

The (mis)interpretation of democracy

The foundation of democracy is egalitarianism, meaning all people have an equally valued opinion as a vote. According to the classical view, egalitarianism reflects legal and moral equality and, throughout the course of history, it has been the ultimate aim of some to achieve this goal. However, the founders of democracy, the Ancient Greeks, did not generalise on its broad scope, shutting out many groups including women, slaves and the sick. Its roots in the differences of social value is well-known but the theoretical aspects of the system could have left behind the segregation as well.

The practical implementation of democracy is voting to make a fair choice between the various options available resulting in the application of that which gains the most support. But in order to make this concept work in the long term, and to help in avoiding catastrophic outcomes, egalitarianism should be interpreted differently than above. It is not an equal vote by people as in law and moral judgements but only equal potential in decision-making. Unfortunately, this equal potential as a fundamental requirement cannot be fulfilled, as explained by the following objective reasons.

Decision-making has two base pillars: intellect and knowledge. Depending on the combination of these at a given point, which I call the decision threshold, a person can make an informed and responsible choice.

Every problem then has its own understanding threshold depending on its complexity; If a person's decision threshold does not come up to the understanding threshold then

Contrary to common belief, the goal of democracy is not to find the optimal solution. This is simply an expectation that every person with a good mindset should desire. The goal is to find the choice which is supported by the majority. Different minority groups present various choices – there is no guarantee at all that it includes the best possible option – and a broad understanding of democracy is desirable at this level as we have to be open to all solutions at this preparation phase. The phase for the majority to choose and they not necessarily capable of deciding what is best as it might require special knowledge. Nevertheless, a choice has to be made and by choosing well we return to the subject of decision and understanding thresholds.

he or she cannot be seen as qualified to make a responsible choice. If they are still forced to decide, the further one resides below the understanding threshold the greater will be the emotional influence, which could result in a decision that departs wildly from fact and reality.

The first pillar of decision-making – intellect – is the naturally inherited feature of all people. This cannot be altered¹. It is what we have to live with but, like every biological feature (eg. foot-size, thermo-tolerance), intelligence is not uniform across the population. It is symmetrically distributed along a bell shaped curve, called normal distribution. The average of all individuals give the population average which is

1 That is not completely true, some parts of the intelligence can be improved with practice but the magnitude is small compared to the whole problem.

arbitrarily taken as 100 point in psychology. Half of the population lies below the average while the other half is above acquiring a symmetric shape. It happens that 50% of the population falls between 90-110 points with 25% is under 90 and 25% is over 110. What does that mean in practice? The recruitment minimum in psychology for the USA army is around 84 points (1) meaning that anybody falling short of this cannot even be used for kitchen work. Considered socially dumb, they take up 15% of the population (2) (see blue line on the graph).

It is obvious therefore that, as the understanding threshold rises for any given problem, more and more people will find themselves excluded from the possibility of making an informed, responsible decision demonstrating that the distribution of natural intellect fundamentally questions the efficacy of the democratic system of equal voting as it exists in its present form.

The second pillar of decision making - knowledge- comprised of two parts: base knowledge and information. These are absolutely under our control, and used wisely, it is possible to elevate or lower the population's decision making threshold. Even a small shift could include or exclude vast numbers of people from the informed decision making (see green and red curve in the graph).

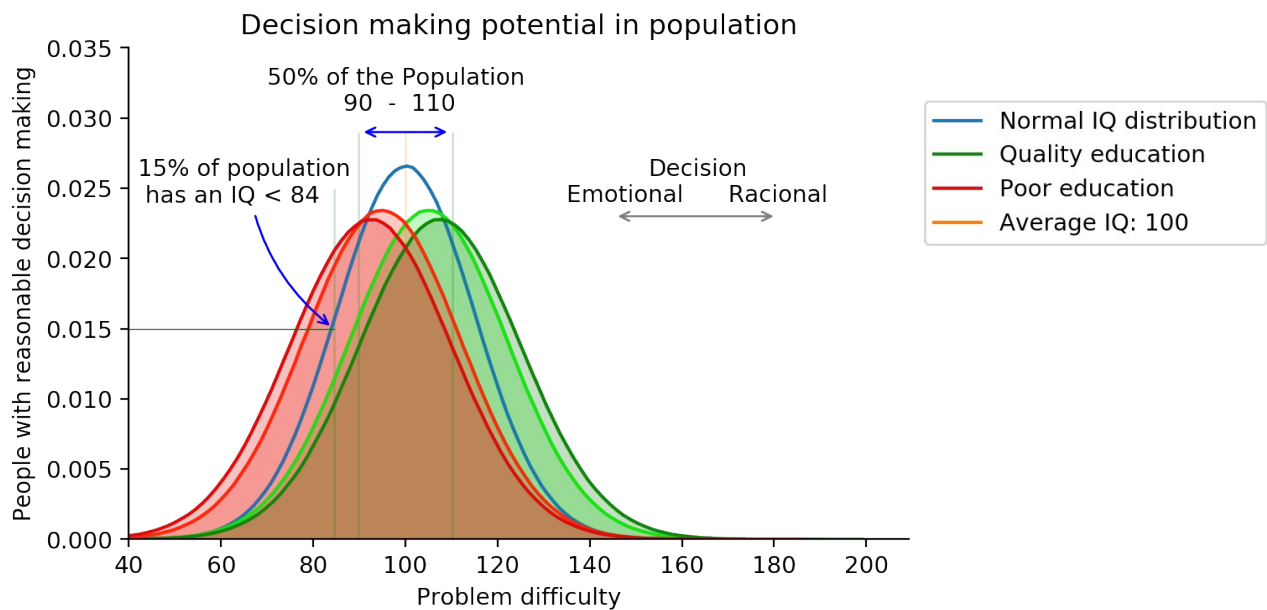
Base knowledge is the general understanding of the world around us. Without it it is impossible to choose responsibly even if gifted with a high intelligence. Improving base knowledge is a governmental duty through primary and secondary education, made undeniably better when backed up by the influence of a stable family life.

