

Contribution from Michael Woodhouse

I would like to drop back to the repeated question of the lack of participation in politics in our country (and also worldwide). What causes voter apathy? A couple of the panel emphasised voting on "issues that mattered" was the most important part of re-engaging with voters, for example the Scottish referendum. This is of course a contributing factor, but I feel has missed a much larger issue that still needs to be addressed.

Put simply, an MP is supposed to represent the views of the people in their constituency. However, in most constituencies the majority of voters do not vote for the MP that wins.

This, above anything else will lead to voter apathy. This is beyond feeling that your voice hasn't been heard, this is your voice being given to somebody that you actively voted against. No wonder 40% of people don't consider this a worthwhile use of their time.

This is of course a simple case for proportional representation, no digital revolution required.

So where is digital important?

100 years ago parliament was limited in physical size and therefore number of MPs, they could also not easily and quickly gather information on the views of the public. I feel the main benefit of digital is the ability to connect many more people together, faster than was ever possible before and at a fraction of the cost. It is no longer necessary to limit the number of "MPs", those that do not fit into the building can easily interact via video conferencing. Eventually it may be possible to stop using the physical building all together.

Instead of discarding over half of the votes of the electorate, the people that were voted for can still be MP's. Their votes can still count (proportionally of course) and they can still be part of the debates. The first stages in this process are allowing electronic votes by MPs not at parliament at the time of voting and regular teleconferencing in parliament.

The other side of digital is online voting. This was discussed and I feel is generally considered a good thing that will happen in good time without a significant public backlash, it's cheaper and more convenient for many and can be implemented in stages, like postal voting. The only issue as I see with it is the problem with security. These concerns are easily alleviated if the software is well managed, open source and not outsourced to private companies. The US venture into digital polling booths and vote rigging claims should serve as a warning about implementation, not concept.

Once online voting becomes the norm it reduces the costs of holding a referendum to the level where it is feasible for everyone to vote on every bill if they wished. This of course is impractical for the majority of people with a normal life. However, say, monthly referendums would be easily justifiable or perhaps even a liquid democracy like system would be possible.

Any changes would of course need to be made incrementally via opt-in system to gain the trust of the people and MPs alike. This really should be the discussion of the decade. Take your time and make sure this is done right, taking everyone's views into account.

I'd be very interested in keeping up to date with future announcements and consultations from the commission, through whichever media you choose to use. Thank you for reading.

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