

# **Digital Frontiers Seminar: Citizen Participation in Policy Development and the “Democracy Machine”**

**Thursday, 22 June 2017**

**Seminar Room 2-1, Level 2, Manasseh Meyer Building**

# Democracy Machine and Deliberative Engagement

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# IPS Digital Frontiers Seminar: Citizen Participation in Policy Development and the “Democracy Machine”

Exploring the present  
and future of online engagement

June 22, 2017

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1. The basic idea
2. Why we need this
3. How it would work
4. The obstacles it faces

The basic idea

# The basic idea of a “democracy machine”

- Government and nonprofits need to develop better opportunities for ongoing online citizen engagement and public consultation.
- The “Democracy Machine” would be a web-based database/service that integrates the best digital tools and social media platforms to make a powerful online public space.
- Government consultation fees would pay for the Machine’s continuous development (e.g., adding new tools, improving interoperability).

Why we need this

# An integrated online platform can help tackle basic problems of self-government.

- Government often has a public participation mandate, but it needs a more reliable and affordable methods for eliciting **reflective and representative public input**.
- Citizens, particularly digital natives, need more compelling online opportunities for civic engagement to sustain **long-term participation**.
- Citizens have become more disconnected from their governments and their political opponents, which undermines **government legitimacy** and citizens' **political self-confidence** (or “**efficacy**”).



# It also addresses less obvious problems.

- Many govt. officials and citizens have lost confidence in traditional consultation methods (e.g., polling and in-person public meetings).
- Dominant social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp) and integrated web services (e.g., Google) will soon build a quasi-civic commons, with an underlying corporate profit motive.
- If government, universities, and nonprofits collaborate to build a stronger civic commons, it could offer better user privacy, transparent code/algorithms, and research opportunities.

