

ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY AS SOLUTION IN “NEW NORMAL” (PANDEMIC) CIRCUMSTANCES

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Abstract

Norberto Bobbio predicted a bright future for electronic democracy in the late 1980s. Pandemic circumstances have led us to think outside the box and about this thing.

The whole world was made to reconsider the circumstances of living so far and find the new ways of earning money, supplying of basic foodstuffs, keeping the process of education for kids in schools, and students in the universities etc. Finally, the right to vote and participate in decision-making came next.

In this paper we will analyze some of the most commonly used electoral systems in the world as well as ways of voting in decision-making processes, and find the ones that would be most effective to translate into their electronic form. Pandemia might be over in few months, but we think that we should be prepared for the next similar situation.

On the other side, we must consider electronic ways of voting and decision making as probably the most efficient way to make millennials- those born after 2000 who were born in era of internet, to go to the polls more, though those polls would be- electronic.

Key words: electronic democracy, pandemia, electoral systems, voting

1. Introduction

Direct democracy seems like a good idea- every citizen can (or must) say what he/she thinks about everything in their country, and not only on the referendums, but in every occasion where it needs to be decided something important in the country¹. This full participation of the citizens in the process of every political decision-making is kind of utopistic, because it requires their constant presence, full awareness and understanding of everything that is happening in the country. Norberto Bobbio in his book „*The Future of democracy- changing the rules of the game*“ said that it is really “childish”, to expect that kind of commitment of the citizens in decision-making processes. He just , rather ironically, added that „judging by the laws passed in Italy today, a good citizen should be invited to cast his vote at least once a day. ”². Having in mind that it is possible for voters to have their own voting strategies, „to make the

¹ *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, edited by Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker, Routledge, 2001, 224.

² Бобио, Н (1990) *Будућност демократије*, Београд, Филип Вишњић , 24. The book was first published in 80es of the XXth century, so, his irony refers to the then existing situation.

best use of their votes while predicting how other voters could vote“;³it makes a lot of trouble in making so called *confident choice*; the choice that is truly belonging to the voter only, and not given in order not to be misused. When citizens vote, they really want their votes to be count in, to matter. On the other side, voters who vote without any specific strategy⁴,but only „by their heart“, „waste“ their votes on political options that are otherwise not that powerful, and they help even more the concentration of votes on two to four centers of political power. If voting could be that often, it makes no sense, and even „not to be misused“ strategies for voting would fail-citizens would be tired of such enlarged need for their constant engagement and participation in voting, that they would , probably, very easily , give up this right.

This form of excessive (and constant) participation can produce a counter-effect and lead to an increase in *electoral apathy*, and also *decrease the interest in politics* and everything that has to do with the state’s affairs. The citizens, in addition to so much freedom given to them and recognized, would quickly begin to feel trapped and paradoxically unfree, and would like to get rid of the “democratic ballast” they received as soon as possible. Direct democracy is failing, then, although it is maybe theoretically considered as a way of completely accepting the responsibility of the citizens about everything that is happening in their country.

The question, which is increasingly being asked in the 21st century, and given the electoral apathy and reduced turnout in many countries, is *whether citizens want that responsibility at all*. The ruling individualist paradigm, which advocates focusing on the individual and the benefits the individual has from the system, essentially contains only the right to participate in political decision-making processes, not the obligation to do so. New generations, especially „millennials“, born in the new millennium, are the *sui generis* products of this paradigm and their abstinence in any election, at any level of government is the lowest.

In this article, we want to examine whether democracy, with all its manifestations, can motivate millennials, as well as citizens belonging to all other age groups, to become more actively involved in decision-making processes relevant to the country in which they live. Otherwise, democratic regimes are slowly sliding towards the introduction of aristocratic regimes, aristocratic type, which the majority will not be satisfied with - but it will be mostly the same majority that has given up the opportunity to participate more actively in creating their own state with their political apathy. In order to do so, we will shortly examine some challenges of e democracy, that are noticed so far.

³ Farquaharson, R, *Theory of Voting*, Yale University Press, 1969, 38-39.

