POLICY MAKING FOR THE 21st CENTURY: HOW DIGITAL TOOLS CAN HELP

Valerie Mocker and Olivia Chapman

Digital technology is profoundly changing the way we live and work. Shouldn't it change the way we do politics, too?

This briefing provides an overview of how digital tools can transform the policy process to become more timely, inclusive, data-driven and user-focused.

REASONS TO RETHINK 21st CENTURY POLICY MAKING

Citizens across Europe feel increasingly disconnected from the political class. Voter turnout in many recent elections has been at an all time low, indicating disillusionment and a lack of trust in the political process.

The digital revolution is changing our societies at an unprecedented rate. Over the past years, we have witnessed the rise of completely new markets, business models and technologies, from crowdfunding to the sharing economy and driverless cars. Policy makers need to react fast without stifling innovation - but traditional, offline methods make it difficult to keep up with the pace of technological change.

WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?

Governments across the world have started to successfully integrate digital tools into their work. These tools do not replace offline forms of engagement or traditional democratic institutions. They are a valuable addition that helps:

Governments and civil servants, to tap into the collective intelligence of citizens, to gather data, to identify issues early on and design better public services.

Parliaments, to engage citizens in the work of parliament and thereby increase public trust into the political process.

Political parties, to increase engagement with members who can suggest and vote on priorities and proposals online.

WHERE DIGITAL TOOLS CAN HELP

Digital tools can be used at all stages of the policy cycle. Some tools are designed to gather input from smaller, specialist audiences, while others work for large-scale public deliberation. Many tools are open source and free to use.

STAGES IN THE POLICY CYCLE	OBSERVATION	ISSUE IDENTIFICATION	PROPOSALS	DECISION-MAKING	MONITORING
DIGITAL TOOLS CAN HELP TO:	Involve the public in generating useful data.	Understand and identify key issues citizens worry about.	Involve stakeholders in drafting new laws and policies.	Let the public vote on decisions.	Allow citizens to monitor political activities.

Digital tools help you design policy and legislation that is:

MORE TIMELY,
enabling you to gather real-time feedback from citizens and businesses on how issues or new programmes affect them.

MORE DATA-DRIVEN,
allowing you to capture new types of data quickly to inform decisions.
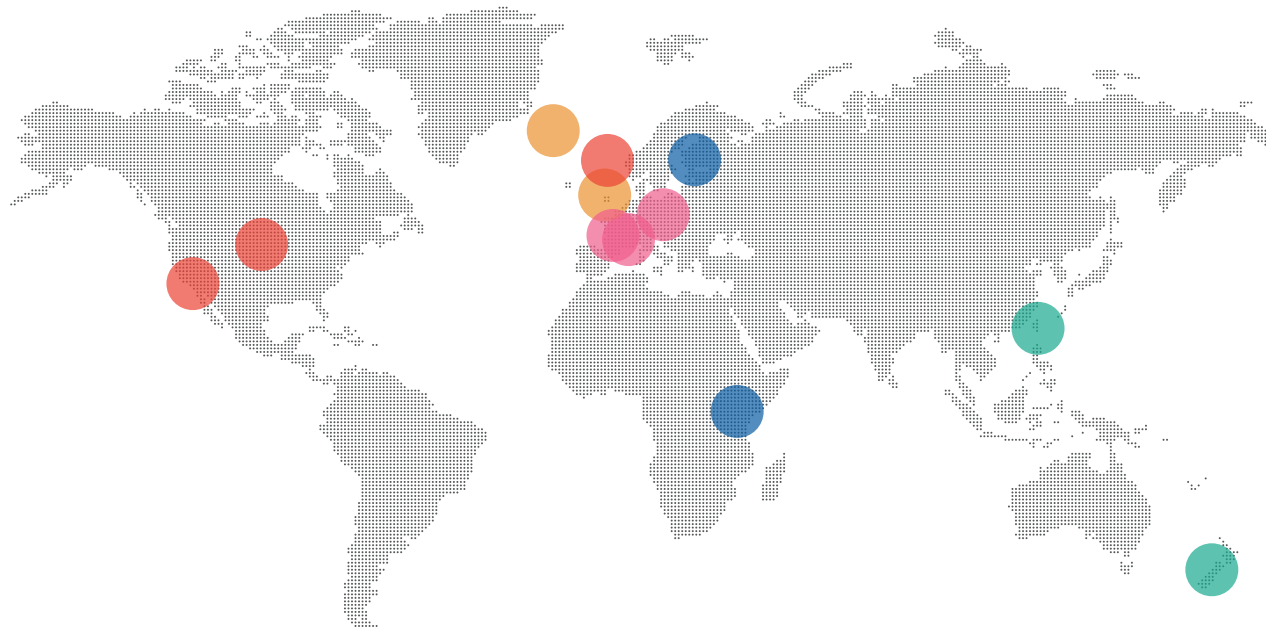
MORE INCLUSIVE,
by involving citizens, businesses and key stakeholders at important stages of your decision process.

