



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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World e-Parliament Conference 2018

Parliaments, technology and innovation

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Geneva, Switzerland

#eParliament

CONFERENCE REPORT

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The World e-Parliament Conference is a biennial forum for the parliamentary community to discuss the use of information and communication technology (ICT) from both policy and technical perspectives. This year's conference, held in Geneva from 3-5 December, focussed on how technology supports innovation in parliamentary processes by acting as a catalyst for modernization, culture change, greater transparency and more effective representation. With 250 participants from 60 parliaments, the conference was a place to share and discuss innovative ways to sustain democracies and parliaments in the future. The vibrant Parliamentary Showcases and Unconference sessions demonstrated the breadth and depth of digital initiatives in parliament.

Key Points

- Effective parliaments
 - Parliaments are taking innovation more seriously. Parliaments are not at the "bleeding edge" of technology but are considering how existing technologies can be applied in innovative ways to support and strengthen parliamentary processes.
 - Emerging areas such as AI and cloud computing are beginning to have an impact in parliaments. New technologies bring with them questions of trust, governance and security and present challenges in terms of skills, resources and funding.
 - Managing the data overload remains a challenge.
- Open parliaments
 - Openness is more about a cultural shift than technology requirements.
 - The core IT systems in parliaments increasingly support openness by default.
 - Parliaments need a deeper understanding of what is meant by open data; data needs to be reusable, machine readable and the underlying data model must be coherent. Non-searchable PDF files are not open data.
 - Parliaments must place the needs of the end-users at the forefront of all efforts to increase openness.
- Engaged parliaments
 - Parliaments need to be able to engage when, where, and in the ways that citizens want.
 - Social tools take you closer to citizens, they help you inform, engage and listen. Parliaments and members need to be clear about what they are trying to achieve when they use social tools.
 - "Fake news" and disinformation is a threat to democracy. Even so, parliaments must be cautious in legislating so as not to impede free speech or silence critical voices.
- Connected parliaments
 - The conference demonstrated an appetite for collaboration between parliaments, evidenced by meetings along regional and thematic lines hosted by hubs in the new Centre for Innovation in Parliament.

Conference Highlights

The conference featured two launches; firstly the new [Centre for Innovation in Parliament](#) and, secondly, the latest edition of the [World e-Parliament Report](#).

[The Centre for Innovation in Parliament](#) is a partnership between the IPU and parliaments to support parliamentary innovation through improved use of digital tools. It provides a platform for parliaments to develop and share good practices in digital implementation strategies, and practical methods for building capacity. The Centre was publicly launched with the support of a core group of parliaments: Brazil, Chile, Portugal, Zambia, and the European Parliament. During the conference a number of additional parliaments expressed interest in participating, hosting hubs and providing funding, including Kenya, Canada and the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

The IPU Secretary General, Martin Chungong, described "innovation" in the parliamentary context as meaning the adoption of new practices, products or services that changed one or more aspects of parliament's operations or culture. These practices did not necessarily need to be new or innovative in absolute terms. Innovation encompassed the adoption of existing processes that had not previously been used in parliament's work. That innovation was often driven, facilitated or supported by digital technology. Every parliament had the opportunity to innovate within its own context.

The latest [World e-Parliament Report](#) (WePR) is the fifth edition in the series. The 2018 report features the traditional survey of parliaments as well as a survey of members, a revised definition of the term "e-parliament" and a chapter on innovation in parliaments. The report shows that digital technologies are firmly embedded with clearly identified governance and technology practices in most parliaments. It suggests a levelling off in the adoption of XML, which appears to relate to cost and complexity, on one hand, and awareness of the value of open data, on the other. The use of instant messaging has seen a significant increase, social media use continues to rise and the report shows digital broadcasting and video streaming overtaking traditional broadcasting. There are barriers to greater use of ICT too, including training and skill deficits among staff and members and growing concerns over security and reliability. The report shows that parliaments want more inter-parliamentary cooperation, something that the new Centre for Innovation in Parliament is intended to address.

