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AI
DEMOCRACY

{ How Artificial Intelligence will rewrite politics and society }

Davide Casaleggio
AI-Democracy

Summary

Introduction

Power is coveted by those who understand it, and envied or feared by those who suffer from it. Yet, no one can exercise it with complete autonomy, not even those who believe they are accountable to no one.

 The true nature of power shifts depending on who seeks it.

An ambitious individual sees "power" as the ability to command others, aiming to secure a position that allows exerting influence, issuing commands, or at least showcasing significance through major communication channels. Such a person loves to instill a spirit of enthusiasm in crowds, favoring strong shows and confrontations while always securing support of one side. The ultimate goal is to make an impact, ascend to prominence, and wield the scepter of power. However, once achieved, these individuals often find themselves bewildered and aimless.

Conformists, more modestly, view power as a sanctuary for a life shielded from economic strife and other nuisances. They aim for moderation to maintain the status quo, seek exchanges of favors, and appointments to ensure protection during challenging times. Their goal is to delay change, to maintain a familiar world for as long as possible, to prevent even a minor disruption that could unsettle their certainties.

Then there are the idealists, who see power as a means to enact significant societal changes. They strive to lead by example and drive change through a cultural shift. Persuasion is a tool for the improvement they wish to see; they utilize power to transform society for the better – or so are their intentions. Idealists must have the courage to race against the wind to be able to take off.

Throughout my life, I have encountered numerous ambitious individuals, many conformists, and a few idealists. Engaging with them has enriched my understanding of their perspectives.

Idealists share fundamental beliefs: the need to raise awareness about the changes they wish to see, the importance of demonstrating possible transformations through personal example, and viewing popular encouragement as contrary to genuine participation.

All have reached one conclusion: the scepter of power does not move of

its own accord but is guided by the awareness and indignation of the community it leads.

For this reason, charting a path to power is complex and often requires understanding its many illusions. The journey over ten years, from running a blog to governing a country, has jolted the certainties of the conformists and piqued the interest of the ambitious. Yet, both groups have been integral to this profound experience of collective realization – a realization that joint decision-making is possible, that change is achievable, and that collective decisions are far more enduring than individual ones. As an African proverb says: alone we go fast, but together we go far.

Today, we must confront a new element that will forever alter the landscape of politics and power: Artificial Intelligence. The ability to understand, communicate, and participate will be further democratized, allowing communities to self-regulate and compelling traditional representative institutions to adhere to collective will and outrage.

Information

If war can be started by lies, peace can be started by truth.