MORE USER-FOCUSED,
enabling you to test more quickly with your stakeholders what works for them.

SUCCESS STORIES FROM ACROSS THE WORLD

Readie.
DIGITAL DONE BETTER

AIRMAP / BIG DATA CHALLENGE 2015
Measuring exposure to air pollution using mobile phone data
USA

GOOGLE TRENDS
Predicting health epidemics such as chicken pox outbreaks
Scotland & USA

FIXMYSTREET
Reporting problems to local councils like graffiti, fly tipping or street lighting
UK

BETRI REYJAVIK
Submitting ideas about budgetary spend across the city
Rekjavik, Iceland

vTAIWAN
Engaging thousands of stakeholders in developing legislation for sharing economy, crowdfunding and ride-sharing services
Taiwan

LOOMIO
Crowdsourcing policy ideas from citizens to develop a city alcohol management strategy
New Zealand

D21: I RUN ŘÍČANY
Citizen participation in city decisions from choosing an investment project, regulation and city ordinance to picking a musicians for the city yearly concert
Czech Republic

LOI NUMERIQUE
Consulting with citizens to vote on and draft digital laws
France

- OBSERVATION
- ISSUE IDENTIFICATION
- PROPOSALS
- DECISION-MAKING
- MONITORING

MZALENDO
Allowing citizens to analyse parliament activity
Kenya

DECISIONS HELSINKI
Getting real time alerts about city debates and decisions
Helsinki, Finland

MADAME MAYOR, I HAVE AN IDEA
Participatory budgeting, allocating €500 million to projects proposed by citizens
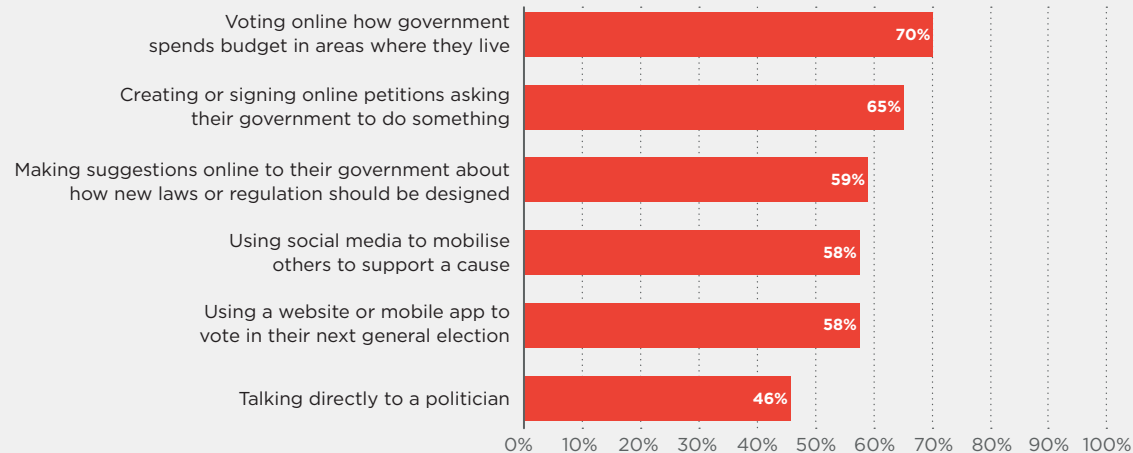Paris, France

3

HOW READY IS EUROPE?

