

TECH@STATE conference

November 30, 2012, Washington DC

Thanks for that kind introduction and for asking me to be a part of a conference that combines so many topics that I care deeply about...elections and civic engagement, diplomacy and international development, and technology.

Before I get started, I want to get a sense of who is here. So let me start with those three broad categories I just mentioned, and raise your hand for the category that most describes your area of expertise. And, don't worry. It's OK if you consider yourself an expert in more than one category.

Campaigns & Elections & Civic Engagement

Diplomacy & International Development

Technology

Ok, it looks like we have an interesting mix of people, so I'll look forward to the Q & A time so I can hear from you.

Even though we represent a lot of different backgrounds, I'm guessing that when it comes right down to it, we're all here for the same reason...because we share a common vision...of a world where new and widespread access to technology and communication networks can be a transformative tool to help more people, in more countries have more power in choosing their own governments.

Here in the United States we've worked for more than 230 years trying to achieve that ideal set forth in the Declaration of Independence...that the just power of government comes from the "consent of the governed."

Obviously, for most of our history, technology wasn't a major consideration, or really any consideration at all, in our election system. But I can report to you, that's

changing—maybe not fast enough for some of you. But believe me, we’re living through a time of dramatic change in how we determine “the consent of the governed.”

More people around the world are yearning to have their voices heard too, and in the past 20 years we’ve seen a remarkable number of these new democrats working to create their own unique systems that empower their own people to select leaders in free elections.

There is no doubt that the access of new technology solutions and communication networks has the potential to be a game changer...not only for elections, but also for governing. All over the world.

And that’s why I’m so pleased to be with this group, because right here in this room is the capacity to make a real difference--in very practical ways--to advance that worthy cause.

Now some of you may have noticed when I asked for a show of hands about what you are expert in, my hand did not go up as a technology expert. But I do know a few things about campaigns and elections as I’ve participated in them, both here and abroad, in one way or another pretty much nonstop for more than 30 years.

So today, I’ll stick with talking about what I know, and that is issues related to elections. And I’ll leave it to other speakers to talk about the latest use of technology in campaigns and other civic engagement.

So let’s start with the basics...Elections 101. Traditionally, elections in the U.S. and in many other countries, involve these 10 common attributes:

1. Citizens
2. Physically gather together
3. Usually along with their neighbors
4. On the same day or days
5. To physically mark a piece of paper

6. Often with some privacy
7. That goes into a secure ballot box
8. And at the end of the day, those ballots are manually counted
9. Under the watchful eye of representatives of different political parties
10. And results are publically announced.

Sounds pretty familiar, right? And for a long time, this open and transparent election process was enough to give people confidence in the results.

Anybody remember James Carville's famous mantra during the 1992 presidential campaign, "It's the economy, stupid." It was his reminder to everyone about what was important.

Well, I've got mantra when it comes to elections, and, if you remember only one thing I say today, I hope it's this...when it comes to running elections...**it's about creating public confidence, stupid.**

It's **not** about using the latest technology; it's **not** about counting the ballots fastest; it's **all about** ensuring public confidence in the process and, therefore, confidence in the results.

Now, let me paint a fuller, behind-the-scenes picture for you about how elections actually work.

I'll use Missouri as an example...we're a medium size state with four million registered voters, 116 local election officials (most independently elected), 4,000 polling locations and over 20,000 poll workers who actually run our elections.

And while as Secretary of State, I hold the title "chief elections official," my office never prints, touches or counts a ballot.

Now as an elections geek, I sometime use a little thought experiment to help people understand the scope and complexity of running an election...so just imagine for a minute that you're trying to run an election like you would a service delivery business. Here's what you'd be facing...

- Your business is open for, basically, one day every other year.
- All four million of your customers could show up on that day, and even though you know they won't, you have to be ready just in case.
- Your front-line employees who are supposed to take care of all those customers are essentially volunteers who might do the job every couple of years and
- You ask them to work a 16-18 hour shift.
- Your employees' average age is...can you guess? 72
- Election laws vary sometimes **dramatically** from one state to the next and endless media coverage about various laws and challenges to laws leaves both voters and poll workers confused about how voting works, what ID's are required and what days the polls are open
- When your customer, the voter, finally gets a ballot, they're asked to vote on 25-30 races from federal to state, county, judicial and complicated ballot questions...so ballots are very long
- Naturally your customers expect everything to work perfectly (and video tape and tweet about things when they don't just to add to the confusion)
- Oh, and customers also expect to get in and out in 15 minutes and not have to endure long lines.
- Then when the customers are all gone and polls finally close, the media expects the count to be quick and results to start rolling in as soon as the polls close, and they want final results by the end of the night.