The report shows that, for members, mobile devices are ubiquitous, regardless of age. Three-quarters of the respondents regarded email as the most important digital tool, followed by Facebook and WhatsApp. Seventy-one percent of members write their own social media content, while content for their websites tends to be written by staff. The surveyed Members also rated their knowledge and skills in online work quite highly; three out of five members consider their knowledge of online communication to be advanced, though one out of five say they lack the skills needed to take part in online chats and events. Support is an issue for members using digital tools with one-quarter having no additional support or assistance for digital content and communication.

Innovation in parliaments

Leading with the theme of innovation and emerging technologies, [Beth Coleman](#), Associate Professor at the University of Waterloo, Canada, told delegates that smart technologies and smart cities were about sensing our environment and reporting in real time; making strategic data available to all as it happens. But, she noted, we had to find the proper balance between technology adoption and the involvement of citizens in deciding how that was going to shape our democracies. We must also talk about the nature and purpose of open data and privacy, considering that, despite a right to our data, many of the conduits and stores remained in private control. The safety of our platforms was not guaranteed; platforms did not always act for good (or in the best interest of citizens), attempts to infiltrate networks, process and data were common. For example, the "Internet of Things" means tracking your movements through the city, but who saw that and how was it used? Rightly, there was public unease at the use of [their] data and the risks associated with opaque "black boxes". There was a need for new models (and understanding) of data sovereignty. Likewise, there was a need for critical

discourses on smart technologies around design, co-design and decision making. We must recognize the need for learning as much as, and sometimes more than, doing things with that data; ultimately, however, open data could create open doors for civil society.

Andy Williamson, author of the World e-Parliament Report, asked: “What does parliamentary innovation look like?” He shared the findings from the innovation chapter of the WePR, noting that being innovative was often the result of a conscious choice and did not just happen automatically. Parliaments had not historically been seen as good innovators and the institutional culture had to shift to accept more innovative practices. Pressure for openness and transparency from the public and political commitment could help with that. Centralization hampered innovation for many organizations and letting staff (and partners) be free to experiment had been shown to produce positive results in the parliaments where that was happening.

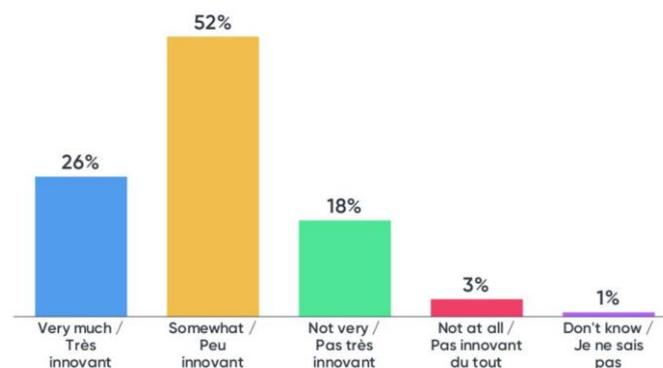
Innovation happened between parliaments and citizens but was equally important in terms of internal systems and processes, making the institution itself more efficient and effective. For that to happen parliaments needed to gain new skills and innovative parliaments benefited from working collaboratively with others. Ultimately, innovation was happening in the parliaments that recognized they needed to evolve and develop new and more open ways of working. That was a cultural shift, not just about technology, and it required a commitment at all levels of the institution to work with others, to see the parliament from different perspectives and to take risks with new, often untried ideas.