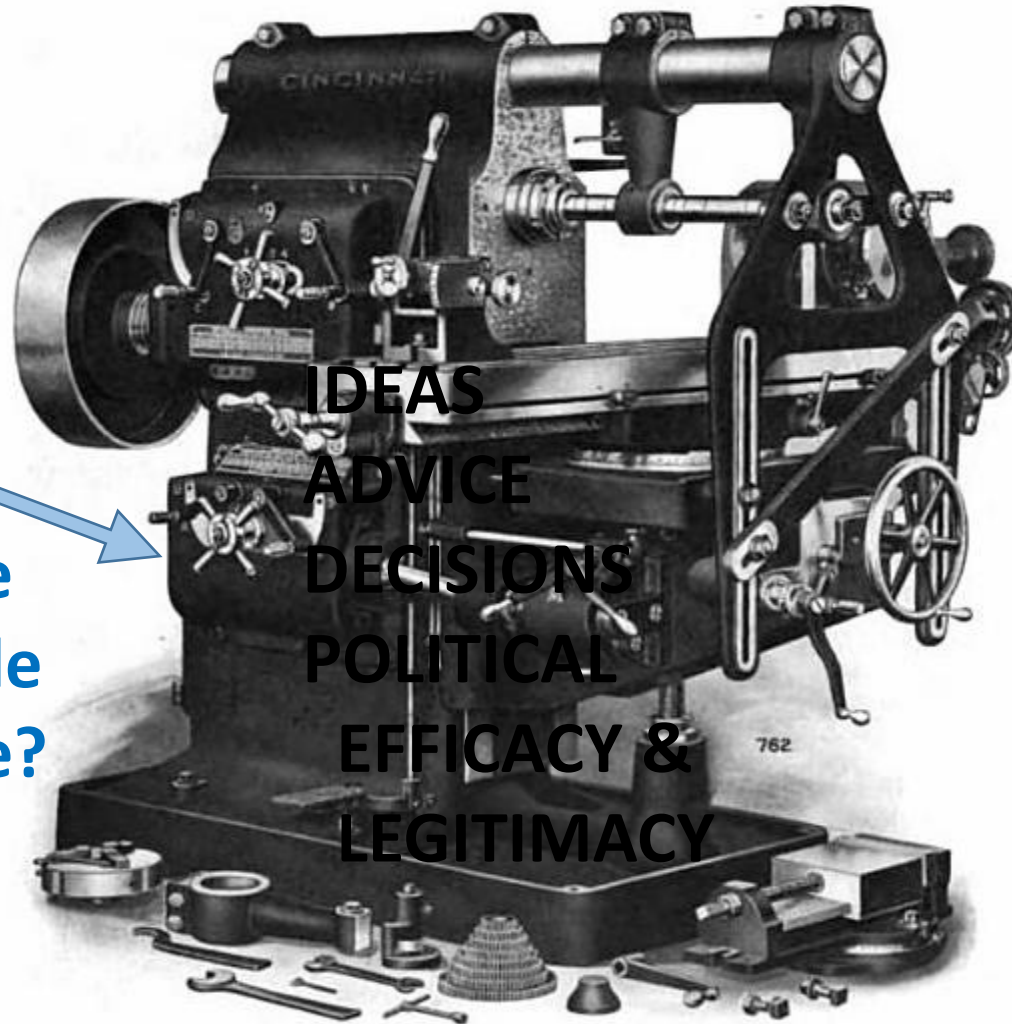
How it would work

# Democracy Machine inputs and outputs.

**GOVT.**

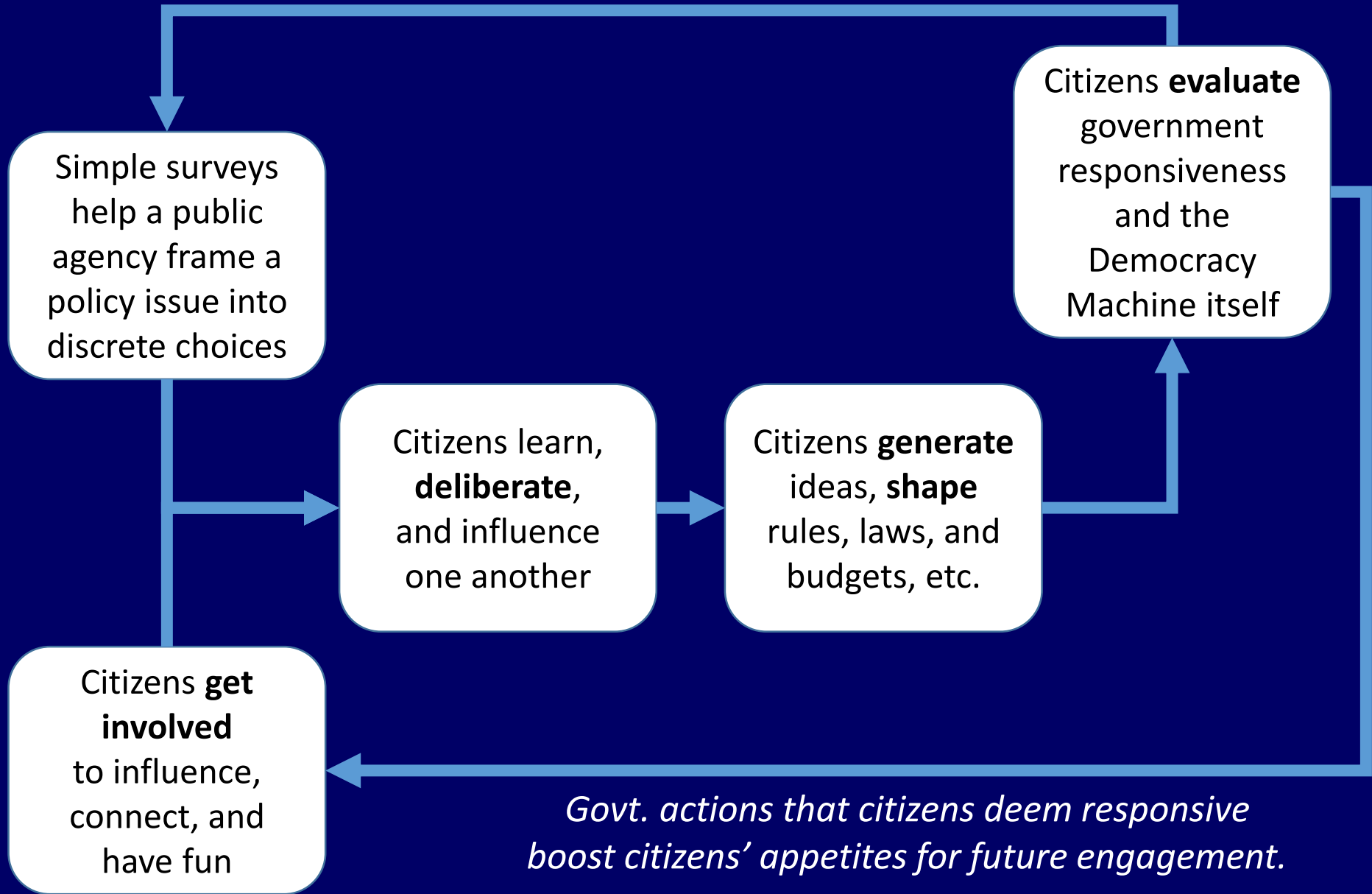
**CITIZENS**

**What is the  
*process* inside  
the Machine?**

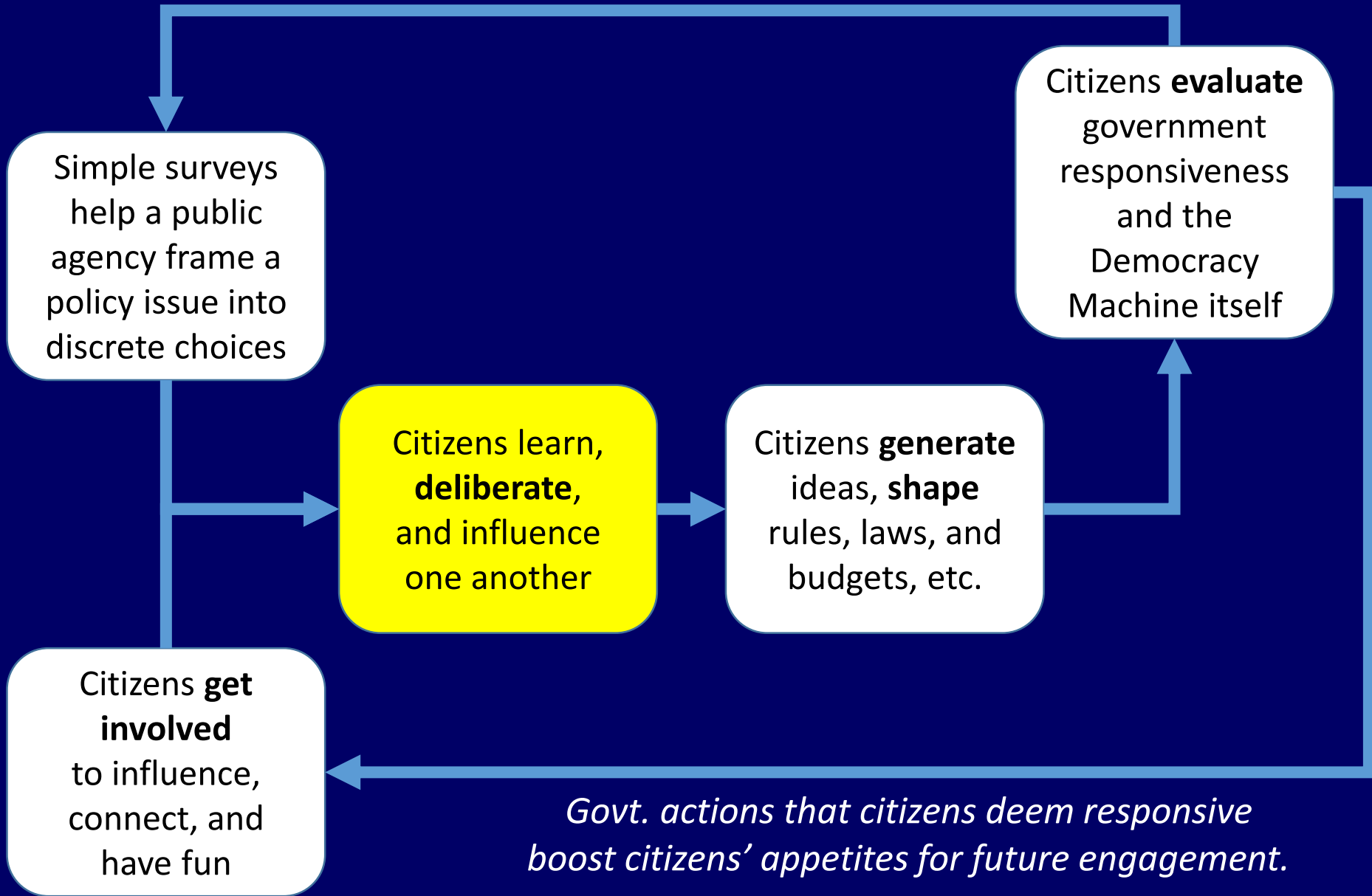


**IDEAS  
ADVICE  
DECISIONS  
POLITICAL  
EFFICACY &  
LEGITIMACY**

*Favorable evaluations boost govt. legitimacy.*



*Favorable evaluations boost govt. legitimacy.*



# Citizens deliberate together in small groups to identify common ground.

common ground

LOBBY | Health Care: How Can We Reduce Costs and Still Get the Care We Need? Forum ID: 116-698-400 Amy

### Message from the Moderator

Welcome to our Common Ground for Action forum. You can browse the tabs in the center column for information about the issue we'll be discussing. Use the chat window (below) to communicate with everyone in the forum, or whisper (in the blue box) to send a message to an individual. \*Note that all whispers are visible to the Moderator.

### Group Chat

Okie

Kenny McGuane Amy

Jackie Spurlock has joined the forum

System Message

Johanna Adams has joined the forum

System Message

Hi Jackie and Johanna!

Kenny McGuane

Hello All.

Johanna Adams

I'm your moderator for today. We'll be getting started soon.

In the meantime, you can watch the How To Play Video up top, as well as the intro video for the issue we're going to be talking about today.

Kenny McGuane

Enter your chat to the group here