It's staggering to think about...no one would survive if they ran a business the way we run elections!

I always say **elections are a miracle!** And perhaps more miraculously, most of the time, there is widespread public confidence in the results.

So, with that picture in mind, I want to address **four questions**:

- 1. What is it that creates or undermines public confidence in elections?**
- 2. Where can technology help improve public confidence?**
- 3. What are the limits of technology?**
- 4. What's the best way to develop and deploy effective technology solutions that advance the cause of democracy around the world?**

The **question of what creates or undermines public trust in elections is trickier than it sounds**...because it varies from one country to the next and maybe even regionally within countries.

Here in the U.S., what do you think is needed for elections to be trusted?

- Clear and transparent rules that are equally applied;
- Fundamental fairness so that everyone has Equal Access and that the principle of one person, one vote is a reality;
- Secrecy of the ballots;
- Accurate counting;
- Secure and reliable voting systems; and
- In the U.S. context it probably also means efficiency of polling places, good conduct and competence of poll workers and election officials, and yes, it also matters how quickly results are announced.

Of course in other places what helps or hurts voter confidence might be completely different...secrecy of the ballot might not be as important, but for historic or cultural reasons, security or transparency might be more important.

So fairness, equal access, transparency, accuracy, privacy and security are all important factors in building public trust about elections, but their order of importance is likely to vary in every country.

With those factors in mind, let's go to the **2nd question, where and how can technology help?**

As I think about it, technological solutions and communications networks can help improve voter confidence in three main categories by:

1. Increasing participation;
2. Improving election administration; and
3. Enhancing transparency.

Increasing Participation

I'm older than a lot of you, so I can tell you things have come a very long way when it comes to using technology in campaigns... I've still got the 4x5 card file of names we used in my father's first statewide election that later turned into his first campaign database.

This election cycle we witnessed yet another explosion in the use of technology. From grassroots fundraising to sophisticated voter outreach, to data mining, digital strategies were used like never before to identify, target and communicate with voters. It's really one of the great stories of this election year so I'm looking forward to hearing about all the latest campaign tools later this morning.

While some of these new tools might not be useful **yet** in emerging democracies, others will be ripe for wider use. For example, there's no doubt that the idea of using social media and other digital outreach to generate excitement about campaigns and candidates has already taken hold in many parts of the world.

The whole world was marveled by (and authoritarian regimes paid especially close attention to) the impact of Twitter and Facebook during the Arab Spring. But there are many of other less dramatic examples of the use of technology for civic engagement and campaigns all over the world.

I've got a trivia question for you...who can tell me the names of the top two politicians with the most Facebook fans in 2011?

Barack Obama and Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan.

So using new technology to increase voter awareness and engage supporters is a global phenomenon that is only destined to grow. And it's worthy of your help and attention.

Improving Election Administration

The second way technology can help enhance voter confidence is by helping improve election administration.

As Secretary of State, this is something I've dealt with regularly. And technology solutions are crucial...and not just on election day. Integrating technology is equally important during the **pre-election period**, in the **polling place**, as well as when ballots are **counted and results reported**.

One of the greatest challenges to running an election actually happens during the pre-election period...and that is, creating and maintaining an up-to-date voter list. And in that job, technology can be especially helpful.

Here in the U.S., and this is different from many other countries, our citizens must proactively register to be eligible to vote. And human nature being what it is, people forget to change their registration when they move or when they die or when they get married. Let me see a show of hands, how many of you have ever asked to be removed from a voter role when you moved out from your prior residence? It just doesn't happen.

But as our population becomes more mobile, keeping the voter lists up to date is a constant challenge. The good news is that other government data sources now are available in a form that can be helpful in identifying those who have died, moved or become incarcerated. And similarly other data can also be used to reach out to newly eligible voters.

By combining these new data sources with other tools that let actual voters check the status of their registration on-line and make changes before election day, it's made an incredible difference and has given us the most up-to-date and accurate voter lists in our country's history.

In most countries where I've observed elections, maintaining accurate voter lists is equally challenging. Except interestingly in Egypt where they seemed to know exactly where everyone lived and virtually everyone had the required government ID card. But the good news is that relatively simple mobile tools already exist or can be created to help election officials "crowdsource" the work of verifying the accuracy of the voter list. Plus there's an added bonus, because when you give voters access to information it does wonders for enhancing voter confidence.

Voter Education is another easy and cost effective way to use technology. By creating simple on-line and mobile tools you can really help voters find information they need such as:

- Download voter registration cards;
- Confirm their registration status;
- Locate their polling place;
- Review a sample ballot;
- Lookup voter ID requirements;
- Volunteer and train to be a poll worker; and
- Get election results.

