

Innovoting

Patrick

Wasn't it Churchill who said that democracy was the worst system of government - apart from all the others? Aside from what any of us think about politics, there is ample scope for reinventing many aspects of the election process itself.

Mark

Churchill also said 'The best argument against democracy is a five minute conversation with the average voter'. Although times have changed, I still think we need to make any new voting solutions as simplistic and foolproof as possible - a cross in a box is enough for some.

Patrick

People all over the world still travel to polling stations and make a pencil mark against the name of the candidate of their choice. In places without compulsory voting, only a minority of people actually take it seriously enough to present themselves. This business of bothering to turn out is probably important, however, since voting remotely doesn't involve the same level of commitment - somehow the votes are less significant if they aren't backed by people willing to turn up en masse (and maybe defend their right to vote if necessary).

Mark

I do not know if I agree with the importance put on the 'bothering to turn up to vote' view point mooted. There may be many other factors, other than apathy, why people do not vote with their feet. For example, family commitments, distance, cost and time restraints or, maybe they just have given up, because they feel all the parties are as bad as each other. If we found a more convenient and exciting way to cast a vote, encouraging a much bigger turn-out, it would have a dramatic effect on the outcome (as the majority rule systems we use can produce results not supported by the majority, if enough people do not vote) and would certainly be good for democracy.

Patrick

Just undertaking the journey to a polling station may be a difficult task. In countries where democracy is under threat, intimidation often skews turnout and election results in favour of some proto-dictator. This can be partly combatted by providing a way for people to enter a polling station unrecognised. My suggestion would be to provide **ballot papers printed on paper bags** that could be worn over the head of anyone frightened of being observed or filmed.

Mark

The voters would look more frightening than the observers, both sinister and comical at the same time - a 'Robber's Convention with a 'Keystone Cops theme', with everyone bumping into and falling over each other. False glasses/nose/moustache outfits are a healthier alternative and would certainly lighten tensions a little.

Patrick

Certainly some politicians are experts on farce. My MP has very little clue about the implications of some of the complex legislation he is required to assess and so I'd like candidates to undergo, and pass, an intelligence test. We demand that applicants for UK citizenship undergo exams, so surely an **online IQ test** is not unreasonable. I'd also like to see random drug testing for everyone seeking political office.

Mark

If not 'dumbed down' online IQ test results, if made public domain, could prove too damaging for some. The credibility of the exam would also be in question, even if avoiding self regulation and administered by a third party, as no system is failsafe or

free of political trickery. We should leave the exposay on drugs and drink to the Media - they have papers to sell and families to feed.

Patrick

In the UK, one invention I'd propose is an **electronic vote badge**, activated at a polling station, which allows the wearer to a) securely identify themselves to vote and b) indicate publicly that they have voted. This would confer some status and encourage others to do the same. It might also illustrate the number of elections the wearer had voted in during their lives. The badge could take the form of software, available to everyone to run on a cellphone. This would also provide access to video clips of celebrities and people in countries without voting rights, encouraging people to exercise their vote - to remind everyone not to take the whole thing for granted.

I'd also equip candidates with a **rosette-shaped badge** illustrating graphically their voting record and a number of other Key Performance Indicators (did someone mention expenses?). The old business of walking from door to door with leaflets and kissing babies at the last minute is an achronism. People could use their vote badge to electronically credit a candidate's rosette badge every time they appeared in their neighbourhood during a term of government and actually did something useful.

Mark

Badges/brooches are out of fashion, much like brown furniture, having the opposite effect in 'conferring some status and encourage others'. The cost to the public purse, at this critical time (when isn't it), to deliver a badge system as described, is prohibitive to say the least and it is adding complexity where it is not needed.

Patrick

Well, it's true that there is huge resistance to all change -even when it's for the better. Politicians, for example, still feel the need to make speeches...but speeches aren't usually interesting in an era where toeing the party line is required. Maybe they could be delivered via a **synthesiser that applied the voice of someone famous?** A pompous and/or vacuous speech would be even more obvious if recorded in the famous voice of a foreign footballer or a comedian with a strong regional accent.