In Europe, over 82% of people have access to the internet.[2] However, to make the most of digital policy making, it is important to know how interested Europe's citizens are in participating in politics online. To understand this, Readie and ComRes surveyed 9,000 adults across Europe.[3] We specifically asked about their interest in using the internet to help with issue identification, proposals and decision-making in the policy cycle.

Our research found that the majority of adults in Europe are interested, or very interested in using digital tools to participate in politics. However, there are striking variations across Europe. The interest is particularly high in some former Eastern Bloc countries like Bulgaria and Poland, where trust in government has been historically lower. Similarly, citizens from nations badly hit by the economic crisis, such as Spain or Italy, have high interest in using digital tools for political engagement. By contrast, citizens in countries with strong and stable welfare states like Sweden, show the least interest in digital policy making.

European adults interested in using the internet to do the following

Activity	Percentage
Voting online how government spends budget in areas where they live	70%
Creating or signing online petitions asking their government to do something	65%
Making suggestions online to their government about how new laws or regulation should be designed	59%
Using social media to mobilise others to support a cause	58%
Using a website or mobile app to vote in their next general election	58%
Talking directly to a politician	46%

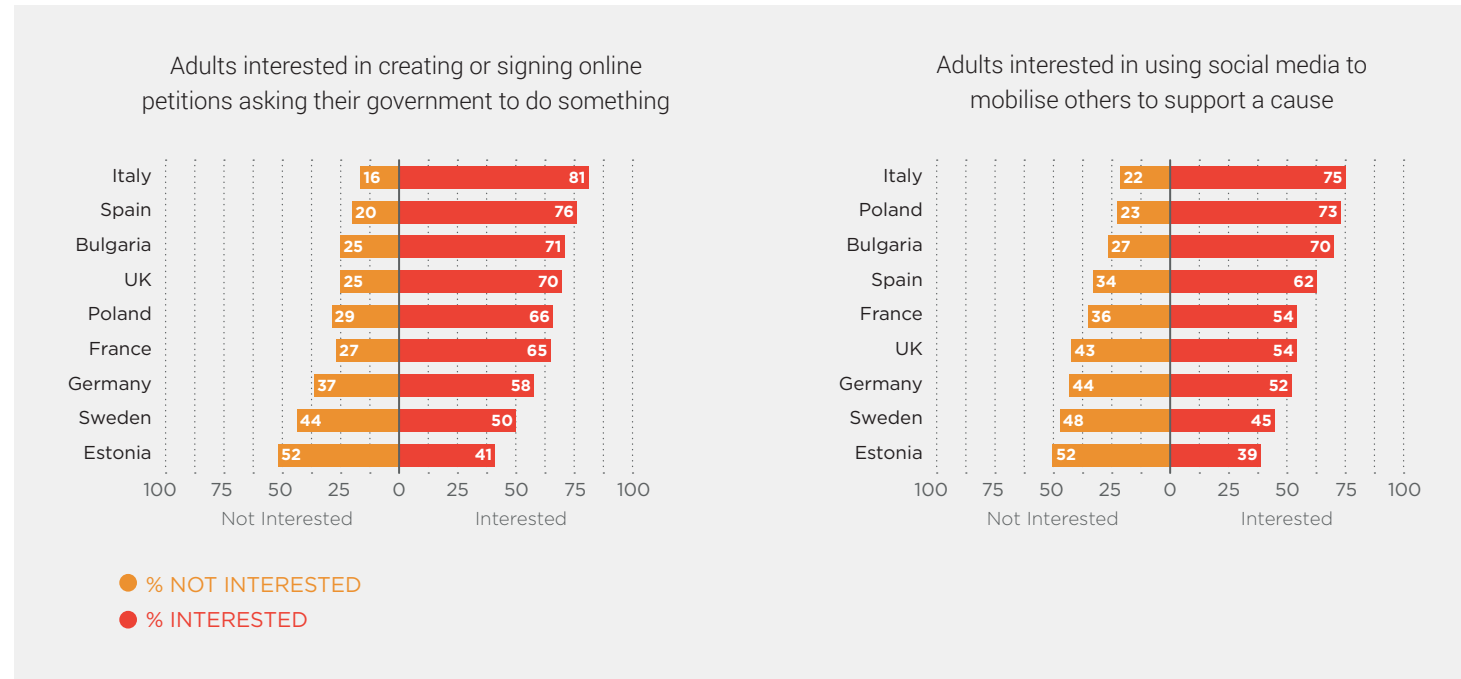2 https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2015.pdf 3 ComRes interviewed 1,002 British adults, 1,015 German adults, 1,004 French adults, 1,011 Spanish, 1,030 Italian adults, 1,016 Swedish adults, 1,019 Polish adults, 1,006 Estonian adults and 1,004 Bulgarian adults online between 15th and 26th August 2016. Data were weighted by age, gender and region to be representative of all adults aged 18+in these countries.