Kenny McGuane

Select a recipient and enter your whisper here

### How-To Video

## Common Ground for Action - How To Participate

# Common Ground for Action

## How to Participate

05:14 HD vimeo

### Issue Details

INTRODUCTION DESCRIPTION

## Health Care: How Can We Reduce Costs and Still Get the Care We Need? (Introduction)

from Common Ground for Action

NATIONAL SECURITY

01:52 vimeo

### Guest List

#### MODERATORS

Kenny McGuane

#### PARTICIPANTS

Amy

Carla Michalak

Jackie Spurlock

Johanna Adams

Open Slot

Open Slot

Open Slot

Open Slot

# Citizens deliberate together in small groups to identify common ground.

common ground FORUM RESULTS Health Care: How Can We Reduce Costs and Still Get the Care We Need? Forum ID: 116-698-400 Amy

Group Chat

Kenny McGuane

yes.

Ronald Hustedde

So, now we're looking at our examinations of all three options together. The actions that are in the center are ones that had a high measure of agreement, plus strong support and acceptance of the drawback.

The other actions fall elsewhere in the map depending on how strong or mixed their support and agreement were.

So take a look, remember this is just a starting point for us to talk.

What do we think about the actions in Common Ground? Does this seem to represent our conversation?

Common Ground

FORUM PROGRESS: Getting Started Option 1 Option 2 Option 3 Common Ground

Option 1: As a Nation and as Individuals, We Need to Live Within our Means