⁴ The strategy here is a way of thinking that some voters have: they want to they attach their vote to the political option that has a chance to win, because they want to participate in the victory. Also, if many voters think that their vote isn’t that important, it could happen a massive dispersion of votes, which could probably result with a lot of political options having lots of votes but never enough to make government. Farquaharson, for example, mentions this several times in his book, mentioned in previous footnote.

We are aware that democracy, as Bobbio emphasized, broke a lot of given promises (especially to be the best kind of regime and the only way to overcome autocracy) and failed to do a lot of things in modern world. It maybe ruined its chances to be the best and the only one regime possible in the future. Some theorist think that democracy is just an illusion⁵, as in those large communities today, it is impossible to engage lots of people to be constantly involved in political decision making(and to understand fully what are they doing). Lots of people find this process of political decision making boring and useless, but they are on the other hand, rather willing to enjoy all the benefits that come from that process.

In the context of our work, the most important unfulfilled promise refers to one of Bobbio's broken promises on the education of citizens and mostly concerns their electoral apathy ⁶. Many efforts have been devoted to tackle key educational issues in digital environments in the 21st century, but seems that people simply ignore what they can do. Digital environment is improving, especially when it become (sort of) friendly environment for lots of people during the pandemics from 2020.,,Social distancing and restrictions on movement have forced parliaments to consider new methods of scrutiny, debate, and voting. The immediate challenge was simply to replicate existing procedures remotely, but the crisis has presented a unique window of opportunity to innovate⁴⁷. We have a chance to finally develop some new mechanisms in this area, which can endure the test of pandemic condition, which we hope are ending soon.

But some people's habits cannot be changed, even if it is obvious that their changing could improve their own life, make them more actively participate in decision making processes and give them their right to create a country for themselves, by themselves, right back away. The citizens must be more encouraged to be involved in those processes, even if that means that they should be intimidated by the loss of the individualism that has become so dear to them, and by the return to a paternalistic, submissive way of life. So, the question we are asking here is : *can internet save democracy?*⁸

2. What is e- democracy?

In literature we find different definitions of electronic democracy (ore-democracy). The term has been coined by digital activist Steven Clift ⁹, as combination of the words

⁵ Plamenac, Dž, *Demokratija i iluzija*, CID, Podgorica, 2006, 46-47.

⁶ The citizens themselves are the worst enemy to the democratic regime when they are building, if they fall into electoral apathy. Bobbio, 34.

⁷ Beacon, R., *How Covid-19 Is Accelerating the Rise of Digital Democracy*, *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, available on: <https://institute.global/policy/how-covid-19-accelerating-rise-digital-democracy>.

⁸ Levine, P., *Can the Internet Rescue Democracy? Toward an On-line Commons*, in : Ronald Hayduk and Kevin Mattson (eds.), *Democracy's Moment: Reforming the American: Political System for the 21st Century* (Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), pp. 121-137.

⁹ Steven Clift launched E-Democracy.org in 1994, and it was the world's first election information

electronic and democracy, in order to mark the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in political and governance processes. There are „minimalist“ and „maximalist“ definitions of digital democracy¹⁰. The minimalist definition focuses on giving citizens access to governmental information and enabling them to interact with government bodies for some consultations or for transactional services online. Some authors find that much of researches that’s been done in area of e-government covers the actual achievement of greater efficiency in the provision of rail services to citizens electronically, without physically visiting administrative centers. They think that increasing the satisfaction of citizens in this way solves all other challenges that they are facing, or perhaps citizens will not even be aware of those other challenges¹¹.

The maximalist definition goes even further, talking about more participatory role for citizens, enabling them to collaborate with government officials in processes of decision-making, and also giving them the opportunity to make their own decisions about how they and their local communities would be governed.

Berg and Hoffman, under the term of e-democracy understand „*a concept that links practices and institutions of collective political self-determination with its mediating digital infrastructures*“¹². These authors make a distinction between an analytical and a normative dimension. „*As an analytical lens, digital democracy investigates how the use of digital technologies may influence the conditions, institutions and practices of political engagement and democratic governance. As a normative concept, it enables us to think about democracy as an open, alterable form of political organisation that is always in the making. Its dynamics are on the one hand due to conflicting principles, interpretations, and aspirations endemic to the democratic idea, like freedom, equality, or popular sovereignty*“¹³.

