

# A Strategic Framework for E-Democracy Development

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**Abstract** - *There are several e-participation projects initiated by different actors around the world but sustainability and citizens' acceptance of online public participation remains a difficult task. Examples of good practice are extremely rare in e-democracy implementation. Most government particularly, in the developing countries, do not have detailed and well established strategy for e-democracy realization, sustainability and citizens acceptance. This work argues that e-democracy implementation, especially in the resource poor countries, should be driven by a strategic approach guided by quality designs that will enhance sustainability and make tools for online engagement accessible to all segments of the society. This work adopts a qualitative approach using Grounded Theory Method (GTM) to develop a strategic framework for e-democracy development, which is largely missing from most national e-democracy strategies. The work introduces a strategic framework which serves as a generic abstraction of existing e-democracy strategies, implementation and best practices.*

**Keywords:** e-democracy, strategy, best practice, strategic, framework,

## 1. Introduction

Most government have achieved substantial progress in using ICT to connect with citizens. Most government have developed e-government strategy to increase transparency, and efficiency in public administration. However, the potential of ICT in governance is yet to be fully drawn. What is most available around the world is provision of e-services. Only few countries have advanced their policies and strategy for ICT enabled governance to participatory e-democracy stage. Several authors have worked on having a lasting e-democracy implementation, but no effort have produced a generic and structured

framework that integrates the most fundamental elements of a successful implementation.

A strategy is the basic directional decisions for purposes and missions. It can also be referred to as what top management does that is of great importance to the organization. Strategy helps management to identify what to do and outcomes to expect [15]. We define e-democracy strategy as a plan for e-democracy systems, their supporting infrastructure, people and process which maximise government's ability to achieve an informed and engaged citizenry.

This work aims at developing a strategic framework which will serve as generic abstraction of e-democracy strategies and implementation. This study adopts a systematic literature review based on Grounded Theory Method (GTM) to develop the strategic framework. Choice of literature was based on the availability of published documents on e-democracy strategies, implementation and practices of countries within the top 20 position in e-participation ranking according UN e-government report [20]. Materials were sourced from academic database, international development organisations (EU, UN, UNPAN, OECD), research institutions (Demo-net, Hansard Society, Democracies Online Newswire), and countries specific Web sites.

This diversity provides a comprehensive view of strategies, implementation and good practices in e-democracy implementation from different domains.

## 2 Related Works

One of the key issues in e-democracy development is the acquisition of system that considerably meet government's needs and the needs of the citizens to participate in the democratic process. Different scholars have worked on having a lasting e-democracy implementation, such notable efforts are found in [1] [4] [12] [9] [6].

Critical keys and potential barriers to the success of e-democracy development must be

considered to achieve a successful development [1]. They therefore, identified six key issues to be considered in e-democracy development which include investment, leadership, training, technological flexibility, access and digital divide, and privacy and security.

Similarly, Clift in his approach to e-democracy development, proposed a “top ten e-democracy: to do list” that will help government jumpstart the use of ICT in improving their democratic process [4]. These include among others announcing all public meetings online in a systematic and reliable way, putting “Democracy Button” on site’s top page, holding government sponsored online consultations, developing e-democracy legislation, Internet education for elected officials, and etc.

Furthermore, a framework for sustainable e-Democracy development based on governance development standard called COBIT 4.1 was presented by [6]. The framework presented a 4 + 1 construct of e-democracy development process comprising: Stakeholders and policy; Information and Communication Technology; Development methodology; Process and project management; Environment and e-Democracy components.

A framework for e-Democracy development based on a promising relationship between e-Democracy and spatial dimension was proposed by [9]. The system presents an extensive use of the spatial dimension in a wiki collaboration environment to capture and integrate e-democracy information.

Strategic e-democracy framework which includes directional plan and basic component of e-democracy programme is still missing both in literature and in government strategies.

### 3.0 Research Methodology

This research adopts a systematic literature review involves a rigorous and well defined procedure applies to an existing literature [17]. Review methodologies in Information Systems research include: the eight steps for systematic literature review [17], systematic approach to literature review [11], writing a literature review [21], grounded theory method for literature review [23] and structured case [3]. We considered grounded theory approach as an appropriate method for framework development in this research because it support development of concepts and constructs that are grounded in data.