Option 2: Make the Health Care System More Transparent, Efficient, and Accountable

Option 3: Take Responsibility for Lowering Health Care Costs by Focusing on Wellness

AGREEMENT

100%

SUPPORT

COMMON GROUND

Action K

Support: 79.2% Agreement: 71.4%

Government could eliminate subsidies for crops such as corn because of their uses in inexpensive and unhealthy fast foods.

**Drawback K1**  
Removing subsidies would hurt farmers. Not all farms are suitable for growing fruit or organic vegetables.

Group Final Top 5

- L Schools should restore physical education classes.
- N Businesses could institute wellness programs and reward
- F Doctors and hospitals could fully adopt electronic patient records
- H Government could forbid drug companies from advertising
- J Doctors and hospitals could post prices so that patients could make

Support Per Option

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
A	A	F	L
E	E	H	N
D	D	J	K
C	C	G	M
B	B	I	O

Satisfaction Survey

If we implemented all the actions in the Common Ground, could you live with this?

☹️ 😐 😊

# Citizens accumulate credits...



Playing collaboration games

Success in prediction markets and quizzes

Thoughtfully completing deliberative surveys on issues, proposed rules/laws

Deliberating with others, esp. when favorably evaluated in diverse groups

*...and more. But not purchased/exchanged.*



...and spend credits in the Machine.