Inside this definition, we find the term *e-government*, which presumes that governmental bodies have their own websites which they use for the promotion of their activities; that these e-activities became the obligation for almost every government body, from local up to national level increasing their visibility to the citizens and making their activities more accessible to the public; that governmental bodies are obligated to offer different services for the population, as well as the opportunity to participate in online discussions, comment on policy measures and bills, and even

website. His “government by day, citizen by night” insights were built as leader of the State of Minnesota’s first e-government initiative. During the term of US President Barack Obama, he was declared White House Champion of Change. More about his initiative and how it grew till now, on the site : <http://forums.e-democracy.org/>

¹⁰ Simon, J. et alia(2017), Digital Democracy- The tools transforming political engagement, pg 11, available on : https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/digital_democracy.pdf. **Access to all sites used in this article was in May-Jun 2022.**

¹¹ Natalie C. Helbig et alia, Understanding the Complexity in Electronic Government: , Implications from the Digital Divide literature, *Proceedings of the Eleventh Americas Conference on Information Systems*, Omaha, NE, USA August 11th -14th 2005, 3-4.

¹² Berg, S., Hofmann, J. (2021)Digital democracy. *Internet Policy Review*, 10(4). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2021.4.1612>

¹³ Ibid.

vote over the Internet on elections¹⁴. E-government is just one of the three types of e-democracy interaction :

- *one-way information provision*(the pure e'government, mentioned earlier);
- *a two-way relationship* where citizens have opportunity to give feedback on issues(although there are no guarantees that their feedback will be given into the count);
- *a partnership relation*, where citizens are actively engaged in policy-making, in all processes that are important, and therefore approaches to direct or immediate democracy.

It seems that nowadays e-government is mostly focused on providing services and informations to citizens , but not is obligated to involve them a lot in processes of decision making. More determined shift to e-democracy would in effect devolve political power from elected representatives to the individual¹⁵, which absolutely corresponds to that individualistic paradigm mentioned earlier in the paper.

Internet provides us with lots of informations about politics, elections, politicians themselves¹⁶. It became the primary source for being informed about everything and everybody (there have been also lots of disinformations, but debunking them would be great topic for special article). Especially young people(voters) depend on social networks and informations there found, so , if properly engaged, they could be the fresh political power that could change a lot.

The COVID- 19 pandemic has additionally served as a corrective to the bad or non-existent digital (electronic) habits of people in different parts of the world. More than ever, we needed the Internet as well as other electronic media for the transmission of informations, because through them we could only find out when and where we are allowed to move safely, how to get basic groceries, how to register for an exam or write an essay through various educational platforms ... The

¹⁴ Netchaeva, I.(2018)E-government and E-democracy:A Comparison of Opportunities in theNorth and South, *Gazzete: the international journal for communication studies*,64(5), 467-468.

¹⁵ As Giovanni Sartori has said, it makes demos directly decides on individual issues, no longer together, but separately and in solitude. Сартори, Ђ. (2001) Демократија, шта је то, Подгорица,ЦИД, рг 140.

¹⁶ After gaining the official facebook sites, most of the politicians in the world have accounts on Twitter and Instagram. In most of the cases, they do not run their own social media accounts but a whole team of people are doing it. Sometimes when they really share their own thought, those post on social media are signed with their initials, like Donald Trump did. He had his own personal account on Twitter , which he retained after being elected president of the United States. On it, he communicated his personal thoughts, ideas and directly in communication with his followers, especially with opponents, while on the official account of POTUS (President of the US) he occasionally personally wrote and tweeted -those tweets were signed with his initials. Otherwise the account was run by people from his PR service. Barack Obama also uses often Twitter account(as president of the USA he used account @POTUS44,his private account is @BarackObama) as well as Justin Trudeau, Canadian prime minister(@JustinTrudeau) . The example of great internet campaign, that was made on the social networks was the one made by Alexandra Ocasio Cortez,in NY-14 district in USA, who got her second Congress mandate while using all social networks(especially on Twitter, her account is @AOC) and services she could, to the fullest. She always personally answers to everyone who interacts with her on her social network accounts.

previous two, almost three years of pandemic life have opened up opportunities for a stronger establishment of e-democracy as a way of faster and more efficient sharing information and participation of citizens in decision-making concerning themselves¹⁷. Why this opportunity was missed earlier- at least as an opportunity to develop and re-popularize this concept. Where is the catch? What are we feared of, or doubt in ?

