

The Message of eDemocracy: Does E-Mail Serve the Interest of European Parliamentarians?

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Abstract

Regarding democratic participation in the age of growing voter apathy in Europe, there is a general perception that information and communications technologies (ICTs) have the potential to assist parliaments and their members to reconnect or better connect with the public they represent. This positive view suggests that ICTs, in particular the internet, create a new space to engage those who might not have been otherwise active. Pessimists caution that simply adding new electronic channels of communication to pre-existing structures do not necessarily provide a solution to the problem of citizen disengagement. Based on a comparative study of four parliaments (the UK, European, Portuguese and Swedish Parliament) with data derived from a questionnaire survey, web content analysis and face-to-face interviews, this paper attempts to answer such questions as how parliamentarians in Europe consider the importance of e-mail communication to parliamentary work, to what extent they make use of this new medium and what ethical issues are being faced by elected politicians in the absence of parliamentary code of conduct with regard to the practice of eDemocracy .

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