Mark

Charles Dickens' Fagin 'You've got to pick-a-pocket or two' fame, from Oliver Twist, springs to mind. It is important for the electorate to get a true picture and feel for the candidates, before making any final decisions. We need more exposure from them, not hiding behind someone else's voice. I would also support a move to ban glasses and beards on politicians in the electoral phase, so they have nothing else to hide, warts and all.

Patrick

Well de-glassing and de-bearding image processing algorithms already exist which could be applied to the campaigning images of the facially cluttered -but that might seriously decrease turnout. Thankfully, we have rules in the UK about such political adverts. Another invention would be a **viral online documentary** talking about the tricks that politicians of all parties use to affect voter behaviour...get Michael Moore to make it.

Mark

Yes, as long as the format allows a live question time, where a Politician is administered with a true drug and cannot answer a question with a question, without the threat of an electric shock. Otherwise, we'll find ourselves in some kind of oppressive regime that uses water boarding.

Patrick

In areas where the political temperature runs very high, politicians need transport in safe vehicles where they can be seen and protected but without looking cossetted (and without costing the taxpayers). I'd make all the candidates in a given constituency travel around in the same '**battle bus**' -based on whatever local transport was available. This would encourage face to face debates, both on and off the vehicle, and remind certain aloof politicians what public transport is like.

Mark

Cattle carts are cheap!

Patrick

At budget time, the news media often run features describing what it will all mean for 'an average family'. We now have the capability to create a much more advanced simulator (with secure access to an individual's data such as income, expenses, voting history etc). A 3-D **scenario simulation program**, perhaps based on 'The Sims' could be used to display the effects of each party's manifesto (if carried through) on the electors in question. Only after watching a simulation of the effects of voting for each of three or four main parties would those parties be named -allowing less prejudice in polling.

Mark

The 'If Carried Through' Disclaimer is a good point. Maybe we should show four sets of figures - if 100%, 80%, 50% or 30% of the relevant party's policies are adopted, what would be the effect on the 'average family'?

Patrick

Ok, consider the humble **ballot box** itself. There are several upgrades which might be invented here. One would involve passing each ballot paper over a scanner before depositing it. This would buzz discretely if an internal camera couldn't discern, from the marks made, the candidate voted for. This might lessen the huge number of spoiled papers. Also, does the count really have to take an entire day and rely on the accuracy of human volunteers? There are places in which vote counting machines are used but their history (remember those 'hanging chads?') is an unhappy one. To get closer to real-time results, I'd suggest using a **reusable vote token** with a precise mass, fed through a close-fitting aperture (as in a car park ticket machine). This would be written on in the usual way but the count could consist of a precise and near instantaneous weighing of the ballot box.

One way to encourage participation would be to create a **big-prize lottery**, based on the polling cards presented at stations by electors (given the massive cost of the process, paying out a few extra million would be a good investment).

Mark

[Patrick, you can get cream for hanging chads] Actually, taking into account most of what you said above, e.g. ballot papers being scanned, avoiding spoiled papers and human error when counting, getting real time results and adding prizes for encouragement - There is a solution staring us in the face - commandeer '**The National Lottery**' System. Many countries have one, and they are a tried and tested safe bet, that has an entire infrastructure already in place. Ballot papers (looking very much like lottery tickets, but with only one box to mark), could be sent to all the electorate. For privacy, add a perforated end section (for removal by the voter) that indicates which boxes relate to the individual candidates. This will vary from ticket to ticket, so no one, should you ask someone else to vote for you (and the shopkeeper) would know who was voted for. Shops would like the extra footfall this created and the prizes on offer could come via the National Lottery itself (saving millions of pounds), where win-

ners are given £50,000 lots to donate to their chosen charity or good cause (terms and conditions apply). Even the most remotely located and infirmed people manage to get their lottery ticket, so why not a vote?

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