Government by AI can enable direct-vote democracies

The percentage of people who vote has become a false measure of the quality of a “democracy”. We need to keep in mind that democracy is not just about “showing up”—voting should be an informed and thoughtful process. *"Vote only on what you have studied and care about"* is a crucial message that often gets lost amid blanket encouragements to vote.

Infotainment outlets have transformed national elections into sports matches and encourage people to vote for the “home team” while villainizing the opposition. Groups of people who previously had good reasons not to vote are now voting just to participate in the spectacle. These voters are easily swayed by slogans and soundbites that have no substantive meaning, but appeal to people’s emotions. When people cast a vote without knowledge or a personal stake in the matter, they become easy targets for manipulation by special interest groups and demagogues.

We live in a time where technological advancements are reshaping how society functions. Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation, and digital platforms are revolutionizing industries and communities worldwide. Yet, government and politics, the very structures that are supposed to guide and regulate society, have not fully caught up with these innovations. The concept of "modern representative government with a separation of powers" was introduced centuries ago, and while groundbreaking in its time, it is now outdated. There are inherent deficiencies in the system for which there were no solutions in the past, but now, we have the tools to fix them.

Let’s look at three glaring issues with the current system—and imagine how technology might come to the rescue.

1. **All Votes Are Created Equal... But Should They Be?**

One of the core principles of our democracy is that every vote carries the same weight, regardless of who casts it. This ideal is cherished, but it also poses a significant problem. A vote cast by a well-informed expert carries no more influence than a vote from someone who barely understands the issue. While this principle ensures equality, it sacrifices the quality of decision-making.

With advancements in AI, we could design systems that place a higher weight on informed votes. Not in a draconian, “elites’ rule” way, but in a meritocratic way. Citizens could setup their own "voter profiles" and allow the system to track their levels of knowledge and interest in specific topics based on their online profile, discussions, and deliberations. Those with expressed interest and demonstrated expertise could have more influence on issues within their field, while those less interested in the topic, would be encouraged to focus on issues where they have stronger opinions or better knowledge. This wouldn’t eliminate anybody’s vote but would bring greater value to opinions expressed by those with more understanding of the subject matter.

2. **Vote Collection is Infrequent and on Limited Topics**

In the past, voting was an expensive and laborious process. Ballot boxes required physical locations, election workers, and extensive planning, which meant elections had to be held a few years apart. Aside from candidates for every position, the issues presented to the voters often span a wide range of topics, from taxes to city planning, leaving the average voter overwhelmed by the amount of information they have to process and express opinions on.

Today, technology allows us to streamline and simplify voting. We can create platforms where voters weigh in on specific issues in real-time rather than waiting for an election cycle. Imagine a system where voters can make more frequent, topic-specific suggestions that reflect the issues they are truly passionate about. This shift would not only engage citizens in a more meaningful way but also reduce the noise of uninformed votes and votes that are skewed by propaganda.

3. **Representative Democracy Was a Necessary Compromise**

Another inefficiency in our current system lies in its reliance on representative democracy. It used to be that in a country of millions, direct democracy—the idea that citizens directly participate in most decisions—was impractical. Thus, we elect representatives who are tasked with making decisions on our behalf.

But let's be honest: that hasn't been going so well lately. Representatives are often more beholden to party lines, special interest groups, or personal gain than to their constituents. So why not replace them with algorithms designed to serve the people?

This needs to be done gradually and in stages of course. AI could help with such transition by first allowing for a hybrid system, where representative democracy is supplemented by quick and direct citizen input on specific issues. This would gradually morph into a modern direct vote democracy where elected representatives would no longer be needed. For conveying information to the people, AI would help simplify the language and give each voter a clear, personalized understanding of the issues. On receiving information back, AI can take on the role of "representatives," aggregating opinions and making decisions based on the actual will of the people. This would eliminate the existing inefficiency and corruption rampant among human representatives.

A Better Tomorrow

Renovating our government with updated technologies will strengthen our democracy and protect it against the threats of demagoguery and corruption.

Of course, some might have negative thoughts about this. Some might fear that AI could one day take over, and before we know it, we'd be living in a high-tech dystopia where machines rule us all. But let's face it: given the current state of politics, would that be so bad? In all seriousness though, technology offers a path to a more responsive, informed, and flexible system of governance. A system where each decision is made by an engaged, informed electorate.

It is important to note that this doesn't need to turn into a form of high tech mob rule. Algorithms can easily recognize the government's need to protect minority rights, and such protections can be built into the system, where they will be implemented more effectively than they currently are.

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