Some states have gone even further by allowing on-line voter registration. And I suspect it won't be long before we have some type of on-line voting. Technology is already being used to transmit ballots to military voters serving in hostile zones...both by fax and by email. And we saw during Hurricane Sandy the use of mobile voting units replace polling places damaged by the storm.

But still, I'm guessing it'll be a long time before we catch up with Estonia, which as you may know, has both on-line and secure mobile voting platforms. But, hold on...because I'm sure that day is coming.

But even before then, technology can still be extremely helpful **on election day**. Most states in the U.S. use some form of **electronic poll books** that list all voters rather than only those in a particular polling place, **scanners** to speed the check in process, or **touchscreen and optical scan voting machines** that provide better access for handicapped voters.

And of course when it comes to counting and tabulating votes, technology has made a tremendous difference. Hand counting ballots is both notoriously slow and fraught with human error, so machine counting really is a vast improvement.

And on election night, everybody seems to love those maps of red states and blue states that can tell you with a glance what happened on election day.

Enhancing Transparency

The 3rd way technology can help in election administration is by enhancing transparency. It allows election officials to cost effectively provide easy access to voter lists, polling locations, complaints, challenges, recounts, voting machine audits and other data. And of course, by allowing watchdog groups easy access to information, it's another step toward creating transparency and public trust.

One of the most remarkable examples of effective use of technology I've witnessed was in Nigeria during the 2011 presidential election. And talk about a complicated place to run an election!

- 73 million voters
- 120,000 polling stations
- over 500,000 election officials; 400,000 young people seconded from the National Youth Service Corp

Now, there were plenty of problems in that election, like the fact that they had to be delayed for a week because printed ballots were delivered late.

But the good news is that the National Election Commission could easily communicate with its young poll workers and keep them up to date by **text message**...something I could never do in my own state!

And at the end of the day, after those young people pulled the ballots out of the transparent ballot boxes and began counting ballots in front of large groups of interested citizens, the vote tallies for each precinct were posted in a public place outside a building or on the side of a tree in the village square.

And guess what happened then? Members of a nonpartisan NGO were assigned to pre-selected polling sites around the country to do a sophisticated swift count. Team members snapped pictures of precinct tally sheets with their mobile phones and immediately sent them to the swift count office. As a result, long before the official results were tallied and reported by the National Election Commission, this nonpartisan civic organization already knew the results and was able to provide independent confirmation of the accuracy of the results reported by the government run election commission...and it did wonders for increasing public confidence.

So the answer to the question about how technology can help is pretty simple, it can help by increasing participation, improving election administration and enhancing transparency.

So that leads to my **3rd question...What are the limits of using technology?**

What do you think? It's easy to think about some of the most practical problems.

- Cost
- Access to a reliable power supply (even in the U.S. after Hurricane Sandy)
- Machine failures
- Ever popular user error

But again, the limits on using technology will vary widely by country.

And besides these practical considerations, there are several other less obvious limitations to consider.

First, remember, as much as technology solutions can be used to improve confidence and the integrity of elections, those same tools can and are being used by ruling parties and undemocratic regimes to subvert free elections and harass opposition activists.

It's also worth remembering that while you can deploy new technology – and it might help improve some problems (like improving accuracy and efficiency) – it also can create a whole new set of problems and unintended consequences.

Not only that – and perhaps more frustrating – just because people use a certain technology in one part of their life doesn't mean they'll automatically trust using it for elections.

A great example of this is the ATM machine and on-line banking system. They're used by lots of people every day. We buy gas and groceries, deposit checks and pay bills on-line. In fact our entire financial system now runs as an on-line processing system...and

in remarkably efficient, accurate and secure ways. Exactly what we want in our elections system...

But the current on-line banking system happens to lack other important features that voters have come to expect like transparency, secrecy and equal access. “Blackbox voting” theories still flourish and many people remain suspect of any type of touchscreen voting system to this day.

So when you think about the limits of introducing new technology in the elections context, remember not only the very practical and predictable problems, but also recognize there also may be some significant psychological barriers to overcome as well.

So that brings me to the **final question**... What are the take-away lessons about how best to develop and deploy technology solutions to advance the cause of democracy around the world?

For me, it all goes back to where we started...to that mantra...it’s about creating public confidence, stupid.

And that means focusing on the solutions that strike the right balance of protecting the core electoral values and principles that people care about...fairness, accuracy, security and transparency.

And it also means gatherings like this, where people of common purpose and uncommon talent come together to share experiences and best practices from around the world and commit their time and energy to creating tools that will help more people, in more countries have more power to choose their own governments.

Thank you for doing such important work.