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CONSUL CON

DAY 2 - 15:45 - AI Stage

Using Digital Platforms For Elections: Experiments from Bavaria and Scotland

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JOHN MUNRO - COSLA

Session recap

At a glance

Maria Hörtrich, project coordinator at the Bavarian State Ministry for Digital Affairs, presented (in German) the pilot of a digital 'U18' youth election held alongside Bavaria's March 2026 local elections, its legal and organisational set-up, and the findings of an accompanying study by the Bundeswehr University Munich. She then asked the audience for ideas on the next step. John Munro of COSLA demonstrated (in English) how CONSUL's participatory budgeting module was creatively adapted to run elections for the Scottish Youth Parliament, including login with the national youth card and a full single transferable vote (STV) count.

Key messages

- Germany's Federal Constitutional Court has not ruled digital or internet voting unconstitutional in principle, which leaves room for careful experimentation.
- Starting with a low-stakes pilot (a non-binding youth election) protects the wider cause of digital voting from a failed or attacked first attempt.
- Use is not the same as trust: young voters rated the digital vote 4.7 out of 5 for ease of use but only 3.2 out of 5 for trust in its security.
- Verifiability must become understandable to non-experts. Being able to request source code from a provider is not enough.
- CONSUL can be stretched well beyond its original purpose: by renaming texts, reusing geozones as constituencies and adding STV counting, it now runs youth parliament elections in Scotland.
- Pilots are worth it, and public administrations, even conservative ones, need the courage to take such risks.

Facts, figures and references

- Bavarian U18 pilot: 10 municipalities, 17,850 eligible voters aged 14 to 17, about 3,000 digital votes.
- Survey results: ease of use 4.7/5, trust in the technology 3.2/5.
- Bavaria shortened the postal voting period from 40 to 20 days.
- Scotland: login with the Young Scot National Entitlement Card; STV counting with round-by-round audit and PDF export; up to 50,000 expected voters.

Takeaways for the community

- Digital voting pilots should invest as much in explainable verifiability as in usability.
- Advisory council and other low-stakes but binding elections are promising next steps for digital voting.
- CONSUL's flexibility (custom texts, geozones, extensible voting logic) makes it a candidate platform for youth and civil society elections.