3. Reasons for doubts in e-democracy

“Every new communication technology, from the telegraph to cable television, it seems to have been the trigger for a wave of enthusiasm when it comes to the potential of communication technology to transform democracy”¹⁸. That transformation has a tactical and a strategical side, thinks Janet Caldw. *Tactical side* means that information technologies enhance access to all sorts of informations, which is important, as we want to have „informed and engaged citizenry“¹⁹. Governments mostly inform their citizens via digital communication about their work, but it doesn't mean that the citizens are actively engaged in decision- making processes. So, governments are informing the citizens, *not involving* them into those processes. This is where the *strategic aspect of e-democracy* becomes important: it is not enough to just give information to citizens, but they should *be motivated and inspired* by the use of internet technologies to get involved in decision-making processes at the state or local level.

The Institute for Electronic Government developed an interesting quadrant combining the intensity of two major components-e- engagment and influence. Quadrant One depicts passive way of using internet- searching for informations, and for other formal data regarding governmental bodies, while Quadrant Four depicts full two- way interaction and cooperation between citizens and government²⁰. Moving around this quadrant shows the improvement of democratic processes in the Internet environment and the learning of new knowledge and skills by citizens and institutions, and could be used as usefull instrument in enhances all sides in this process.

Every change in any sphere of life causes a certain fear. Living in a familiar space, where the rules of the game are known, and the consequences of doing or not doing is too tempting to leave and embark on a permanent adventure called democracy, profitable voting exclusively online. There are some real challenges that *justifiably frighten users*, such as:

¹⁷ Valuable informations about e democracy and its handling in pandemic conditions could be found in article: Engler,S. Et alia, Democracy in times of the pandemic: explaining the variation of COVID-19 policies across European democracies, *West European Politics*,2021, 44:5-6, 1077-1102

¹⁸ Dahlberg, L(2001) *Democracy via cyber space*, *New Media and Society*, Vol. 3(2), 158.

¹⁹ Caldw, J, e-Democracy: Putting Down Global Roots, 2004, available on: <http://www-01.ibm.com/industries/government/ieg/pdf/e-democracy%20putting%20down%20roots.pdf>

²⁰ More about this quadrant and its usefulness in: Caldw, J, e-Democracy: Putting Down Global Roots, 2004,8.

- ***Cryptographic verification of data***, ie. votes that have been submitted thru any voting platform²¹. Thru process of verification, votes have been recorded, tallied and declared correctly, independently from the hardware and software running the election. Every voter must have a chance to check whether his/her votes included in the election outcome. Also it is very important to check that each vote was cast by a uniquely registered voter. Could that cryptographic verification be broken? Yes, indeed, and it could duplicate original single votes cast by individuals or not memorize the votes at all²², as it was proven in public-interest lawsuit, that was taken in October 2004 by a group of public-interest plaintiffs, represented by Professor Penny Venetis of the Rutgers Law School. They all sued the State of New Jersey (in NJ Superior Court) over the State's use of direct-recording electronic (DRE)voting machines in New Jersey, which was by the independent research proven as fraudulent system. The researchers found out that this system can be “easily hacked, by the installation of fraudulent firmware...and this is easily hacked, by the installation of fraudulent firmware”²³. Easy hacking cancels all previously set verification protocols. Is it possible to build a non-hackable system? Probably yes, but when and how?
- ***Preserving personal data of voters***, which are even more valuable than their votes themselves. It is a crucial matter of cyber security²⁴. Identity theft has become commonplace. On the other side, we are sharing lots of personal informations on our social networks' accounts. Why do we fear theft of our personal data in process of voting? The Rousseau platform, used by Italian party Five Stars as a place for citizens' full engagement, has been widely criticised after it was attacked by hackers and failed to protect its users' data. Due to “political divorce “ of family Casaleggio²⁵, who were administrating this platform, and the movement Five Stars, all personal data of citizens who voted and actively were engaged in some decision making processes on this platform are somewhere lost. The platform is on “guest mode”, no one can access to their data left on this platform or erase his/her personal data²⁶.

