

The ORG and FIPR week of e-voting events

London, 14 February 2007

[Electronic voting](#)

Last week there were three e-voting events hosted in London by EDRI members, the Open Rights Group (ORG) and the Foundation for Information Policy Research (FIPR).

On 6 February guests saw a screening of the documentary film "Hacking Democracy" which reveals in detail the failings of e-voting and e-counting systems in the United States.

After the film a lively panel, chaired by ORG's e-voting co-ordinator Jason Kitcat, discussed the film's implications particularly given e-voting pilots planned in the UK for May 2007. On the panel were John Pugh MP (Liberal Democrat); Russell Michaels, one of the film's co-directors and Dr Rebecca Mercuri, an e-voting expert from the United States.

On 8 February there were two events which gathered, for the first time, a wide array of e-voting experts and activists from around the world. In the afternoon the European e-Voting Activism Workshop was started with a keynote by Harri Hursti, a Finnish security expert who has demonstrated a number of major security flaws in US election systems. Mr Hursti discussed how he compromised an optical counting system to provide the finale for "Hacking Democracy". He also shared his views on the wide variety of ways in which e-voting and e-counting systems are vulnerable to fraud and error.

Subsequently experts from Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands and the United States presented the problems they were experiencing with the introduction of e-voting in their countries. Attendees were struck by the strong similarities between all the presentations:

- Governments would, with extremely weak standards in place, contract the running and monitoring of elections to private companies;
- These companies would do minimal testing and withhold the results of those tests;
- Problems and possible indications of fraud would arise during and after elections. Further investigation would be impossible due to failings in the technology and/or due to obstruction by vendors and government.

After the workshop's broad overview of e-voting, the evening event "e-Voting: A challenge to democracy?" provided time for more detailed presentations.

Margaret McGaley, the founder of Irish Citizens for Trustworthy e-Voting, reported on the thus-far abortive attempts to introduce e-voting machines to the Republic of Ireland. She noted that early in the process experts had offered advice but weren't listened to. After pushing on at great expense the Irish government were forced to create an Independent Commission on Electronic Voting which found serious flaws in the Nedap voting machines and software purchased.

Dr Anne-Marie Oostveen, a founder of the Dutch "We don't trust voting computers" foundation, reported how in the Netherlands the government position went from 'trust us' to uncertainty. "We don't trust voting computers" demonstrated on national TV several important hacks on the Nedap machines used in the majority of Dutch municipalities. The result was the withdrawal of SDU machines from elections and the creation of an independent commission to examine the voting process.

Colm MacCarthaigh, a founding member of Irish Citizens for Trustworthy e-voting, now following the Dutch situation since it has become resident in The Netherlands, tied together the Dutch and Irish stories. He commented on how the Irish independent commission's report had provided information on the Nedap machines which had helped the Dutch activists find flaws more quickly. The successful Dutch hacks, in their turn, helped apply more pressure on the Irish government.

Dr Rebecca Mercuri presented the latest developments concerning voting technology in the United States. She noted how vendors, when forced to create voter-verified paper audit trails, had created unreliable, barely usable systems which had created new problems of their own. In place of e-voting machines Ms Mercuri advocated the use of paper ballots, perhaps optically or barcode scanned. To conclude Ms Mercuri argued that Internet voting, as proposed for the UK's 2007 pilots, was an inherently flawed technology that should not be pursued.

One question which kept being asked after every one of our events was, why are governments pushing so hard for e-voting technology when the problems are so evident? We just don't understand it.

The events ended with the activists resolved to meet more often and collaborate through a newly formed umbrella grouping, 'Europeans for Verifiable Elections'. The Open Rights Group will continue its campaign against e-voting in the UK and our sister organisations will carry on their work across Europe.

Audio, video and slides from the events will be available soon
<http://www.openrightsgroup.org>

Europeans for Verifiable Elections
<http://www.efve.eu>

(Contribution by Jason Kitcat - EDRI-member Open Rights Group)