Julian Assange
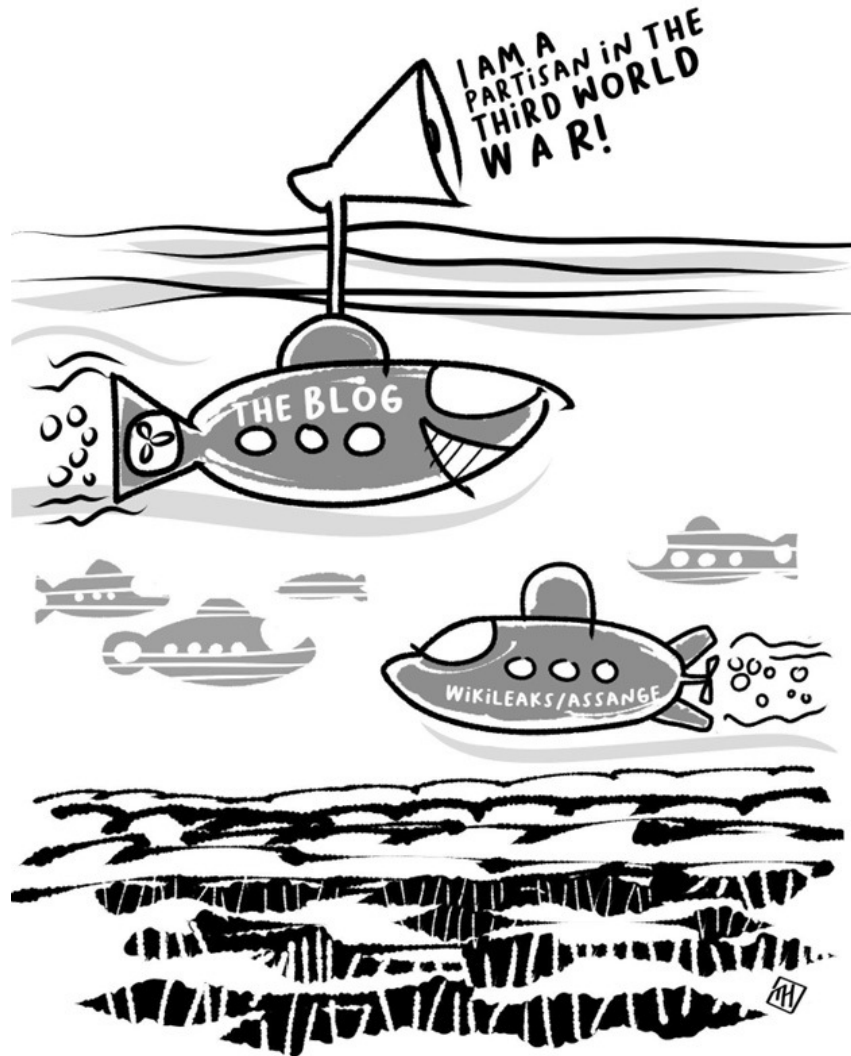
The Race of the Blog in Italian Information

The tide of the people's awareness raises all boats [even those in the palace]
Dalai Lama

There are "no's" that can change the history of a country. The one we received, in 2004, could have been one of them, but for better or worse things turned out differently. Giving us that "no" had been Beppe Grillo, the most talented Italian comedian at the time, in whom we had recognized a potential client. "Too expensive," he had told us. During one of his shows in Livorno, we had been struck by the energy of a comedian who, exiled from 1980s television because of an uncomfortable joke, had found refuge in theater. The room was a mosaic of mature faces, witnesses to a bygone television era. There was no sign of the young. Grillo spoke of environmentalism and social issues, while technology, in his sketches, was a monster to be demonized or ridiculed.

  We were convinced that the emerging technological innovations and new forms of engagement offered by the Web could radically revolutionize entertainment and audience interaction. We saw in it a gigantic opportunity, but lacked the customer willing to invest.

  Instead of throwing in the towel, we reacted by accepting the challenge: we would work for Beppe Grillo for free in exchange for the production and marketing rights to his first digital show *Beppegrillo.it*. This show would chronicle the technological revolution as a force for positive change in society. Those were the years of VHS tapes and e-commerce had recently seen the light of day, but the Blog and direct online sales seemed to us to offer a way out of the censorship that had affected Grillo. We set ourselves a minimum goal: less than six hundred cassettes sold and the contract would be cancelled.

  The show was a resounding success, going beyond our wildest predictions. We surpassed one hundred thousand copies sold in just a few months, going from theaters of one or two thousand seats to packed arenas of ten thousand people per event. We had overcome the initial funding hurdle for the Blog and paved the way for a new era.

  In 2005, in a world that did not yet know Twitter and Facebook, blogging represented a revolution. It was a pioneering platform that offered an unprecedented way for citizens to connect and share ideas.

Through a blog, anyone could speak openly, challenging the control of traditional media, which had become guardians of the status quo and allies of political parties.

A single blog was able to provide space for public debates on issues neglected by governments, parties and the mainstream media. Our efforts forced the resignation of the president of the Central Bank, promoted referendums and popular laws with the aim of expelling convicted criminals from parliament and zeroing out public funding for the press. Our virtual community turned into a real and tangible force, organizing on meetup.com and creating a political movement capable of garnering wide support.

With the advent of social media, the potential of the digital in the realm of politics became even more evident. A Facebook page in Egypt helped spark the Arab Spring, Twitter hashtags like #iranelection fueled the Green Movement in Iran and, years later, gave voice to the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States.