The information is then the up-to-date state of a situation, but its distribution is a more complex subject. State influence is important for establishing standards for mainstream and social media and other forms with the aim of making free, unbiased information broadly available.

In the absence of knowledge the decision making will again shift towards the emotional to the detriment of the rational (see red curve on the graph).

The current system involves the majority of population participating in decision making without actually having the chance to decide responsibly. This is because the given question's understanding threshold is often above the limit of the average decision threshold as dictated by the two pillars discussed. Though the decision-making threshold can be raised by education and sharing of reliable information to some degree, the impropriety would still remain due to the inherent effect of natural intelligence.

An unfortunate world tendency is that general knowledge is in decline (3), reliable information being replaced with social media-spread propaganda schemes. 'Machine Learning' automated statistical algorithms are targeting selective groups with opinion marketing creating the dream of Isaac Asimov's psychohistory (4) where the analysis of predictive population sentiment guides the future. The identification and influence of the population's reaction patterns further decreases the chance to fulfil the axiom of decision equality and freedom.



Is there any solution?

It is essential to recognise that, like everything, the social systems evolve. It is pretentious to believe that we have reached the ultimate level of development in democracy in its present form even if there is no immediate solution at hand to improve its faults.

As I pointed out in the essay “Crisis of the Systems” (5), in the same way that economical systems must transform due to the created ‘close system’ on Earth, the social system also urgently needs development. The common feature between them is that they have to be consciously driven to in order to handle most aspects of human nature. They have to be ready for self-correcting and the handling the inevitably occurring deviancies. Many historical systems evolved only to serve the benefit of certain leadership-groups regardless of the human psyche or environmental circumstances. Today we, via psychology, sociology, economy understand ourself the degree to which building on these knowledge would aid us in designing an improved – even if not flawless – system to fulfil the basic legal and social egalitarian paradigms combined with efficacy.

Among democracy’s other weaknesses (e.g, under-representation, weak civil control, tolerance for illiberalism) the voting system is the most fundamental. One of the possible path of improvement could be an introduction of a credit score system.

Credit scores are widely used in many areas like university lecture weighting. The main idea is that a secret score is attached to the individual’s vote which is unknown even to him or herself. This credit score is part of their personal data. The credit score is calculated from the their information and decision-making capabilities which are assessed by means of an academically designed test.

Similar to an A-level exam, the test is done before reaching to voter age. But unlike the A-level, the test is renewable. If a person has the aspiration to achieve a better score because they have grown wiser or more conscientious, they can retake the test at certain intervals. Still the result is unknown, so they take a blind approach with the result attached to any subsequent votes.

The test should not filter point of views or opinions, it should only measure their ability for decision-making and general information/knowledge. It should test for facts, knowledge of alternative opinions and their outcome effects, so no lopsided brainwashing could concur. It would completely negate gender, race, religious or any other discrimination.

While no one is restricted from voting, it is avoided that, on a question with an understanding threshold of 110 points, an emotionally overheated individual with 85 decision threshold could hold the same weight as a field expert with 115.

The technical background of implementing such a system is available as of today. With this framework, we would find the direction of political campaigns shifting from emotional influencing to reason. Hence the power of ignorance will lose its value compared to today's system, the interest of politics would be a better educated and well-informed society.

This in long term will benefit all humankind.

Although this outlined system is not without faults and is still open to the possibility of exploitation, it would work better than the present interpretation of democracy and would provide a good baseline for further discussions and improvement.

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