Grounded theory is an inductive method of analysing data with the aim of generating concepts,

themes or theory that is grounded in qualitative data [19]. Grounded theory method has a set of principles and techniques which makes it suitable for quality qualitative research. These include principle of emergence, constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling. Analysis of data to develop concepts, themes, and theory using grounded theory approach employs three analytical techniques. The three techniques are open coding, axial coding and selective coding [7]. Open coding involves identifying concepts, categories and their properties in a corpus [7]. Axial coding involves establishing relationships of identified categories and sub-categories of concepts or themes focusing on answering why, where, when, and how about the categories [14]. Selective coding involves selection of core variables of the emerging theory or concept. Table 1.0 summarized how GTM was used to review literature beginning with domain identification.

Previous studies were used as data so that concepts for the strategic framework could emerge. The sample composed of secondary data drawn from materials sourced from Information Systems centric publications and e-democracy strategy and implementation report documents. Electronic databases were searched for peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters and conference proceedings on e-democracy. The Web sites of government agencies and those of international organisation and academic institution dealing with piloting and reporting e-practices were searched for relevant data. This includes OECD and Demo.net, and public.net.

### 4.0 The Proposed E-democracy Framework

The analysis of the major contents/focal points of e-democracy strategies, research and practice in literature was the starting point in developing the framework. These major contents which we referred to as constructs spelled out directional plan for the component strategic framework. We examined each of these components from our sample literatures in detail with an effort to structure the emerging strategic framework of e-democracy. It is important to understand the basic elements of each of these components as well as the relationships among them. Going through this process enables us to determine why and when relationship between the components [7] This also enables further classification of the components of the framework and in turn makes it very simple and clear. The next section presents some of the components and Figure 1.0 presents the strategic framework.

Table 1.0: Summary of Steps for Applying GTM to Literature Review

| Steps          | Tasks   | Application in this study   |
|----------------|---|---|
| 1. Define      | 1.1 Define criteria for inclusion and exclusion | Studies conducted on e-democracy implementation from top countries in e-participation ranking   |
|                | 1.2 Identify the field of research              | Information Systems, e-democracy, e-government and online participation research  |
|                | 1.3 Determine sources                           | - Peer reviewed journals, conference papers, book chapters;<br>- Leading international development organizations e-library (e.g.: EU, UN, OECD),<br>- Research institutions sites; and - Search Engines |
|                | 1.4 Specify search terms                        | e-democracy strategy, e-government strategy, e-engagement, e-participation, online participation strategy, online participation, e-politics, digital democracy,   |
| 2. Search      | Search articles                                 | Conduct the search in identified sources  |
| 3. Select      | Select articles                                 | Select articles using the criteria. Articles were selected for the analysis based on their focus on e-democracy.  |
| 4. Analyze     | Open coding                                     | Identify concepts and categories with their dimensions  |
|                | Axial coding                                    | Relating categories and their subcategories   |
|                | Selective coding                                | Refining categories and their relationships   |
| 5.Presentation | Presenting results                              | Reporting insights from the review  |

## 4.1 Component of E-democracy Framework

### Policy Framework

E-democracy policy framework captures the technological, legal and political process to back e-democracy implementation. It can be described as outlined strategy with respect to the purpose, structure and course of action laid down for achieving a set goal or agenda of e-democracy. The policy document should detail the strategic vision, strategic aim and objective, strategic policy, mode of implementation and overseeing body. Though the elements are the least mentioned components in literature their importance cannot be overemphasized.

**i Specific Strategic Policy:** policy content is largely missing in most e-democracy strategy at both conceptual and implementation stage. The overview of e-government and e-democracy by United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (2003) reported that only 13 (8%) out of 190 member countries have direct/clear statements or policy encouraging citizen participation. High level policy direction serves to accelerate and deepen second and third generation ICT applications. “A strong e-democracy policy with specific measurable goals is essential to promote long-term progress in implementation” [22].