²¹ Kho, Y.-X.; Heng, S.-H.; Chin, J.-J. (2022) A Review of Cryptographic Electronic Voting. *Symmetry*, 14, 858. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sym14050858>

²² The voting system in Finland had a usability problem where the messages were ambiguous on whether the vote had been cast, or who casted the vote at all. So the election were run again. Whitmore, K. INFORMATION REPORT ON THE ELECTRONIC VOTING IN THE FINNISH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, observed on 26 October 2008, available on : <https://rm.coe.int/090000168071adcf>.

²³ Appel, W.A, et alia, The New Jersey Voting-machine Lawsuit and the AVC Advantage DRE Voting Machine, available on : https://static.usenix.org/events/evtvote09/tech/full_papers/appel.pdf.

²⁴ During the New South Wales state election in 2015, over 66,000 electronic votes could have been compromised: The server with personal data of voters and casted votes was under the attack. More about it on : <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/mar/23/nsw-election-result-could-be-challenged-over-ivote-security-flaw>.

²⁵ Father, Gianroberto Casaleggio invented this platform; his son Davide, managed it after father's death in 2016.

²⁶ Genealogy of the case : Hanna Roberts, Italy's 5Stars struggle to reboot after losing online platform,

- **Digital inclusion**- if voting is solely electronic, or mostly electronic, the country must provide the best and reliable signal of internet around the country by itself or to have special agreements with mobile and other internet providers, in order to ensure equal coverage and strength of the Internet signal to all voters, especially at the time of voting²⁷. We face with syndrome of *digital divide*-that refers to the gaps in access to information and communication technology²⁸. We want the world of equal individuals, and in order to have them engaged in everything important to them, we are paradoxically dividing them on the basis of the same criteria that should be maintained to enable them a better life-on the basis of internet. It seems that e-democracy shouldn't be the only way of citizens' engagement, but the government must involve themselves more in real world, in live connection B2B with their possible voters, and defeat all those *zone of deafness*²⁹, while promoting and improving the conditions for the electronic functioning of the state
- **Voter intent**-what if voter is indecisive? In live voting, the voter can change his mind, cross out the name of the candidate he has already circled and circle another. Or in systems where voting is multiple³⁰, ie where a voter can vote for more than one candidate at a time - what if he changes his mind and decides to vote for at least two that are different from the ones voted so far? If the cryptographic verification for the single caste vote was done, there is no possibility to change that. And not all voters are that politically intelligent, but they have equal right to change their mind always.

available on : <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-5starts-online-platform-rousseau-crisis/> ; Italy's 5-Stars split with core 'direct democracy' platform, available on: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/italys-5stars-split-with-core-direct-democracy-platform-giuseppe-conte-italy-rousseau-beppe-grillo-rome-b1836646.html> ; Michele Barbero , Italy's failed digital democracy dream is a warning, available on: <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/italy-five-star-rousseau-online> .

²⁷ For example, in Estonia, every citizen possesses an electronic chip-enabled ID card, which allows him/her to vote over the internet. The ID card is inserted into a card reader, which is connected to a computer. Once his/her identity is verified he/she can then cast his/her vote via the internet. Votes are not final, until the end of the election day, so indecive voter can change his/her mind and change his /her vote during the election day countless times not considered final until the end of election day. This way of voting became very popular in the elections of 2014 and 2015, when almost one third of Estonian voters voted online, and in 2019. election, almost 44 %of voters voted online. More about it on: <https://rk2019.valimised.ee/en/voting-result/voting-result-main.html>.

²⁸ More about it in : *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement*, OECD, 2003, 58-62.