Whenever citizens expressed their opinions through blogging, the halls of power faced an unprecedented challenge. These new channels of communication and participation were undermining their control. Indeed, the response of institutions was not long in coming: anti-blog legislative measures were proposed in parliament. None of these laws managed to pass, but the very fact that they were conceived and proposed revealed a growing alarm.

Our work was not limited simply to promoting the sharing of ideas, but went so far as to defend fundamental rights such as freedom of expression. We found ourselves at the center of debates on hot topics such as the right to anonymity and censorship. These challenges spurred us to seek creative answers and break new ground: the digital age had revolutionized the playing field, and we were on the front lines.

In 2005, the social media era was still in its infancy. The facebook.com domain had been registered in April of that year, and we would have to wait until May 2008 before the platform spoke Italian. Twitter, born in 2006, did not offer an Italian-language interface until late 2009. In this context, blogs were perceived primarily as personal diaries, and their potential as tools for active participation, public debate and collective action was not yet fully recognized and exploited.

In this sense, the Blog was something like a submarine, ignored by the media who did not see it on their radar. But under that radar, a match was

enough to ignite the haystack of social discontent. Thus, so many people from all walks of life, with no other avenue to express themselves, joined our digital community. The history of the Blog is still to be read, now accessible only from www.ilblogdellestelle.it, with its six million comments and seventeen thousand posts published over nineteen years.

It all began on January 28, 2005, when the first post was published:

> I am a partisan of World War III, the information war. We are not information deprived, today there is information flooding. The only way to ensure the survival of democracy is to have a guarantee that the government does not control the ability of citizens to share information and to communicate.

Italy's former prime minister, Romano Prodi, was on his sabbatical: he had completed his term as president of the European Commission in 2004, and would become prime minister again in 2006. Unlike other politicians, he knew how to look under the radar, and he noticed the Blog. Perhaps, he also sensed its potential. Four months later Prodi launched his own platform, but without allowing readers to comment. Posting texts that looked like press releases and eliminating interaction, he did not really have the tool in his hands. What's more, in one year he posted only two articles, only resuming publishing three years later.

In that 2005, the Blog emerged as a new model of expression and debate. In the beginning we published mostly nonpolitical posts, and the public interest was palpable: for example, an article targeting wine enthusiasts and soccer fanatics provoked lively reactions and debates. As early as the spring, more than a thousand comments per day were recorded.

This does not mean that we were limiting ourselves to light topics. Blog columns denounced the often questionable actions of politicians ignored by the mainstream media. The column "Arms Stolen from Agriculture" offered a critical look at the lives and activities of party officials. A June post against abstaining in a referendum on assisted reproduction marked a record two thousand comments.

The Blog not only promoted free expression, but also invited the creation of original content. Four months after our debut, for example, we launched a contest for cartoonists, who were asked to graphically interpret the day's posts. In addition, readers were involved in coordinated online activism. In June 2005, thousands wrote to the president of the European Commission to support one of our campaigns for a "Clean Parliament."[1] In the face of institutional indifference, we launched an online campaign to raise funds and place an ad in an

international newspaper, naming twenty-five members of parliament on whom a conviction hung.[2]

Blog activism knew no bounds. When, also in 2005, Bank of Italy Governor Antonio Fazio was embroiled in a scandal following the publication of wiretaps in which he was personally involved in the Antonveneta purchase affair, we reacted swiftly. We launched a fundraising campaign to buy advertising space in the main Italian newspaper "Corriere della Sera." Although the newspaper rejected the ad, we did not stop: we published in the second most read newspaper "Repubblica," spending fifteen thousand euros for a page with the eloquent title, "Fazio go away."[3]

Our battle, passed over in silence by the mainstream media, found an extraordinary echo on the Internet, prompting a flood of comments and images that joined the chorus of "Fazio go away." Three months later, the governor resigned.[4] We had shown that through the Blog it was possible not only to gather the voice of citizens, but also to influence the course of events.[5]

