

Future-Proofing Democratic Institutions

Lottocracy as a Prophylactic Against Disinformation

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Abstract

I offer specific proposals for institutional change against the challenges posed by misinformation. I focus on four key areas where lottocratic transformations of existing US political institutions would stymie or dampen the threat posed by misinformation.

Lottocracy & Misinformation

There is a rich tradition in political philosophy of ‘election by lot’, which is commonly called *lottocracy* or, as a result of its use in the ancient Greek city of Athens, *sortition*. The salient characteristics of this system governance include not only election by lot but also dividing legislative tasks between multiple bodies and utilizing temporary and on-going fixed-term bodies in the decision-making process [2, 1]. I believe lottocratic transformations of existing US political institutions can mitigate the challenge posed by misinformation to the ‘epistemic capacities’ of democratic institutions. Below are my specific proposals.

1 Misaligned Incentives

Proposal: *Legislators cannot be re-elected*

Rationale: Misinformation often enables interest groups which are not aligned with public interests to capitalize on the inability of citizens to accurately reason about policies which may harm them. For example, if misinformation concerning the long-run effects of climate change causes key voting blocks in a democratic society to believe that energy policies should not punish CO₂-emitting industries then those industries can use their influence to sway legislators without fear of reprisal. If legislators cannot be re-elected, the ability of interest groups to sway them are lessened since ‘capturing’ legislators is harder then they rotate out of power more frequently.

2 Randomness & Representation

Proposal: *An additional 10% of legislators in the House of Representatives are randomly chosen citizens*

Proposal: *Each state gets an additional senator who is a randomly chosen citizens*

Rationale: Random selection into office is more likely to ensure a representative sample of the public hold power. Currently, “30 of the 535 members of Congress have a net worth of over \$2 million; 80% are male; 84% are white, and more than half are lawyers or businesspeople” [2, p9]. There are clear epistemic limits to decision-making bodies that lack diverse constituents [3]. Diversity in the legislative bodies of the US may be a potent prophylactic against misinformation.

3 Raising the Stakes for Political Participation

Proposal: *The tie-breaking vote in the senate is cast by a randomly selected adult*

Proposal: *Instead of aggregating ballots to determine the winner of an election, a single ballot is chosen to determine the outcome of all races (this is called ‘lottery voting’)*

Rationale: Much like the random selection into legislative office, by elevating ordinary members of the US public to the position of casting the decisive ballot on a senate bill or the winning vote in an election, the stakes for maintaining erroneous belief systems created by misinformation in the face of evidence grow. Similar to jury duty, random selection to office should come with penalties for misbehaviour and a level of scrutiny that befits the position. If the stakes for holding erroneous beliefs as a result of misinformation are negligible—as they are today—then increasing the stakes for holding these beliefs may result in their abandonment.

4 Misinformation as ‘Noise’

Proposal: *Create multiple, single-issue legislative bodies*

Proposal: *Legislators only vote on their subcommittees*

Rationale: The complexity of making informed policy decisions can be a daunting task for legislators and misinformation only renders this task even more challenging. By limiting the policy remit of legislators to specific issues they are better able to focus on the details and specifics of a given policy issue. This reduces their reliance on proxies, signals, and heuristics in policy areas they are less familiar with and thus directly combats the challenge of misinformation.

References

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank David Danks and Mason Broxham. This research was funded by an Fellowship from Center for Informed Democracy and Social-cybersecurity (IDeaS).