

The Representative System for Electronic Democracy

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Abstract

The representative system for electronic democracy combines the best from both a parliamentary system and direct popular voting. On every decision, citizens can decide whether to vote themselves, or let their elected representative vote for them. This system will give people more influence on decisions without requiring them to personally study each issue.

Note: The representative system is covered by patent. For communication with the patent owners, see <http://www.vivarto.com/>.

Introduction

Many people feel powerless in today's society. They experience that they cannot influence their own living environment. They believe that it is meaningless to vote, that their vote will have so little influence, and that there is no party which represents their views.

For practical reasons, it has not been possible to let every citizen participate in all public decisions. But through information technology, it is now possible for the first time in history to let every citizen participate in all public decisions.

Transferring your Vote

Most people do not have time and interest enough to learn enough to make informed decisions on every issue which requires a public decision. Because of this, there is a need to select a representative, who will do the voting for those who selected this representative. This representative can be an ordered list of people, organisations or political parties.

This is what is the real meaning of parliamentary elections, that the citizens transfer their rights to vote to the party or to the member(s) of parliament they prefer. So voting in general elections is in reality a way of transferring your right to vote to someone else.

Representative

The discussion about democracy is usually a discussion of two extremes: That every citizen vote themselves in every single issue, or that their chosen representatives vote for them. But a better alternative might be to let the citizens decide on each issue, whether to vote themselves or let their elected representative vote for them.

In some countries public referendums are used, but only on a small selection of issues selected by the government. Would it not be

better to let the citizens themselves decide, on which issues they should be allowed to vote?

In most concrete public decisions, most citizens will prefer to let their elected representative(s) do the voting for them.

But whenever people do understand the issues and have an own well-considered opinion, they should be able to vote themselves on this issue, and not be forced to let their representative vote for them.

It is important that the actual voting done by a representative on each issue is recorded and publicly available. This information is central for the citizen in deciding which representative to select. It also enables people to check that their representatives adhere to promises they have made.

By viewing a person's previous voting record, perhaps on a selection of issues of special importance, a user can select a representative. It is also possible to provide attitude forms, where people can specify their opinions and find a representative with views they like. This gives people more influence than just choosing between a small number of political parties. Such attitude forms should allow the user to specify how important each issue is to him/her, so that the opinions on important issues have more weight in choosing a representative than the opinions on issues of less importance.

It is not necessary that each representative represents the same number of people, and therefore that his/her vote has an equal weight. Instead, the weight of the vote done by a representative should be proportional to the number of people, who have chosen this representative. This gives people even more freedom to select a representative which fits their views.

People will have the freedom to select a close representative, who represents fewer people and whose vote has a lower weight, or to select a more distant representative, such as members of parliament in today's democracy, and whose vote has a higher weight.

It should be possible for a representative to select another representative for making certain decisions. This is similar to when MPs specialize on certain issues, and other MPs follow the vote of such a person when they do not have special reason to vote differently.

In summary, the representative system gives people more influence than traditional parliamentary democracy:

- People can choose to vote themselves, whenever they have a well-formed opinion.
- People can choose a representative who more closely matches their opinion than

the parties in normal parliamentary democracy.

Security of Electronic Voting

There are a number of commonly expressed criticisms of electronic democracy. No voting system, manual or computerized, can ever be 100 % secure, but security is increased if different people are responsible for developing and running different parts of the software, such that falsified results require that each part made and run by different people is falsified. In general, the more different groups of people have insight in the software, the smaller is the risk of falsified results. Experts commonly agree that the software and hardware should be open for inspection, public domain software is regarded as most secure.

People will have more trust in an electronic voting system, if they can check how their own vote has been recorded, and which representative they have selected. (The representatives, however, need not be able to see who voted for each of them.)

Forcing and Buying Votes

Because the representative system allows anyone to register as a representative, and because the voting done by representatives has to be public, someone who forces someone to vote in a particular way, or buys votes, can force people to register as representatives in order to be able to check how they vote.

Forcing people to vote in a particular way with threats should of course be illegal, and if it occurs too much, actions have to be taken to reduce the risk.

Note that also MPs in traditional democracy can sell their votes or feel more or less forced to vote in a particular way. Someone trying to buy votes would probably be more interested in buying the votes of MPs than of ordinary citizens, since each vote by an MP carries much more weight.

These risks must be weighed against the great democratic advantage which the representative system provides.

Issues of Importance

A common argument against direct popular votes is that the best decision may not always be the majority decision. If a decision is very important to a minority, and unimportant to a majority, then political parties, trying to maximize their votes, may vote with the minority. This will, however, probably not be

any problem with the representative system. When people choose a representative, the same principle as for choosing a political party will favor decisions which optimize the total welfare. And people will choose to vote themselves, and not let the representative vote, on issues of special importance for them.

Unbalanced Budget

Another common argument against direct popular votes is that this may cause an unbalanced budget, people will vote for higher government costs than government income. However, this can be countered by a suitable voting system, for example that every proposal for increased government spending must include the same amount of increased government income (and the reverse).

Continuous votes

On certain issues, continuous voting may be preferred. A continuous vote is a vote where anyone can change their vote, or choice of representative, at any time. Continuous votes cannot easily lead to a legal decision, but they can show the opinion and how it changes, and thus be indirect input in the decision-making process.

Vote buying and enforced voting is more difficult with continuous voting, since people can later on change any vote they made under duress.

Selection of Issues

The process of selecting which issues are put to vote is important to democracy. The representative system is of no value, if it is not used for the important decisions.

The representative system could be extended with a method where anyone can propose an issue, and where such proposals go through

a screening process based on similar methods as the final vote.

Children and Voting

One of the main reasons for democracy and equal rights to vote, is that such a system will result in a society which will cater to the interests of most people. And since children are not allowed to vote, this may lead to a society where the interests of children are less supported than the interest of adults.

Because of this, one could discuss a system where parents are given additional votes to represent their children.

Payment

MPs are paid for their work of studying issues and making decisions. With the representative system, there is a need for paying the representatives. This payment could be proportional to the number of voters behind each representative.

Getting There

It will probably not be politically possible to introduce the representative system in one step. It should be tested in smaller steps first. Such smaller steps might be to start with only consultative voting in local government issues. As people see how it works, the system can be accepted by more people and this experience can lead to its acceptance for decisive voting and for national issues.

The End

The end result of introducing the representative system will be a society, where people feel that they have more power to influence decisions and feel that decisions are not made above their heads.