²⁹ Even though we are in 21st century, there are still some areas with people that are fullz disconnected from the rest of the world and most of the channels of communications. More about this issue in Uganda, on the same report of OECD, : *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement*,155-160.

³⁰ Such as the block vote system, or limited vote system. More about those systems : *Electoral systems*; <https://aceproject.org/main/english/es/ese02.htm>

- **Transparency of e- voting system**, ie possibility of electronic, mechanical, or other errors and fraud³¹. All machines are built by people, who are not perfect. It means, even the most perfect system could have or create later any *bug*, that could crash the whole system, mix or erase already casted votes, or voter's data and ruin fragile trust in the whole electronic system.
- **Government responsiveness**, or how much electronic votes or electronic participation of citizens in processes of decision making really counts. It is not enough to just secure all the above mentioned items and say, we have e-democracy. It is necessary for the state to understand that citizens should be actively involved in its actions and that it is important to always respond to all their comments and suggestions - if they are accepted, why are they accepted; if they aren't accepted, why some suggestion aren't accepted. E democracy is not one way street, but *rather wide boulevard with a lot of lanes*. After all, goverment responsiveness to citizens' comments and claims could be the most important ways in gaining again trust of citizens, that their opinion really matter to the state³².
- **Level of civic engagement**. It means that citizens who want to involve actively in this issue, must have at least good political knowledge and understanding of public affairs, political trust for the political system, and political participation in influencing the government and the decision-making process³³. On the contrary, we could have a crowd that thinks it knows something, and eventually can do a little, but wrong or nothing. Public discussions are valuable to both parties in this strange relationship- to the state and to the citizens. The citizens got their place to be heard , the state got the justification to themselves and to the citizens that they have included them in decision-making processes.

³¹ In 2010, hackers which were graduate students with their university professor hacked the District of Columbia's online voting system and changed all votes casted for the real candidate to be the votes of –imaginary candidate. Electoral comitee didn't find out about this for whole two day. More about it: <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/09/us/politics/09vote.html> and on : <https://alumni.umich.edu/michigan-alum/hacking-the-vote/>

³² „In 2002, Gallup organised a mammoth poll on the degree of trust of those questioned in 17 social 'institutions' – from the army and trade unions to parliament and multinationals. This involved questioning 36,000 people in 47 countries. Of all institutions, parliaments appeared to enjoy the least trust: an average of 51% of people had little to no trust, whereas only 38% had a moderate to high level of trust“. Verhulst J., Nijeboer A., *Direct Democracy Facts and Arguments about the Introduction of Initiative and Referendum*, Democracy International, Brussels 2007, 8.

³³ Five Star Movement was formed in 2011 in Italy and was specific because of its internet platform (Rouso platform), where their members had lots of opportunities to involve in law making processes, voting whetet that political movement should join other political aprties in order to make coalitions.. All momebers of the movement were highly professionally and politically educated, by themselves or by the politicians from this movement. If they woudn't? More about it: *A top leader of Italy's Five Star Movement: Why we won*, available on : <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldpost/wp/2018/03/19/five-star/>

Enhancing the level of civic engagement “would challenge the stereotype of citizens being intolerant and ignorant”³⁴. But is there a danger if citizens become very interested in decision-making processes, and want to be involved in everything, whether they have knowledge or understanding of processes they are deciding of? According to some author, we can have then electoral involatility, democratic instability or, in a way, democratic deficit-paradoxically created by democracy itself (deficit will come as a result of constant opinion changing and frequent mutual struggles to achieve some majority opinion)³⁵

- **Youth participation.** The millennials are the hardest to be drawn into pools and voting processes. Their agenda (for most of them) is very simple, they want good jobs with relatively little effort, they want them immediately or very quickly, they prefer informal to formal education, and they want to travel the world. Going to the polls and voting in some boxes is of little or no interest to them, even when they are offered the green agenda or the agenda of human rights parties, especially minority rights, as political options in elections³⁶. Because internet was there when they were born, and because they do not remember any moment without internet, it seems that e-democracy can turn another page in democratic education and participation in whole when it comes to millennials.