COUNTRY RESULTS: ISSUE IDENTIFICATION ⚠

Citizens can use a number of free, easy to access tools like Twitter or Change.org to raise issues to their governments. The public in Italy, Spain, Bulgaria and Poland are the most interested in using these tools to take part in the political process.

Adults interested in creating or signing online petitions asking their government to do something

Country	Not Interested	Interested
Italy	16	81
Spain	20	76
Bulgaria	25	71
UK	25	70
Poland	29	66
France	27	65
Germany	37	58
Sweden	44	50
Estonia	52	41

Adults interested in using social media to mobilise others to support a cause

Country	Not Interested	Interested
Italy	22	75
Poland	23	73
Bulgaria	27	70
Spain	34	62
France	36	54
UK	43	54
Germany	44	52
Sweden	48	45
Estonia	52	39

● % NOT INTERESTED
● % INTERESTED

Italians are the most interested in co-designing specific new laws or regulation with their government. People in Germany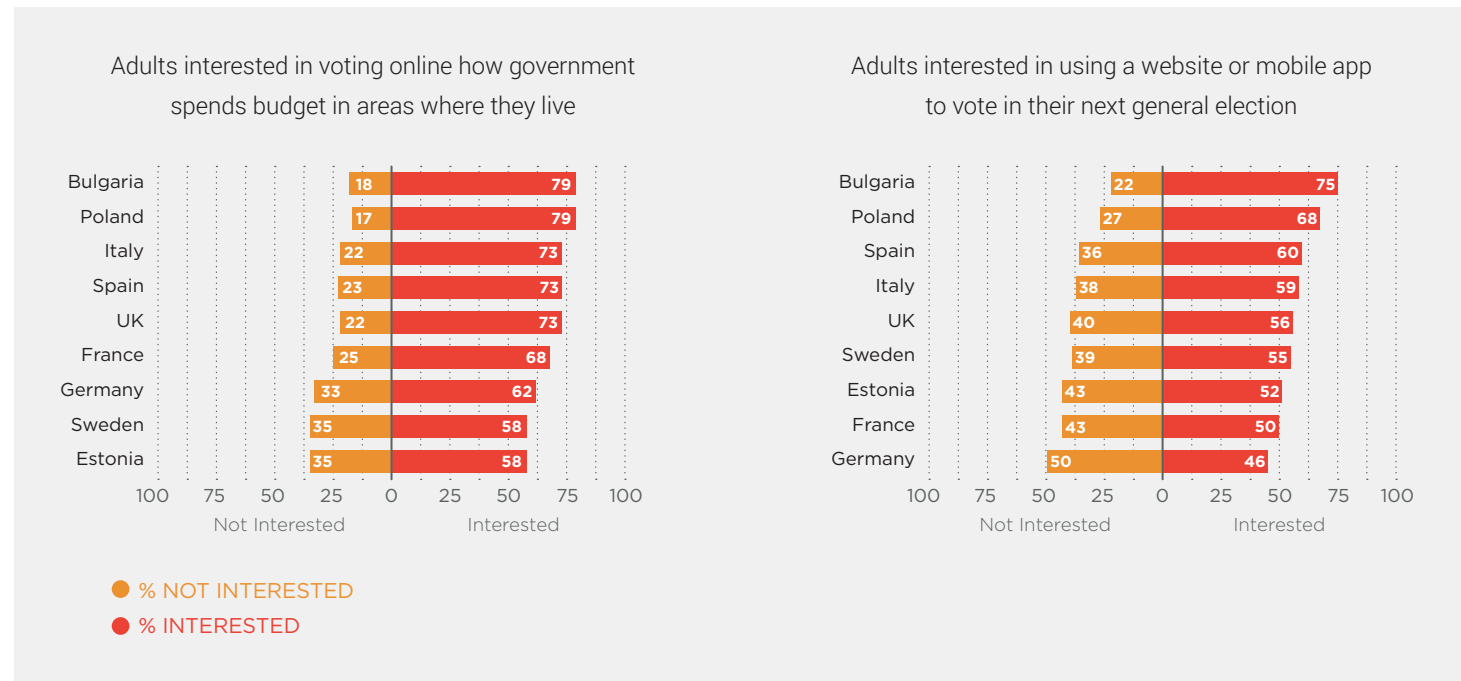 and Sweden are split, while Estonia is the only country where the majority - over 51% - is not interested in using the internet to co-design new laws or regulation. In all countries, citizens are less interested in using the internet to talk directly to their politicians.

