

Contribution from John Hunter, Your Democracy Ltd, Director

Hello,

Just some very quick thoughts on your call for evidence, which I saw on Twitter about fifteen minutes ago!

Point One:

In 15 to 20 years time the internet will surely be a much more integral part of the way we engage with our democracy. Instead of a slow, unresponsive and dyadic C19th system, we will see MPs interacting with constituents in a meaningful and public way, so that members of the public have far greater lateral awareness of the worries and hopes of their fellow citizens. At the moment the relationship (frayed as it is) is too enclosed.

Point Two:

Surely it must. The key element is an understanding that this must not descend into ochlocracy, but instead make sure that politicians understand and engage with the general will of the populace far more than they do currently. This makes elections more, not less important, because it should make them a more genuine test of an MP's responsiveness whilst in office. They become more accountable and trusted because they engage with their constituents meaningfully on an ongoing basis, rather than concentrated around election time.

Point Three:

I'd suggest this entails to establishment of a dedicated system to connect Parliament/MPs/Constituents/the nation as a whole rather than just Twitter and Facebook. This might best be done by a third party rather than government, to avoid the small "c" conservatism of the civil service and the inevitable partiality of politicians and parties.

Point Four:

This is a false dichotomy. Social media makes it easier for anyone, whether locally or nationally, to engage with MPs. There simply needs to be a degree of filtering to make sure that national and international discussions don't overwhelm MPs and undermine their ability to connect with their constituents. That said, MPs legislate on behalf of the whole nation, so it's entirely reasonable for them to engage with the broader discourse to some degree.

Information about politics

This could be built into the digital system mentioned in point three. The creation of a political social network, so to speak, independent from any currently existing organisation.

Point Two

Objective information is readily available? Hmm. I'm not sure what this refers to. I don't think any of the "objective" sources that might be consulted by members of the public tend to be widely accessed, presently. I'd argue that we need to create a much better understanding of the way that our democracy functions through citizenship and education in schools. The rest, naturally, could be disseminated through the aforementioned system.

Make it easy for people to find out information and uncover the arguments and sides involved through utilising digital technology. That's about as much as you can do, beyond magically reinvigorating our current system and suddenly having a fully engaged populace. Some people, I suspect, will always be uninterested in politics and democracy.

Political campaigning

I'm not quite sure what "continuous election campaigning" actually means. But I imagine that if it means that citizens constantly feel like they're being sold vague promises and are exposed to endless party politics, they'll find it an enormous turn off. People want issues to be tackled and intelligent responses to be formulated, not to feel like they're being treated like a consumer pondering what brand of toothpaste to buy.

Anyway. Those are my two cents. I hope they were of some value!

Yours,

John Hunter
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