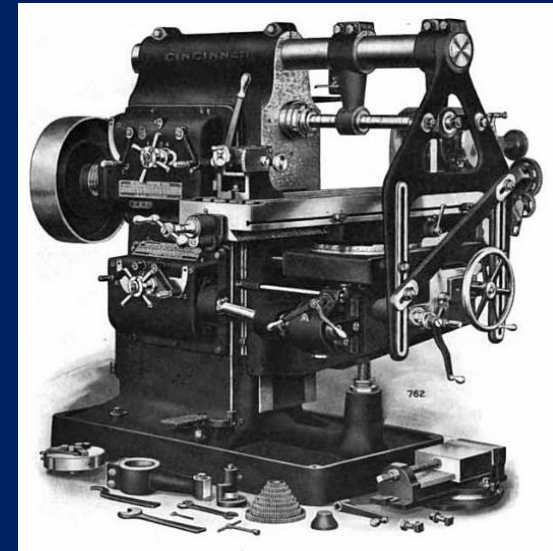
Voting on proposals

Placing and ranking items on the agenda

Initiating and signing petitions

Allocating Machine surplus

*...and more, including  
Leveling up*



## Requirement

## Unlocks activities

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | Registered user account   | Games and surveys  |
| 2 | Credit threshold  | Focus groups and deliberations   |
| 3 | Deliberation threshold  | Join an alliance   |
| 4 | Voter reg. verification   | Host deliberations, take impact surveys  |
| 5 | Hosting threshold   | Form new alliances, serve as alliance officer, and recruit/boot new members  |
| 6 | Recruitment threshold<br>Relinquish anonymity                     | Forge coalitions among alliances<br>Help to prioritize existing agenda items   |
| 7 | Credit threshold<br>Local board review                            | Bring issues to the agenda<br>Help to frame issues on the agenda   |
| 8 | Nominated by diverse coalition members<br>Peer feedback threshold | Public outreach on behalf Machine<br>Recruit public officials to feed Machine<br>Eligible to serve on local and state boards |
| 9 | Randomly selected from Level 8 district members                   | Eligible to serve on the national board<br>Advise in the Machine's development   |

Alliances, coalitions, and quests cause citizens to forge complex social ties.

Citizens forge alliances, often with those who share common values and backgrounds.

Quests award credits if citizens can recruit new registrations to diversify their alliance.

Alliances get credit for forging coalitions that bring together divergent alliances.

Coalitions gain even more credit by deliberating together to find common ground.

Additional feedback loops could form.

Favorable citizen evaluation of responsiveness grants agencies discounts on next usage.

Public officials with strong track-records get public endorsements and support.

Citizens will voluntarily invest sweat equity to help local and national projects they chose.

Each project cycle increases our civic capacity (skills, knowledge, empathy, etc.).

A robust online civic sphere could help strengthen the most important offline public spaces.

Obstacles to surmount

# Inclusion problems

- Even with paid random samples and demographic weighting, online discussion will never be **representative** of the larger public.
- The more inclusive, participatory, and flexible the system becomes, the more likely it will produce a non-deliberative “**tyranny of the masses.**”
- There’s no realistic way to people make accountable by requiring real identities while still ensuring their **personal privacy.**
- If forced to use real identities, members of marginalized groups will be more likely to **self-censor** and skew the results.

# Failure to deliberate

- Not even Uber-like incentives can get citizens to **listen and show respect** to one another during political discussions.
- **Partisan tribal affiliations** will drive what participants say and do in this space, making deliberation impossible.
- Even the best online interaction spaces lack the **strong social cues** that spark dialogue and deliberation in face-to-face settings.
- This project will further **degrade face-to-face interaction** and offline public spaces, such as town meetings and public forums.

# Sabotage

- Civic organizations and political parties will work to **delegitimize** this project if it undermines their existing influence strategies.
- If the project flexes political muscle, special interests and partisan groups will **capture** it no less than they do any other process.
- **Mischief makers and grievers** will find a way to undermine this project as soon as it gets on their radar. See: Boaty McBoatface.
- Russia (and others) will **hack** this project to bits and make public any private data within it. This is why the Internet can't have nice things.



# So, where to begin?

Use existing technology to build the Machine.

Work with experienced and innovative govts.

Start locally, build density, expand.



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