Moving from the general to the specific, Frode Rein (Head of Strategy and Innovation at the Norwegian Parliament) described their vision to become "a leading digital parliament" as a direction of travel, not a destination. It was important to be a good digital parliament because it made the institution more effective. However, getting there was non-linear and not something to hurry. Finding time to innovate was challenged by operational requirements and it was important to understand that innovation in parliament was not about inventing a new device or bleeding edge technologies, it was about taking existing innovations and giving them a meaningful life in a parliamentary context. Innovation needed the institution to allow staff to think freely, try things and fail. The Stortinget allocated two-people teams 10% of their workload to develop proof of concepts, allocated a budget for that and used [Design Thinking](#) as a formal methodology. The aim was to show a good mix of openness and receptivity to ideas combined with a clear process.

India observed that for them innovation was about increased efficiency for members, providing better access to citizens and better processes for staff. It was not about new technology but building solid, reliable platforms that shaped better debates and participation, and ensured that the national infrastructure was capable of supporting a digital society.

Conference participants were asked to rate how innovative they thought their own parliament was:

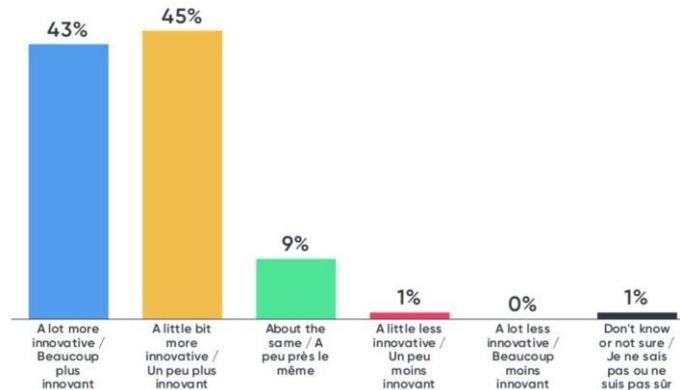
To what extent would you describe your parliament as innovative? / Dans quelle mesure qualifieriez-vous votre parlement d'innovant? Mentimeter



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And to say whether they expect their parliaments to become more or less innovative in the future:

Will your parliament be more or less innovative in three years time? / Votre parlement sera-t-il plus ou moins innovant dans trois ans? Mentimeter



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Being an effective parliamentarian in the digital age

Duarte Pacheco (Portugal) asked participants to share their perspective and experiences on the positive and negative impacts of new technologies on parliaments. Digital technologies and social media had changed people’s lives in last few decades, he said. How had they changed the work of parliamentarians? More broadly, many parliaments and parliamentarians were experiencing the negative impact of social media in their work. People were often not well informed and laws were complicated to understand. Trust in the traditional sources of information was starting to break down. That contributed to creating a space for "fake news" and unreliable information to spread through social media.

Yet despite the negatives, there were still many ways parliaments and parliamentarians could benefit from digital technologies, including social media. Making draft laws available for citizens’ comments through social media enhanced public participation. Digital tools could be effective for sharing parliamentary messages and information or putting out statements on vital issues. They were seen as particularly important to achieve an effective, two-way communication with the public.

Both Bahrain and Finland observed that members required better systems and good support to make their work more effective. Finland talked about the importance of seamless committee information for MPs across platforms. They discussed the need to ensure that there were ways for MPs to comment on amendments and for these to be recorded and shared. The Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) presented findings from their latest 2018 finance database, "comparative perspectives on money in politics". Several components in regulating political financing were emphasized, from public and private funding, through spending and reporting, to oversight and sanctions. The use of online crowd funding was an issue raised during the discussion. This was seen as a new aspect of political financing, which imposed new challenges to ensure the transparency of money in politics.

Social media had changed the way people, parliaments and elected members could communicate, share ideas and share data, said Andy Williamson (IPU). They also had adverse effects, such as disinformation and abusive behaviour. Members and parliaments must consider how to use new media to reach the right people and send appropriate messages. They must learn how to manage challenges too.