We decided to continue our battles with a campaign for a convict-free parliament. Again a total of 48,000 euros was raised through micro-donations, and we published an ad, this time in the "International Herald Tribune." Although the names of the current convicted parliamentarians were not listed there, there was a link to our blog page, where the twenty-five were mentioned one by one, along with a description of the crimes they had committed.[6]

The impact of our initiative transcended national borders, so much so that it inspired other movements around the world. A few weeks later, the Gandhi Peace Foundation wrote to us after seeing the page in the "International Herald Tribune," and informed us that in India they had just succeeded in ousting eleven corrupt parliamentarians from parliament.[7]

> [...] We, too, took note of what was expressed on the page of the "Herald." There was a time when criminals financed politicians, now they directly enter politics and parliaments. They get elected and represent us. But nowadays we do not have the tools to drive them out of the temples of democracy.

Something similar happened in Brazil, where our campaign inspired a collection of signatures in favor of a popular law, the Ficha Limpa. Today, thanks to this law, one must have a clean criminal record to run for parliament. I did not learn of this story until years later, when by

chance I met Márlon Reis,[8] the former magistrate who had led the initiative. We met in a quiet bar, the perfect place for a revealing conversation, on the sidelines of an event dedicated to digital citizenship. The judge, in a measured but passionate tone, outlined the tortuous path they had had to take to keep the law in place after its passage. He told of the many legal challenges and endless appeals faced to defend the legitimacy and effectiveness of that legislation. It was a tale of a tenacious and committed battle that revealed another face of the struggle for justice and transparency in the political system. More importantly, it showed that even without international coordination, events were happening simultaneously because popular outrage and the technology available to coordinate it were both ripe.

Blog activism asserted itself not only on the political front, but also on the social front. For example, we fought to save the historic Pedavena Brewery, which was in danger of closing following its takeover by Heineken, and played a crucial role in the search for justice for Federico Aldrovandi, a boy tragically killed by four Italian police officers. By interviewing his family members and closely following the trial, we helped raise public awareness, which in all likelihood helped lead to the conviction and imprisonment of the officers involved.[9] Our campaigns then also covered the environmental impact of shopping malls and the construction of unnecessary rail tunnels for freight transport.

But giving us unprecedented visibility was the revelation of the scandals of large publicly traded companies, such as Parmalat. Beppe Grillo, examining publicly available company financial statements, highlighted the accounting anomalies that then led to Parmalat's bankruptcy and the subsequent write-down of shares and bonds, and the Blog launched a campaign against the company's evaded responsibilities. It similarly highlighted the financial anomalies of Telecom Italia, which allowed some large shareholders to extract value through a series of Chinese boxes at the expense of small shareholders. These were significant contributions to a more informed and critical public debate.[10]

These actions led the Blog to receive significant recognition: within less than a year of going online, it was awarded first place as the "best news site in Italy" by the main economic Italian newspaper "Sole 24 Ore," by far more than all the traditional media. Since then, the Blog grew further in terms of traffic and participation, becoming a threat to

the hitherto dominant media monopoly on public debate.

Internationally, too, there was no shortage of recognition. Technorati consistently included between 2006 and 2009 in its daily rankings our platform among the top thirty blogs in the world by traffic, often even among the top ten,[11] and the Webby Awards honored it in the "activism" category.[12] For his part, Beppe Grillo was ranked seventh in the list of web celebrities compiled by "Forbes" and ninth in the list of the most influential bloggers according to "The Observer" (2008). In addition, "Time" described him as the most politically powerful figure in Italy after the prime minister.[13]

THE NEW LANGUAGE OF BLOGGING

That of the Blog was a new language that most people were still unfamiliar with. One example: a post published in 2007, announcing that some of Beppe Grillo's shows had been canceled because of his voice problem, closed with the phrase: "Don't worry. I repeat: do not worry. The strawberries are ripe. I repeat: the strawberries are ripe." It became a catchphrase, and it was only the first in a long series. These were always ambiguous phrases, to which everyone could give their own (imaginative) interpretation. Even the press launched into the most daring hypotheses.