Adults interested in making suggestions online to their government about how new laws or regulation should be designed

Country	Not Interested	Interested
Italy	17	80
Spain	27	69
Bulgaria	31	65
France	30	62
UK	35	58
Poland	38	55
Germany	47	48
Sweden	47	46
Estonia	51	41

100 75 50 25 0 25 50 75 100
Not Interested   Interested

Adults interested in using the internet to talk directly to a politician

Country	Not Interested	Interested
Italy	33	65
Spain	44	52
Bulgaria	44	51
UK	46	49
France	47	45
Sweden	53	43
Poland	53	41
Germany	61	35
Estonia	69	26

100 75 50 25 0 25 50 75 100
Not Interested   Interested

● % NOT INTERESTED
● % INTERESTED

6

Voting on budgetary decisions was one of the most popular options in all countries. Voting online in general elections is also popular. Over two thirds of Bulgarian and Polish adults are excited by this opportunity. By contrast, in Germany, the majority of people would prefer to vote in a polling station.

Adults interested in voting online how government spends budget in areas where they live

Country	Not Interested	Interested
Bulgaria	18	79
Poland	17	79
Italy	22	73
Spain	23	73
UK	22	73
France	25	68
Germany	33	62
Sweden	35	58
Estonia	35	58

Adults interested in using a website or mobile app to vote in their next general election

Country	Not Interested	Interested
Bulgaria	22	75
Poland	27	68
Spain	36	60
Italy	38	59
UK	40	56
Sweden	39	55
Estonia	43	52
France	43	50
Germany	50	46

● % NOT INTERESTED
● % INTERESTED

HOW TO GET STARTED

If you want to trial digital tools in your work, we suggest you start by asking four key questions:

1 WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE?

Digital tools can help with all stages of the policy cycle, from gathering new data to improving legislation.

2 WHO DO YOU WANT TO REACH?

Do you want to reach a smaller, specialist audience or do a large-scale public deliberation? Consider which stakeholders might be more or less likely to engage, and who has digital access.

3 WHICH TOOLS ARE MOST APPROPRIATE?

Your desired goals and the group size of the stakeholders you want to engage will make some tools more feasible than others.

4 HOW WILL DIGITAL TOOLS INTERACT WITH THE POLITICAL PROCESS?

Consider in advance how the input you gather with digital tools will feed into the overall democratic and political process. Also communicate how this input will inform your final decision to avoid disappointment amongst participants.

HOW READIE CAN HELP

READIE

is managed by Nesta, one of Europe's leading innovation foundations. Readie is a centre dedicated to empowering policy and decision makers with cutting edge insights into Europe's digital economy. In particular, we provide a platform and support services for sharing existing policies and innovative approaches to foster digital economic growth.

To find out how you can use digital tools in your work get in touch.

CONTACT DETAILS

info@readie.eu

+44(0)20 7438 2500

www.readie.eu

@ReadieEU

We are kindly sponsored by:

Nesta

1 Plough Place
London EC4A 1DE

research@nesta.org.uk

@nesta_uk

www.facebook.com/nesta.uk

www.nesta.org.uk

October 2016

Readie.