Antonio Anastasia (Brazil) presented several tools from the Brazilian Senate that enable public participation using social media. Citizens could initiate an idea for a new law, which was published and became available to the public. If the initiative got sufficient support, it went into parliamentary

procedure. There was an opportunity for citizens to participate online by sending comments and suggestions on draft laws. Citizens could also vote online about any legislative act discussed in the Senate. The results were not binding but they were public and senators could take them into account when deciding how to vote. Giorgio Jackson (Chile), shared his experience and approach in using social media. For a parliamentarian, it was important to be visible and accessible on social media, to create bonds through the two-way communication with citizens. An MP, however, needed to know how different platforms worked and who was the main audience. Content and the language used had to be adapted to different groups and for different purposes; however, it was vital that the core meaning of the message itself remained the same. For MPs, their digital personality must be carefully created and consistently curated. Ravza Kavakci Kan (Turkey) emphasised her careful and thoughtful use of social media, with full awareness of their power, including power to spread and disseminate fake news. Although the social media were fast by nature, her approach was to always verify any information before sharing it and think about every word, its meaning and possible connotation, the language and even grammar, before sending a message.

Sharing innovation between parliaments

Gerard Hilbert (European Parliament) enumerated success factors in the ECPRD network on Parliaments and ICT. Successful networks were based around a shared idea and addressed a specific need. They created a win-win situation where participants both gave and received something that was valuable to them. Keeping the red tape to a minimum helped to maintain the flow of ideas and information, as did an active facilitator.

Parliamentary hubs within the Centre for Innovation in Parliament aim to build upon this experience to develop into a new network of expertise. A series of meetings during the conference had allowed parliaments hosting hubs to set out their vision, and for other parliaments to assess the potential benefits of joining these hubs. The initial hubs within the Centre cover the following areas:

- [ICT Governance thematic hub](#): An online learning platform for parliaments to support a wide development of maturity in IT governance. Host: European Parliament.
- Inter-Parliamentary Cloud thematic hub: Aims to create a portal to pull together open data from multiple parliaments to create new ways to analyze and improve the law. Host: Chamber of Deputies of Brazil.
- Latin America regional hub: To share technological tools, software developed by the parliaments, free access to third party software, documentation, and information on real cases. Host: Chamber of Deputies of Chile.
- Southern Africa regional hub: To promote effective use of technology in parliaments by sharing and consolidating information on past, ongoing and future ICT initiatives. Host: National Assembly of Zambia.

Listening, responding and engaging with citizens

The open parliament, one which is transparent and accountable, makes a positive contribution to strengthening the democratic process, contributes to the fight against corruption and facilitates the relationship between civil society and parliament. Karin Luck (Chile) argued that how parliament and its members listened and engaged was a major theme, particularly as civil society became more organized, more vocal and had increasing expectations of partnership and collaboration. Thibaut Denoncourt (Parlement et citoyens) made the point that the citizen consultation initiatives must be accompanied by a commitment from parliament to be open and transparent about how citizen input was taken into account.

Abir Oreibi (LIFT, Switzerland) talked about how we could promote open innovation for positive change and that digital was the driver for new ways of collaboration; "big data is the oil for the internet". Digital created new actors, new centres of ideas but also of power. It caused disruption—of process and vocabulary—as physical ways of connecting were augmented and enhanced by new

online methods. Parliaments needed to keep abreast of developments and explore what could work for them, aware that civil society were often the early adopters of the tools around where engagement could happen and so they were likely to be ahead of parliament. Oreibi cited "Consultation pour l'agenda digital Suisse" and the "Shanghai open data initiative" (SODA) as examples of collaboration focused on public and democratic innovation.

Dan Barrett (UK) saw data as the fundamental raw material for achieving engagement between parliament and civil society, yet he noted too that the WePR cited knowledge of how parliaments worked as the biggest barrier to greater citizen engagement—and how that rang true with the UK experience. Barrett said that was important for parliaments to understand their data, that that was an iterative process and that poorly designed data was a barrier to parliamentary openness. Above all, parliaments must understand their business process and think beyond the data, beyond the system or report, and consider the end users of what they produced, be they members, citizens, academics or journalists. Other people would be able to make use of the data that was made available and that was largely a positive thing. The UK Parliament had chosen not to lead as such but to participate in the wider open data and civic tech communities, where it could share and learn as part of a network.