**ii Vision:** vision is another element that is rarely mentioned in e-democracy implementation. Inclusion of strategic vision in strategic document for e-democracy will set direction for implementation. Queensland government Government’s e-democracy agenda classified e-democracy vision as one of the strategic dimensions towards desired outcome. Vision will set the focus for activities and serves as motto of the e-democracy governing body [8].

**iii Strategic Aim and Objectives:** each government implementing e-democracy is trying to achieve certain objectives. Objectives are extremely important. They justify the huge investment committed to e-democracy and help to measure the outcome of e-democracy. Strategic objective provides an overview of what the government is going to achieve therefore they must be defined in coherent manner and backed with appropriate choice of tools and technology for it to be accomplished.

**iv Guiding principles:** are rules, procedures, guidelines, and laws that must be followed in order to achieve a desired objectives. They help conformity to standard. Table 2.0 shows a list of guiding principles and from Queensland and OECD

**Level of Engagement:** This component of e-democracy considers the levels of citizens’ engagement [13]. Different bodies of knowledge

have defined various levels of citizens participation however any level of participation chosen must match the vision and objective of e-democracy and implementation with appropriate tools.

Table 2: Guiding Principles and from Queensland and OECD

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| Guiding Principles   |                     |
| accessibility, Clarity, Simplicity, Accountability, active citizenship, mutual respect, early involvement, responsiveness  | Queensland          |
| early planning, implement to fit target group, integrate e-method with traditional ones, Test and adapt your tools, promotion, analyse result, provide feedback, | OECD                |
| Privacy, commitment, evaluation (process and impact)   | Queensland and OECD |

**Technology and Tools:** a number of tools exist to facilitate online participation. The choice of tools to engage should be informed by the level of engagement sought, the objective sought to achieve by the government and the accessibility of the tools to the citizen. The choice of a wrong tool for a particular set of objective would be a waste of investment.

**Stage in policy making:** this dimension considers when to engage citizens and the tools and technologies that the capacity to facilitate the level of engagement required. This dimension also demands taking a close look at the objective in order to achieve the desires outcome.

**Stakeholders:** E-democracy is about people, technology and democratic process. This dimension considers who should be engaged and by whom [13]. There are different categories of stakeholders in e-participation such as elected representatives, government employees responsible for implementing policy, policy-makers, businesses, civil society organizations (CSOs), ordinary citizens, journalist, multi-disciplinary team to support the socio-technical nature of e-participation, etc. Each group should be specifically identified and their respective roles clarified. Identifying and clarifying the responsibilities of stakeholders is useful in characterizing e-democracy initiatives and reducing the complexity in ownership.

**Rule of Engagement:** the conduct of stakeholders is important in online participation. Rule of engagement among others include a clear statement on the conditions of use of the site, and the extent of usage of personal data.

**Critical Success Factors:** important issues pertinent to the success of e-democracy project were explored. They are key issues to be considered in making participatory e-democracy user-friendly and effective. These are technological, social and political, social, technological issues that makes for good success in e-democracy implementation. These are beyond the traditional concerns of the digital divide.

