

▼ Introduction to E-Democracy Minitrack

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E-democracy comprises the application of information and communication technologies to support the democratic decision-making processes and to allow more effective and transparent engagement between government, business, NGOs, and citizens. These technologies have created an opportunity for policy makers, managers, politicians and citizens to invigorate the democratic processes at a time in which public trust in government and voting levels are at historic lows. Nevertheless, electronic democracy has also been criticized as not living up to expectations or that social and economic inequities have resulted in a digital divide. Research questions often considered in this area of study include: To what extent do Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) facilitate public interaction and encourage participation among citizens, government representatives, and stakeholders? How do we develop and deploy technology to support the electoral process such that it provides secure and trustworthy voting environments? What are the emerging practices in electronic campaigning and do they work? How are communities and neighborhoods using ICTs to network and mobilize socially and politically? How do governments integrate electronic input from citizens and stakeholders into decision making? How does the application of ICTs for governance enable citizen participation in government?

The mini-track includes three papers that explore the role of ICTs for citizens and democracy.

Engaging and Informing Citizens with Household Indicators, written by Janet Davis at Grinnell College, reports on the application of a new approach, called Household Indicators, to enable citizens and stakeholders to understand potential outcomes and impacts of complex packages of policy and investment decisions at the household level. Indicators include population, employment density, housing opportunities and travel times. The paper incorporates this approach into one urban simulation program (UrbanSim), discusses the design of the tool, and presents the challenges of selecting indicators that simultaneously serve planners, administrators, and citizens in ways that are constructive and transparent.

In the second paper, *Drop-Down Democracy: Internet Portal Design Influences Voters' Search Strategies*, Scott Robertson, Christine Wania, George Abraham, and S. Joon Park, all from Drexel University, compare two types of interfaces on candidate websites to determine how design influences search behavior. Findings show that drop-down lists of issues stimulated citizens to search more broadly, reducing their reliance on the candidates' websites. The paper has implications for search aid design to structure citizen search strategies.