Audience members made the point that publishing data in non-machine-readable formats (such as PDF) inconvenienced end-users. While acknowledging that the publication of open data could sometimes lead to criticism of parliament, they noted too that parliaments should not be too concerned; the reality was that criticism came from a small minority and most people had a genuine interest and reason for wanting access to the data.

Finland shared a different approach, talking about a project whereby the Speaker hosted a regular Facebook Live session. That had been positively received both inside and outside parliament and there were plans to expand the format to include committee chairs. They noted that whilst many of the questions were pre-screened and participants selected, there was still the opportunity for spontaneous questioning of the Speaker.

Managing disinformation

Sophia Ignatidou (UK) told the conference that, "if you're confused and overwhelmed by the complexity of the issue of disinformation and fake news, you're not alone. We all are!" The language was confusing too as that was an emerging area and definitions were ambiguous; when was news "fake"? When was it intentionally disinformation? How does "viral content" spread through networks? As Tommaso Venturini (Italy) noted, "true or false" was too simplistic in many cases; journalism was all about selecting and combining information into a well-constructed (or badly-constructed) narrative. Most "fake news" did not hide its fakeness, satire for example. The difference was the intent to mislead. Kenya reported on legislation adopted in 2018 to combat the spread of fake news, and also noted a survey which showed that 87 per cent of Kenyans questioned had seen information that they had suspected to be fake. Whilst that was worrying, it also suggested that people were able to tell what was and was not real.

Pakistan noted that fake news could be a lethal instrument and Sudan suggested that international cooperation was required to control its production. For Zambia, there was a question of ensuring that journalists were providing honest content and it was noted that there was a role for legitimate, independent fact-checking organizations to verify content. The question of freedom of speech and freedom of expression was raised; how did we manage fake news and protect the voice of others, such as minorities or political opposition? Regulation was lagging behind, but parliaments should be careful to fully understand the situation before taking action. "Fake news" was not simply something you disagreed with and there was a risk that legislation could negatively impact on free speech or silence critical voices.

Artificial intelligence

On the technical side of the conference parliaments debated how they were starting to explore Artificial Intelligence (AI). These are systems that can sense, reason, act and adapt independently.

Brazil demonstrated how they were using AI-based technologies to support better legislation. They were providing complex thematic searches, automatic translations of non-Portuguese laws from elsewhere and sentiment analysis to understand large numbers of comments. Their systems were also able to provide "smart" summaries of legislation, support voice recognition and even manage the Chamber's relationship with citizens through intelligent "bots". The Austrian Parliament emphasized that AI was about enhancing what they already did; making parliamentary systems better and recognizing that the value lay in categorization, summarization and sentiment analysis. These were all manually-intensive tasks that were made more efficient and effective through AI. We are seeing AI emerge within parliaments, cutting across many existing processes, reducing complexity (for the users) but requiring a holistic approach and careful change management. Parliamentary IT services must learn to manage algorithms as well as systems, but parliaments must recognize that there are issues of trust with any algorithm-based approach; they are not neutral and can be biased (and can be trained to be biased). This is a new area for parliaments and there is a need to recognize that strong governance and oversight is required to ensure the veracity of AI, to build trust and to promote its effective use.

Abdulaziz Alhargan (Saudi Arabia) led an interesting and provoking discussion in relation to new technologies, such as AI. With ICT now essential to parliaments, will the advancement of big data analysis and AI cause the typical role of parliaments to change or disappear? This discussion further re-enforced the views of earlier discussions about the need for strong governance, ensuring trust but also raised the question of the role of democratic institutions in an age of smart systems. What does the huge increase in data storage and our increasing ability to analyse and make decisions based on this mean? Will there be a need for voting and parliaments in the future? What of the representative role of parliament?