We had been inspired in this by a famous French footballer active in England in the 1990s: Eric Cantona, who had called a press conference after, on appeal in the criminal trial for a kick given to a fan who had insulted him, he managed to have his sentence reduced from two weeks' imprisonment to 120 hours of community service. The media pillorying he endured there exasperated him to the point that he only uttered one sentence before getting up and leaving the press conference he himself had called: "When the seagulls follow the fishing boat it is because they think sardines will be thrown overboard." Such enigmatic words had the power to put British journalists in an uproar, and for weeks they tried to interpret it and give it meaning. It was a small revenge for Cantona.

In Italy, too, the effect of these catchphrases was felt. Code messages so absurd that they sparked the interpretive imagination of journalists and politicians appeared from time to time in online posts: *The knee is the washerwoman's. I repeat: The knee is the washerwoman's. - The cow is not mad. Repeat: the cow is not mad. - The mushroom is late. Repeat: the mushroom is late. - The quail is in her lap. Repeat: the quail is in the lap.*

They were affixed at the end of in-depth articles on Italian society and politics. It is rumored that the Minister of Justice at the time, Clemente Mastella, even activated the Secret Service to patrol the woods at his home after a postscript about him: *Mastella is in the woods. I repeat: Mastella is in the woods*.

THE BLOG AND POLITICS

Politics, looked at from the perspective of the Blog, appeared through different lenses than the mainstream media. Politicians were no longer on a pedestal acting their character undisturbed in the so-called TV "sandwich," but became people under the magnifying glass. Rather, we were paying tribute to people whose civic and social commitment and lives had protected the country.

To highlight these national heroes, we have published a calendar each year since 2007 with the eloquent name, "Lay Saints." Telling stories of firefighters, Mafia turncoats, journalists, entrepreneurs, as well as ordinary housewives and children who had fought and remained on the side of the community even when it was not convenient for them, this calendar testifies to the perennial war between servants of the state and its adversaries such as criminals, terrorists and corrupt politicians.

The Blog also became an open place for normally unheard voices, a place to create new value. It often happened almost by accident: for example, in 2006 it gave a voice to a precarious worker (employed on a short-term basis and without a regular contract) and then to hundreds of others like him, who told their stories on the Blog.[14]

Giving voice to the direct testimony of ordinary people, unrelated to politics, constituted in effect a true exercise in participatory journalism. The "Breath on the Neck" project, launched in 2007 in the City of Turin, was also an example of this: it involved filming council meetings with a video camera and publishing them on the Web. At the time, this was a revolutionary act, since debates in which important decisions were made had always been limited, until then, to transcribing in an obscure record only a few words. When the practice of recording sessions became widespread, some city councils reacted by interpreting it as an invasion of their space, and forbade taking cameras into the city council. The ban, however, only gave further visibility to the initiative.

In 2008 we launched a real call to arms (of information) by inviting readers to equip themselves with cameras, ask provocative questions and

post them. "You are Beppe Grillo!" was our slogan. People who followed the Blog began to take their cameras with them whenever sensitive issues were discussed, and politicians began to really feel the "breath on their necks." Today, broadcasting meetings live on the city hall website has finally become normal in most large cities.

Over time, more and more people wanted to take part in the blog conversation. Nobel laureates such as Muhammad Yunus, Dario Fo and Joseph Stiglitz also spoke, through written or video interviews. Among the most distinguished contributions was that of the Dalai Lama, whom I met on the occasion of one of his visits to Italy. One phrase that stuck with me, from that conversation of ours, alluded to the awareness of ordinary people with respect to the actions of those who operate in the halls of power: "The tide of the people's awareness raises all boats" [even those in the palace]. He meant that to change the course of political events, it is first necessary to work on informing people to create collective will for change. The pressure of a cultural revolution is the strongest pressure that can be exerted on the doors of the palaces of power.

