation were used turnout did not increase. However, cases in which remote methods were implemented have produced mixed results. The length of time remote Internet voting options remain in place appears to be related to increases in both its use and in voter turnout.

Fourth, related to administration, Internet voting is claimed to produce faster and more accurate election results. Internet voting system is said to deliver a faster official ballot tabulation process and are alleged to be more accurate than other types of machine counting (such as punching cards) which are sometimes criticized for error.

Fifth, over the long term all types of Internet voting have the potential to be less expensive to operate and execute than traditional paper ballots which require setting up and staffing polls. However, the start-up costs for machines or kiosks can be very high.

Finally, all types of Internet voting have the potential to improve the overall quality of ballots cast by reducing or eliminating ballot errors and by creating better informed electors. There can be no ballot errors, and, depending on the system, no spoiled ballots because the computer will not permit it. However, if the legal structure in a jurisdiction requires the option to spoil a ballot or allows for protest votes, a button can be added in some programs to give electors the option to cast a protest vote (or decline to vote). Furthermore, depending on the architecture of the Internet voting system, there is the possibility for additional information to be displayed regarding candidates and their policy positions in conjunction with the on-line vote. This would provide voters with basic information about the candidates and party platforms, and therefore better informing them to vote.

In general online voting system can help voters & competitors in the following manner:

- Flexible voting time for electors
- Flagging of ballot errors
- Replication of ballot images without voter information for counting or audit purposes
- Lower cost than traditional methods

- Potential to increase voter turnout & enhance electoral efficiency
- Faster and more accurate election results
- Elimination of long line-ups
- Instant absentee ballot
- Flexible voting time for electors
- Elimination of mismarked or spoiled ballots and other invalid results
- Removal of authentication questions so voter identification is most similar to the traditional process
- Assistive devices to improve accessibility for electors with disabilities
- because it saves time and paper, and avoid chances of electoral malpractices.
- Convenience and accessibility for electors who have computers with Internet access at home, at work, or abroad; and for certain groups of electors (persons with disabilities, the military, single parents, electors who are traveling, etc.)