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Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

E-participation: a tool for inclusion?

Capacity Building Webinar on “Developing institutional capacities in digital transformation for a more inclusive and equitable recovery”

14-15 December 2020

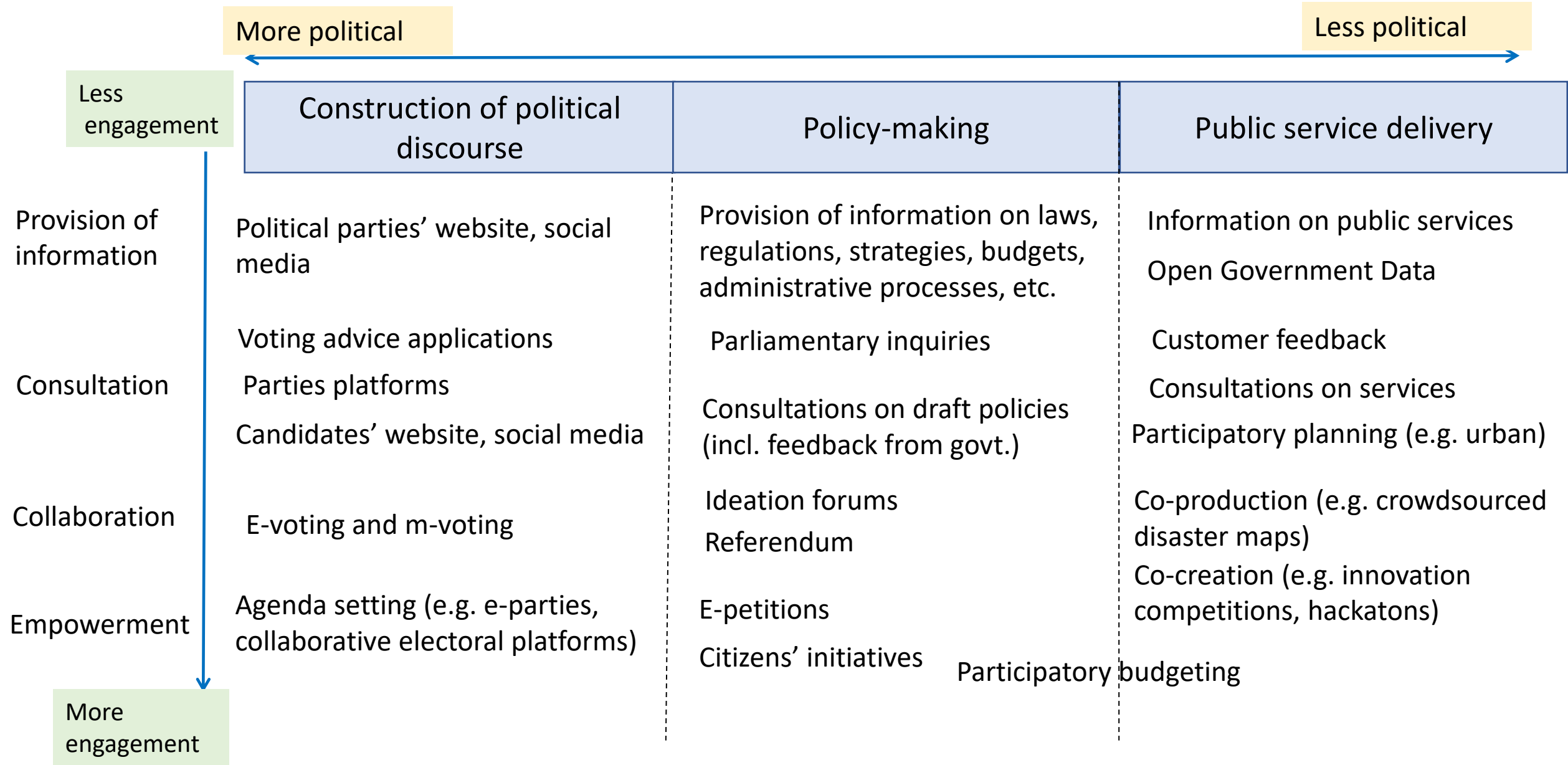
David Le Blanc, DPIDG



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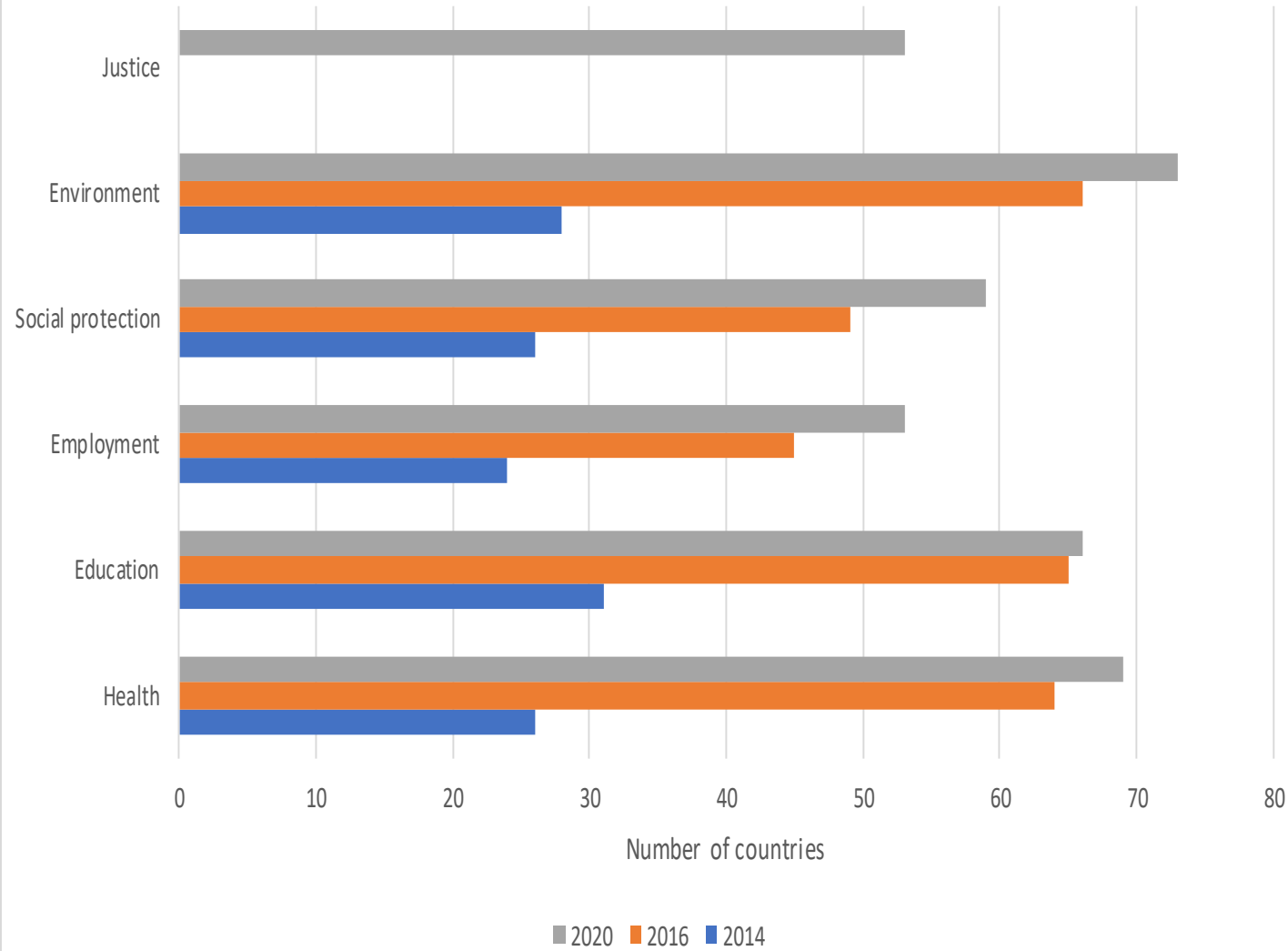
Spectrum of e-participation according to political dimension and level of participation



