

Internet Voting in Practice

The Case of the Umeå Student Union

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Abstract

In May 2001, the student union at Umeå University conducted an election to its Council where Internet voting for the first time was one of three methods to cast a vote. The election was preceded by an online deliberation phase among the voters, which however attracted very limited interest. This paper reports on a comprehensive evaluation of the election, focusing on logistics, security, and voters' and non-voters' views on several issues regarding e-voting, including accessibility, usability, privacy, security, and the symbolic values of the voting act. Methods used include a questionnaire to 2,500 students and expert evaluations of the used technical system and the manual routines in which it was used. Internet voting was by far the most used way to vote but still the impact on participation turned out to be limited. The voters prioritized convenience over security. The general attitudes towards the voting act as a manifestation of the democratic system have not been changed by the use of electronic voting, but there is openness to new procedures. Manual routines were to some extent problematic due to a lack of understanding of the technology used. Hence, improvised solutions had to be used to take care of several incidents. These improvised solutions not only in themselves increase the risk for further problems, but may also result in an increase of the user organization's dependency of the provider.

The paper concludes by discussing some issues raised by the evaluation as well as the Government decisions made related to the results, including the view of local popular votes, the relation between user organizations and software providers, and voters' view of symbolic values associated with the voting act.

Keywords: Internet voting, e-voting, logistics, security, voting privacy, symbolic value of the voting act.