Planning for the cloud

Moving data to the cloud brings many complex challenges for parliaments. Parliaments need to understand their present position before moving ahead; do they have resources for an internal data centre, should they use a commercially hosted service (which has risks) or join their government's cloud (if one exists)? There are serious pros and cons to all three approaches that have to be understood. What are the implications on a parliament's IT strategy and the legacy systems that it has and how will new systems integrate with the chosen cloud provider? There is an impact for IT departments in terms of staffing. This is reflected not just in terms of numbers but in the way the nature of their work can change. Security can become even more of a sensitive issue, particularly if the data is held outside the parliamentary network. This in turn raises questions about the sovereignty of parliamentary data and the legal framework in which it (and the parliament) operates. Guyana noted challenges in terms of the size of their IT department (only two people) yet the UK parliament had demonstrated a strong business case, with significant savings from the deployment of cloud technologies. Suriname planned a path for adoption that included training and "walk-in" surgeries to aid uptake, but many other parliaments noted that there was a cultural challenge and there could be resistance to cloud services.

Tools, such as the ICT Maturity Self-Assessment model, developed by the European Parliament and presented at the conference, can play an important role in helping parliaments to define their current position. It also helps them understand what issues they might face as they start to deploy new technologies, such as cloud and AI.

New developments in parliamentary video

Israel and Mauritius presented their experience of translating innovation to practice in order to reach citizens and promote parliamentary transparency, particularly using visual tools. The Knesset had used HD broadcast to increase media exposure of the parliamentary work alongside a national legislation database, with all laws available in consolidated form. Data visualisation of their data added

to this mix, graphically presenting, for example, the responsiveness of ministries to parliamentary questions.

Bringing parliament to more people, reaching more citizens and raising understanding of democratic processes had guided the introduction of live broadcasting in the Parliament of Mauritius, designed around an extensive survey and analyses of other countries' experiences, including expert support from partner organizations. Now, the Parliament provided live broadcast through a dedicated Parliamentary channel and via the internet.

Building the greener parliament

Many parliaments are transforming their processes as they become environmentally aware. The greener parliament is a cross-cutting concept that does not exclusively fall within the domain of ICT or "paperless" initiatives. The Belgium Parliament identified a number of "quick wins" that helped it move towards becoming a "green" parliament, not all related to ICT. As Spain noted, printing was a major cost for parliaments and also left a significant environmental footprint. Reducing printing was a significant way to improve parliament's environmental credibility but doing so meant thinking through the entire workflow; what were the documents for? Who were the users? How would documents be archived? And how could the overall process be improved, rather than just replicated with digital tools. The Parliament of South Africa presented a four pillar greening initiative based on reducing cost, paperless environment, e-waste disposal, and reduction of carbon footprint, all mainstreamed into new projects. Initial results demonstrated a reduced printing by 60 per cent. Similarly the Israeli Knesset had a comprehensive approach covering energy efficiency and renewables, water conservation, recycling, and organizational culture of sustainability. Kenya pointed to the use of e-parliament systems that managed workflow, publication and amendments as a key tool in reducing paper production; the work of parliamentarians could happen in the digital space.

UN panel on digital co-operation

Claire Messina brought the conference to a close by introducing the [UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation](#). The Panel had been convened to raise awareness about the transformative impact of digital technologies across society and the economy and to contribute to the broader public debate on how to ensure a safe and inclusive digital future for all, taking into account relevant human rights norms. Messina noted that parliaments played an important role in shaping our societies and encouraged parliaments and parliamentarians to [engage with the panel and to make submissions to it](#).

References

- [World e-Parliament Conference 2018](#)
- [World e-Parliament Report 2018](#)
- [Centre for Innovation in Parliament](#)
- [Innovation Board](#)

Further information: innovation@ipu.org