Why do governments engage in e-democracy?
Index

- Background
- Availability of e-democracy projects
- Responsiveness to e-democracy projects
- Conclusions
- Outlook
Background

- Last decade: a boom of e-democracy initiatives
- Not only in the West
- Some non-democracies are outperforming long-standing democracies
- UN e-participation index 2012:
  1. NL/Korea
  2. Kazakhstan/Singapore
  3. UK/US
Why do governments engage in e-democracy?

Puzzling to see non-democracies engage in e-democracy

Reasons for:

1. Availability of e-democracy projects
2. Responsiveness to e-democracy projects
Availability of e-democracy

- Socio-economic modernization is a key predictor
- Wealth leads to demand for freedom and demo
- Human capital, a determinant
- (Norris 2001, Siau & Long 2009)
Availability of e-democracy

- Political context should not be downplayed
- Democratic systems are prone to promote e-demo
- Authoritarian regimes seek to suppress political freedoms
- (Norris 2001, Inglehart & Welzel 2005)
Availability of e-democracy

- ...but there is variation of e-democracy also in highly developed democracies
- Political and social org. adapt technology quite independently of development
- Tech development shape society
- (Norris 2001)
Availability of e-democracy

- “Legitimation hypothesis” (Jaeger 2005, Chadwick, 2001)
- Economic globalization and tech development drive e-democracy in authoritarian regimes, regardless of the level of democratization.
- Economic globalization opens up countries.
- ICT is a tool for economic growth: gain legitimacy, secure investments from abroad.
Availability of e-democracy

Source: Astrom et al. 2012
Availability is not results

- The e-democracy field has started to go beyond simple counting of projects (e.g. UN index), looking also at results
- The literature/my PhD shows little responsiveness to public engagement in e-democracy projects
Bottleneck in the political model

Source: Model of democratic politics from Fung et al. 2013
Unpacking the government box

Citizens

CSOs, interest groups

Public sphere

Politicians, public agencies

laws/policies

public action

Politicians, public agencies
Unresponsiveness to e-democracy

STABILITY/POWER:

- Political practices are change-resistant
- Politicians secure stability and development of public inst.
- Maintain/boost personal power
- Winston’s ‘Law of suppression of radical potential’:
  - elites assure that new technologies are integrated into society without disrupting fundamental power relations

Unresponsiveness to e-democracy

REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IDEALS

• Politicians consider that e-democracy threatens their democratic mandate:
  o it is their duty to make decisions on behalf of citizens
  o more qualified than ordinary people
  o special interest groups “hijacking” the process
• Fear consequences that e-democracy might have for the role of the parties and for the electoral turnout

Source: Mahrer and Krimmer (2005); Åström and Sedelius (2010).
Responsiveness to e-democracy

MEDIA INCENTIVES

- Individual politicians are more visible:
  - jumping the intermediation
  - facilitated access to traditional media
- Use of e-demo platforms for election campaigning
Responsiveness to e-democracy

BOTTOM-UP INCENTIVES

- Increasing pressure for participation by citizens and civil society, outside elections
- Decreased voter turnout and levels of trust

Source: Codagnone and Wimmer (2007)
Conclusions

INSIDE CAMP
- Stability of power, protection
- Representative democracy
- Have a final say, unresponsiveness

OUTSIDE CAMP
- Challenge institutions
- Participatory democracy

Source: Blaug 2002.
Conclusions

- The availability of e-democracy projects does not mean that they have an impact.
- Today, e-democracy is used by politicians as a one-way communication tool.
- Governments’ disincentives for responsive e-democracy are stronger than incentives, creating bottlenecks in terms of results.
Outlook: future

- The structure of political power will not be radically changed (Bimber 1998)
- No online direct democracy
- E-democracy will lead to an incremental change in some areas (Fung et al. 2013)
  - Political monitoring
  - Advocacy
  - Mobilization
Thank you for your attention!