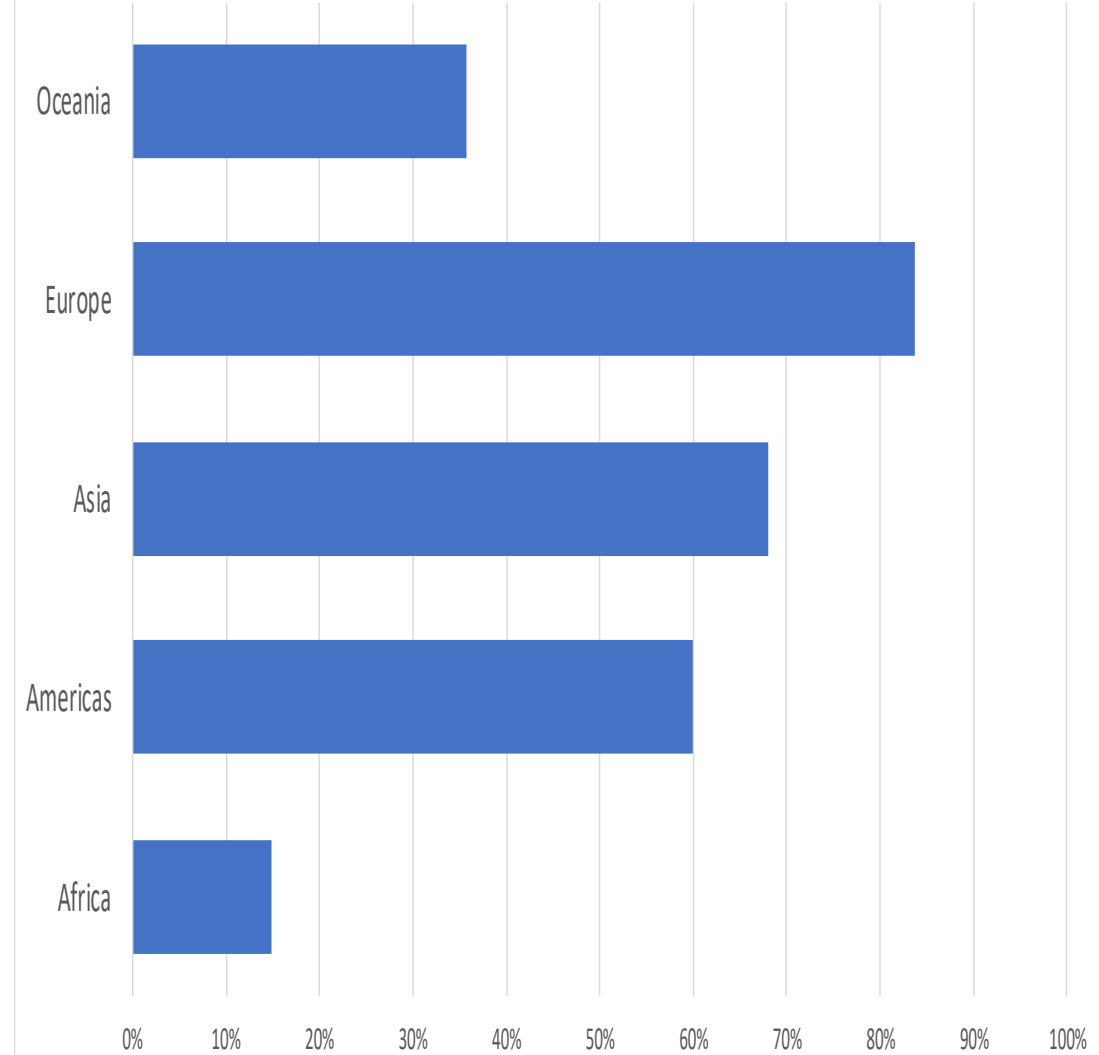
Examples of higher-level participation mechanisms highlighted by Member States in MSQs

	Consultation	Collaboration/ empowerment
Policy-making	<p>Ideation platforms: Luxembourg “Vosidees”; Switzerland engage.ch; Azerbaijan Idea Bank</p> <p>Consultation Websites: Singapore REACH, Malta’s consultation Site, Mexico “participa”, New Zealand “Engaging with government” site; France “Participation citoyenne”, Armenia e-draft website; Argentina “Consulta Publica”; Brazil participa.br; Colombia Urna de cristal; Uruguay participación ciudadana</p>	<p>Citizens’ initiatives & E-petitions: Finland Citizens’ Initiative, Estonia Citizen Initiative Portal rahvaalgatus.ee; Russian Public Initiative, UK e-petitions website, Costa Rica Parliament’s website; Korea e-petition to the President;</p> <p>Participatory Budgets (national level): Korea Budget Participation; Portugal Participatory Budget</p>
Public service delivery	<p>Public Feedback / complaints: Armenia complaint system; Oman “Shurkum”, Bahrain Tawasul App, China “Hudong”/Interactive Website, Korea “e-people” website, Philippines Complaint Management System e.reklamo; Singapore One Service; Albania Platform of Co Government; Dominican Republic 311.gob.do; Mauritius Citizen Support Portal, Tanzania Wananchi portal; Cote d’Ivoire Participation Citoyenne</p>	<p>Co-creation: Colombia “Software Público”</p>