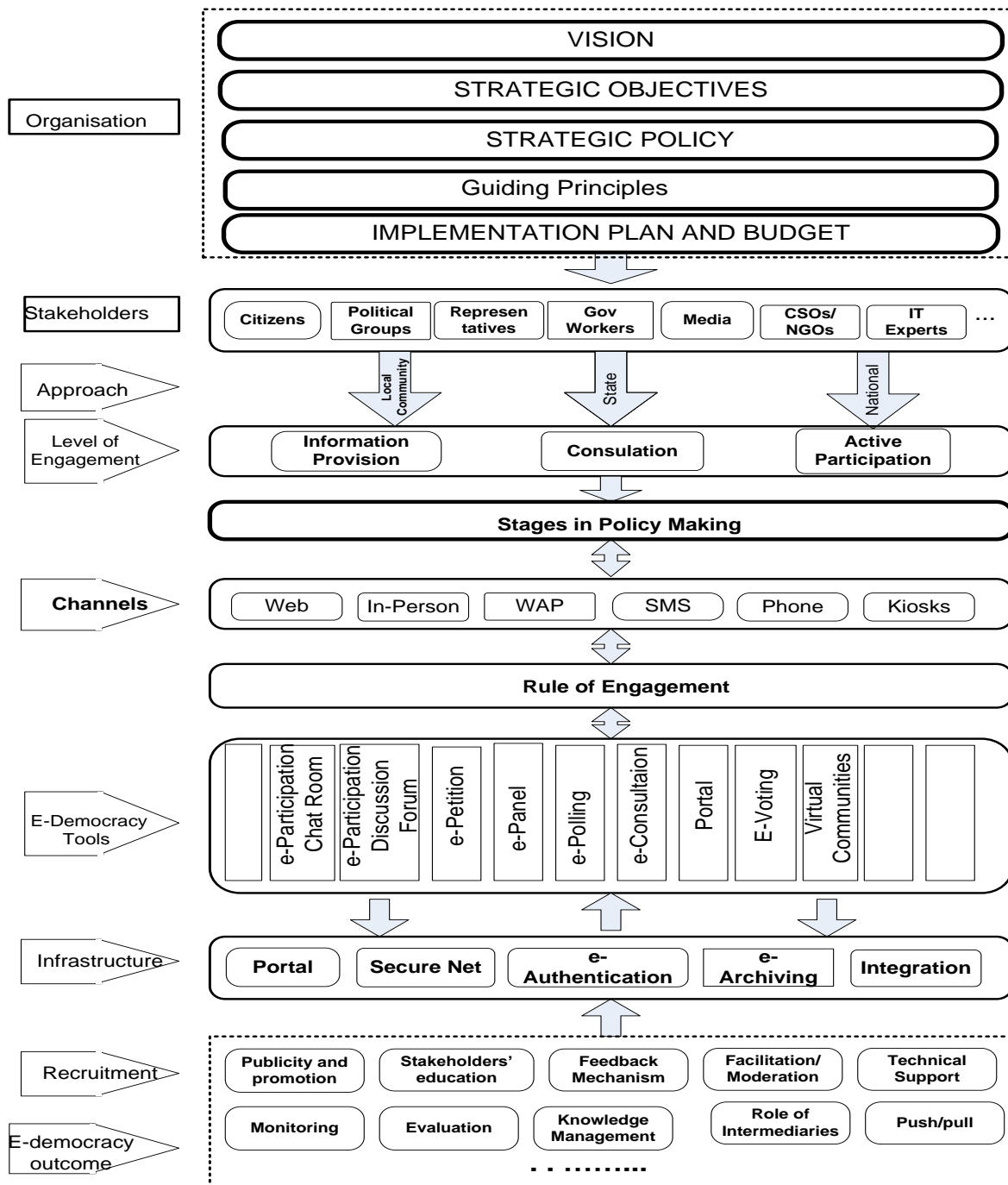


Figure 1: The proposed Strategic Framework of E-democracy

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

Figure 1 presents the proposed strategic framework of e-democracy. It is a comprehensive, best practice based and generic framework. The reason for this strategic framework gives a simplified

and comprehensive conceptualisation of e-democracy strategy. It could serve as first point of call when discussing e-democracy implementation. It shows how different basic components required for e-democracy implementation fit together. The framework is designed to be modular for the sake of flexibility. Each component of the framework is a

module in itself and its interaction with other modules can be depicted from the diagram. It is an extensible generic framework and requires local customization. It is thus easy to add a new module or update a module. The strategic framework is meant to add value to detailed textual strategy where available or to serve as a quick alternative in the absence of textual strategy.

In conclusion, this framework is a result of comprehensive study of e-democracy strategy and implementation report produced by (34) cutting-edge research across different countries among the top 20 countries in e-participation implementation. Framework is a top-level documentation of strategic directions, goals, components, principles and implementation guidelines. Framework serves as a generic abstraction of an e-democracy implementation. This graphical representation gives a lot of information at a glance, makes planning and foreseeing of discrepancies a lot easier at the early stage of e-democracy implementation. It would save governments a lot of time, research, money and disappointments. It helps to identify contradiction, misalignment and out of orchestration with the general policies early.

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