Participation was always large, and some posts recorded over ten thousand comments. Topics ranged from allowing senators to vote by secret ballot to elect the president, to why people had voted for Five Star Movement, to the bill against blogs introduced by Romano Prodi in 2007.

The extraordinary rise of the Blog was accompanied by new challenges, particularly in comment management. The influx of daily contributions made moderation an issue as crucial as the publication of posts themselves. Trolls, with their constant attempts to deflect debate, threatened its quality. At first, the Blog staff was dedicated to removing off-topic comments that the troll would then attempt to post again, as in a game of table tennis. Since then, the system has evolved so that it is the users themselves who report tendentious comments.

The best metaphor used to identify the Blog is that of the "Train." It originated from the comment of a user, who posted a poem in which he likened the platform to a train moving to an unknown destination, and welcoming new passengers at each stop, while others got off:

The poem closed like this:

How do I talk to the conductor? He might know where the train is going. But you can't. The carriages don't communicate with the engine. And the intercom only announces the next station. Never a terminus. Or a turnaround. It can't. Always on its rails. From the Blog

Railways. Safe travels. A Passenger.

The Blog was also a place to experiment with how new technologies could be used to interpret society. In 2004 in Portugal I met Albert-László Barabási, a Hungarian scientist from Transylvania who had studied Network Theory applied to physics and authored a number of books, including *Linked*.[15] Upon reading his theories, I became so passionate about the subject that I began to study it seriously. In the course of my research (which I would later collect into a book)[16] I came across a system that had been used in the United States, using this method of analysis, to evaluate the phenomenon of *interlocking directorates* in publicly traded companies. It was called *They Rule*.[17] It provided a completely new perspective on how publicly traded companies were being managed through the same people sitting on the boards of companies that were competing with each other or had a customer-supplier relationship. The whole thing could be observed graphically, through avatars of the directors and auditors of the various companies.

I then decided to replicate this analysis for Italy. In contact with the American programmer who had created *They Rule*, we adapted the software to the needs of the country. We thus realized the *Map of Power*[18] , which brought to the center of the debate a hitherto unknown fact: the conflict of interest of those who sat on boards of directors to represent the will not of shareholders, but of certain power groups that were able to control the strategies of companies through their presence, at the same time, on different boards.

By choosing one company or person, it was possible to see how they related to others, and which groups of people linked companies together. I published a study to show how 223 of the 275 companies then listed on the Milan Stock Exchange shared at least one director or auditor with another. Specifically, we identified a core group of 93 highly interconnected companies, at the center of which a single one, Pirelli, pulled the invisible strings of power from their boards of directors.[19]

The public debate that followed focused on how these interconnected boards failed to protect small shareholders, who had no interest in the existence of cartels or contracts that did not favor the company in which they had invested.

No surprise, then, when the following year, at the end of a judicial investigation, a strange fact emerged: five thousand people had been

illegally wiretapped by employees of Telecom Italia, the country's leading telephone company, which at the time was under the control of CEO Marco Tronchetti Provera. The investigation made me uneasy too, because on that list appeared, among others, the name of my father Gianroberto Casaleggio. However, we decided without delay to make the entire list available with a search engine[20] on the Blog, so that everyone could know if their communications had been intercepted.[21]

Other experiments began on the distribution front. "The Week," a pdf collection of the main posts of the last seven days, was born: it could be printed and distributed, or even left on cabs or in bars to be read. When we exceeded 40,000 weekly downloads, we began distributing it in subways as a free print newspaper.

It remained an isolated initiative, but one with strong symbolic value. It showed that the Blog, having established itself in the digital world, could enter the space occupied by other media. However, distribution costs would condemn it to the same fate that now befalls all print titles: the model of organized distribution of daily information on paper is destined to end, while digital access to information takes over.