Number of countries having undertaken online consultations in the past 12 months, by sector



Proportion of countries having conducted an e-consultation in the past 12 months by region



Source: UN e-government survey 2020

Some challenges facing e-participation

- In many cases, “demand” remains low (low take-up of e-participation opportunities, low quality of participation)
 - Lack of trust in government, Internet or social media
 - “Competition” from citizen-to-citizen platforms
- Technology barriers: access to Internet, mobile, IT skills/ participation skills; social media not well adapted to advanced forms of e-participation
- Institutional factors
 - Focus on the technical side at the expense of organizational, social aspects
 - Institutionalization of e-participation processes critical, but not well understood
 - Lack of linkages with formal decision-making processes, creating unmanageable expectations
 - Legal and regulatory framework
 - Culture and values in public administration
- A more cautious view of the potential of e-participation by governments?
 - Technology, by itself, does not increase participation and civic engagement
 - Recent focus on security, polarization of opinions, “capture” of e-participation tools by populist movements

Thank you

5. E-participation

5.1 Introduction

Participation is a key dimension of governance and is one of the pillars of sustainable development, as underscored in Agenda 21, the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit), in 1992. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also highlights the importance of national participatory processes, particularly in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 16.7, which calls for ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.¹

The concept of e-participation revolves around the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to engage people in public decision-making, administration and service delivery; hence, e-participation is usually considered part of e-government. The definition used by the United Nations in the E-Government Survey is "the process of engaging citizens through ICT in policy, decision-making, and service design and delivery in order to make it participatory, inclusive, and deliberative".² An influential early paper characterized e-participation "as a social activity, mediated by ICT, involving interaction between citizens, public administration and politicians".³ This definition highlights the vital importance of the triangle of citizens, public administration and politicians as key stakeholders in e-participation initiatives.

As a subfield of participation, e-participation is seen to have both intrinsic and instrumental value. Its intrinsic value is based on the idea that participation (online or offline) is a desirable goal because it contributes to inclusive societies both directly and through increased civic engagement. The instrumental value of e-participation derives from the role it can play in increasing government accountability, making public services more responsive to people's needs, and improving the quality of policies and legislation. Broader goals include strengthening the legitimacy of Governments and people's trust in public institutions. In addition, e-participation is analysed from a technology perspective as a way to enhance digital governance and move towards digital societies.

By definition, e-participation is a subset of both participation and e-government. It is also connected to several other dimensions of governance and public administration, and those relationships are explored in the sections below. A simplified conceptual map illustrating some of the intersections is shown in figure 5.1.

Over the years, the scope of e-government has broadened beyond the delivery of public services; this is reflected in the semantic shift from e-government to "digital government" and "digital governance" and the growing emphasis on the role ICT plays in public administration.

CHAPTER 5 • E-PARTICIPATION

Chapter 5



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Chapter 5

E-participation: a quick overview of recent qualitative trends

Author: David Le Blanc

ABSTRACT

This paper briefly takes stock of two decades of e-participation initiatives based on a limited review of the academic literature. The purpose of the paper is to complement the results of the e-government Survey 2020. As such, the emphasis is on aspects that the e-government survey (based on analysis of e-government portals and on quantitative indicators) does not capture directly. Among those are the challenges faced by e-participation initiatives and key areas of attention for governments. The paper maps the field of e-participation and related activities, as well as its relationships with other governance concepts. Areas of recent development in terms of e-participation applications are briefly reviewed. The paper selectively highlights conclusions from the literature on different participation tools, as well as a list of key problematic areas for policy makers. The paper concludes that while e-participation platforms using new technologies have spread rapidly in developed countries in the first decade of the 2000s and in developing countries during the last 10 years, it is not clear that their multiplication has translated into broader or deeper citizen participation. Beyond reasons related to technology access and digital skills, factors such as lack of understanding of citizens' motivations to participate and the reluctance of public institutions to genuinely share agenda setting and decision-making power seem to play an important role in the observed limited progress.

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Sustainable Development Goals: 16, 16.6, 16.7

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<https://publicadministration.un.org/en/research/un-e-government-surveys>

https://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2020/wp163_2020.pdf