When pandemia occurred, young people (under the age of 30 especially) were set to survive in this virtual imitation of life that we had intensively for almost two years. And they were better in adapting to new living conditions. Making them involve into political decision-making processes can widen up their perspectives. But is the use of internet really needed to make the process of decision-making more convenient for millennials and inspire them to actively involve here? Levine thinks it can, only if they have the secure internet connection at home. “*Clearly, the Internet can make political and civic participation more convenient and less time-consuming by bringing certain activities right into people’s homes*”³⁷.

- **Direct or representative democracy?** We should focus also on this question, whether it didn’t seem that crucial at the beginning. If we choose e-democracy as a way of voting in elections for representative bodies (legislative bodies) and the president of the country, as well as at lower levels of government, again for the purpose of electing the highest representatives of government at those levels, then democracy will be exclusively a digital version of existing participatory democracy. Better to have a virtual assembly than no assembly at all? And would it be all inclusive as it could be when done lively?

³⁴ *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, 227.

³⁵ *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, 170-227.

³⁶ Those were the results of some researches back to 1999/2000: „Studies of young peoples’ attitudes to political practice have shown widespread disregard for conventional politics, but also widespread dissatisfaction with their lack of involvement“, which is paradox. More about it in: *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement*, OECD, 2003, 65-70.

³⁷ Levine, 123.

If the participation of citizens increases, and introduces, for example, as mandatory in legislative processes at any level of government in the country, if citizens receive greater authority in the drafting process (say, it is possible to send a bill electronically to the legislature, without painstaking and physically hard collecting thousands of signatures of citizens), also that citizens actively participate in the election of judges and other officials -then we can have direct democracy. But it will last, endlessly long³⁸. However, this direct democracy can also have its downside. The excessive participation of citizens, mentioned by Bobbio, can lead to even greater participatory apathy of citizens or even to anarchy³⁹. Abuses are also possible, especially in the context of modern *cancel culture*, where the masses can very easily *cancel* someone's existence, first in the virtual world which have repercussions on real life.

Some concluding remarks

The right measure of democracy and balance between political power and citizens' power are difficult to achieve, because the internet has already taken over all spheres of our lives. The main reasons for wider introduction of e-democracy in our lives still can be that it is chipper, more effective and that it can move younger voters finally to the voting and decision making processes. On the other side, e-democracy is not that safe way of participation, every digital solution can be hacked and made unsafe, and it doesn't make feel comfortable most of the voters that usually come to pools.

There is a hope , that if democracy which we knew broke all the promises, this new wave of changed democracy wouldn't broke that much promises, because it didn't made them. New normal world belongs to tech radicalists "*who believe technology could radically transform democracy either through the use of advanced technological tools or via an entirely new operating system*"⁴⁰.

Could e-democracy, in its fullest meaning be the new political mechanism in divided, pandemic frightened world? Could it really establish new political, voting and decision-making era, and significantly increase the participation of millennials in those processes?

We think after this short overview that it could. Overcoming mentioned obstacles wouldn't be that easy, but it is achievable only if all sides in this processes do their best in order to established more balanced, politically engaged society. Strange thing that remains, is that we understood all benefits from informational technologies then we they were the only way for us to survive.

³⁸ Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought, 226.

³⁹ More about this argumentation: Asimakopoulos, J., The Ragged Edge of Anarchy: Direct Democracy, Theory in Action, Vol. 13, No. 1, January 2020, 161-188

⁴⁰ **Beacon , R. , *What Is the State of Debate on Digital Democracy?*** Paper posted on: 10th June 2021 , available on : <https://institute.global/policy/what-state-debate-digital-democracy>

Democracy must be seen as a form of common life in a community that is only worthwhile if some political liberal freedoms are actively used, if all citizens enjoy these freedoms unhindered and if everyone (both citizens and the state) contributes to their further development. E-democracy is just a modern appearance form of democracy itself. The awakening of democracy, which was started in the ancient period, in order to periodically appear like a phoenix after terrible historical periods, in the 21st century must overcome the growing individualism and re-establish the collective spirit and the sense of the importance of the individual act for the whole community. Otherwise, democracy, whether implemented live or electronically, will sing its swan song as a political regime.

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