



Open Parliaments: Technological Enactment in State Legislatures

Tiago Carneiro Peixoto
Ph.D. thesis defence on 2 October 2013

Abstract

This thesis starts with a simple research question, asking why parliaments that share the same level of functions and competencies produce different results in terms of the level of development of their websites. The research is divided into three stages: comparative website analysis, quantitative analysis and case studies. Looking at 93 state Legislatures in Brazil, Spain and the United States, each of the stages of the research presents findings that contribute to the literature on e-democracy and open government.

The comparative website analysis shows a varying degree of development amongst state Legislature websites. This heterogeneous level of development is contrasted with a common denominator amongst most websites: while the majority of efforts are towards the provision of Legislative information, the prospects for participation and deliberation are extremely limited. Standing out against these rather predictable results, findings also suggest that certain institutional traits such as electoral systems may influence the design of websites in terms of both their content and features.

The quantitative analyses single out a number of factors that influence the differences in levels of development of Legislative websites. First of all, contrary to what has been suggested by a portion of the e-democracy literature, neither resources nor partisanship seem to matter for the development of Legislative websites. Conversely, the quantitative findings suggest that matters of institutional design (e.g. parliaments' autonomy) and demand (e.g. Internet access, population) may play a significant role in the performance of Parliamentary websites.

The case studies – the core of this research – follow an institutional approach to the process of ICT usage within public organizations, through a detailed analysis of the inner workings of three different Legislatures in Brazil (Rio Grande do Sul, Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Norte). This analysis evinces the role played by factors largely ignored by the majority of the e-democracy research until now. It shows how the different institutional arrangements ultimately shape the very configuration of websites, impacting each of them in terms of their features and contents. By reversing this interpretation, we surmise, the configuration of Legislative websites per se may provide external observers with information regarding institutional arrangements and policy-innovation cycles and processes within a Legislature.

Finally, the comparative perspective taken sheds light on the role played by civil servants in the technological enactment process within Legislatures. All other things being equal, it is the relationships among civil servants and MPs, and the relationships between the two groups – mediated by institutional arrangements – that will ultimately affect the level of development of parliamentary websites.



Jury:

Prof Leonardo Avritzer (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), Prof Giovanni Sartor (EUI, internal member), Tiago Carneiro Peixoto (candidate), Prof Alexander H. Trechsel (EUI, supervisor), Prof Graham Smith (University of Westminster, by videoconference)

Bio

Tiago Peixoto started as an Assistant Coordinator for the European Commission project "Democracy in the Cities", he supported the design of innovative citizen participation pilots in Europe and Latin America.

Between 2004 and 2007, he was the Latin America Coordinator for the European Commission Project "e-Agora". From 2005 to 2006, he co-managed the design and implementation of the "Online Training on e-Democracy".

From 2007 onwards, he was hired as a consultant for numerous governmental and international organizations, being appointed in 2007 as an expert for the OECD's steering committee on Open and Inclusive Policy-Making. In 2009, he was appointed as the advisor for the "e-Democracia Project" at the Brazilian House of Representatives. In the same year, he was hired by the United Nations to work on the issue of "e-government policies and management of crisis response funds".

In 2010, Tiago Peixoto joined the World Bank as an Open Government Specialist for the Open Government Cluster.

With a PhD from the EUI, Tiago holds a Masters in Sociology of Action (Sciences-Po Paris) and another in Political and Social Sciences (EUI). He is also a Research Coordinator at the Electronic Democracy Centre, a joint venture of the European University Institute, the University of Zurich and the Oxford Internet Institute.