Online voting still some way off

WASHINGTON, USA: Online voting has the potential to boost election participation around the world, but is not yet ready to be widely rolled out due to security risks, a US study shows.

The CDT's Joseph Hall says that online voting is difficult to achieve because the identity of the voter must be confirmed but the vote must remain anonymous. Image: CDT

The research, produced by the Atlantic Council think-tank and the online protection firm McAfee, concluded that "security will need to be vastly improved" before it becomes feasible to adopt Internet voting on a large scale.

According to the study, online voting faces more complex obstacles than electronic commerce, where a customer can be reimbursed after fraud or theft.

"Online voting poses much tougher problems than e-commerce," the report said.

"Lost votes are unacceptable and unlike paper ballots, electronic votes cannot be 'rolled back' or easily recounted," it said.

The report said hackers could paralyse an online voting system or, even worse, change the results without being detected.

A major problem of online voting is that any system must verify the identity of the voter, and at the same time guarantee anonymity.

Online voting my take 40 years to perfect

Some experts believe it could be decades before online voting is widespread.

Joseph Hall of the Centre for Democracy and Technology said that many security experts believe it could take between 30 and 40 years before the technological hurdles to online voting are overcome.

"One of the problems is the uncontrolled platform, in which voting software or computers can be infected," Hall said at a discussion hosted by the Atlantic Council.

Jordi Puiggali of the online voting technology firm Scytl said: "While internet balloting has not been perfected we have to consider the risks of voting channels that already exist."

The researchers cited a study released earlier this year by University of Michigan scientists on online voting in Estonia, the first country to hold national elections on the internet.

Scytl's Jordi Puiggali believes that online voting might be the new 'killer-app' if a development team can perfect it. Image: Scytl

That study, which is to be published in a scientific journal next month, revealed vulnerabilities in Estonia's online voting system.

"Attackers could target the election servers or voters' clients to alter election results or undermine the legitimacy of the system," the study said.

Estonian officials have maintained that the system is secure.

"For the digital generation, unsupervised polling via mobile devices may be a 'killer app' of e-voting," the report said, adding

that biometric and other security features may need to be perfected.

"Broad adoption of most new technologies generally takes longer than technology optimists hope, but it will happen," the report added.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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