The issue of newspapers and their financing has often been the subject of the Blog's battles. Many newspapers then as now were financed directly by politics, creating an information short-circuit that led to distorted information. In its international ranking, "Freedom House" defined from 2004 to 2016 the Italian press as "semi-free." Since 2017 it no longer provides a rating of the freedom of the press, but only the overall freedom of the state and that of the Internet. One of many examples where to solve a problem we change the thermometer. One of the Blog's battles was precisely to expose the flaws in the system, for example through the column *The Newspaper Caste*

In response, political allies of big media began proposing laws against blogs. It all began in 2007 with the so-called "blog-killing law," which was co-authored by former Prime Minister Romano Prodi, i.e., the very man who a few years earlier had tried unsuccessfully to start his own blog himself.[22] And again, two years later a bill was proposed in the Senate that, if passed, would have allowed the Interior Ministry to shut down sites for *alleged crimes of* opinion, essentially allowing it to bypass the necessary intervention of the courts.[23]

Both of these proposals remained as such, as they were never finally approved. One of the reasons they ran aground has to be found in the

popular *Free Blogger* campaign that we launched on Flickr, a then-popular, and still existing, social media site that allowed users to share personal photos. Many people posted a photo of themselves holding a sign that read "Free Blogger."[24] Thus, the Internet was flooded with pictures of citizens defending the right to freedom of expression, which helped to ensure that the two bills fell on deaf ears.

But it did not end there. A few years later, parties on both the right[25] and the left[26] tried a new path: imposing costly burdens on blogs, or trying to ban advertising on the Blog under the pretext that it supported a political movement. In response we launched the *#NoGag* campaign on Twitter (now X). The proposals were withdrawn. After that, another rule was presented, providing for up to two years imprisonment and a ten thousand euro fine for publishing fake news on the Web, without clarifying who should decide with respect to the truthfulness of a piece of news and being careful not to impose the same constraint on the traditional press.[27] Fortunately, this proposal also ended in nothing.

At that same time we witnessed a more devious attack: some public companies such as Anas, the company managing the public road infrastructure, began banning their employees' access to the Blog as well as other sites, but not those of political parties. Again, the problem was resolved after the publication of an eye-opening[28] post showing that this was an attempt to suppress freedom of expression.

All of these experiences allowed us to measure the power of a blog directly run by citizens instead of political parties, dri ven by their own interests, and the mainstream media. On the other hand, the constant attempts to frustrate this power also confirmed its success. My father Gianroberto, who together with Beppe Grillo had started the Blog, was hit by so many and so severe attacks years ago that he went so far as to collect them in a book.[29] Through subterfuge, misquotes or out of context, the mainstream media rarely ceased their efforts to undermine the Blog and its association with the 5 Star Movement, even by some newspapers outside Italy. In 2020, four years after my father's death, the Spanish newspaper "ABC International"[30] published a photoshopped image of a fake report that my father had received a briefcase containing money from the Venezuelan government ten years earlier. The Italian media jumped on the story and talked about it for a whole week before it was finally exposed as a hoax and I denounced all the people involved.

When, three years later, the court sentenced the Spanish journalist who had written the article to compensation, none of the major newspapers and news outlets mentioned it, although the Adnkronos news agency had reported it to all newsrooms.

In the face of such attacks, we remained true to the maxim "Do no evil, have no fear."

What was happening in Italy had triggered, without any programmatic coordination, a similar process in different places around the world. Just as during spring the flowers all bloom at the same time thanks to favorable weather, an invisible force brought about by the new tools at our disposal combined with an outrage over a global economic crisis was bringing about change globally. I found out by talking directly to the protagonists.

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1 https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2005/07/basta_parlament.html
2 https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2005/10/il_muro_di_gomm.html
3 https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2005/08/fazio_vattene_1.html
4 https://www.economist.com/news/2005/12/19/fazio-shamed-out-of-office-at-last
5 Fazio was later acquitted after a long court case that lasted nine years. This does not detract from the fact that the ethics of such sensitive public roles should sometimes exceed the limits imposed by law.
6 https://web.archive.org/web/20070127010931/

http://www.beppegrillo.it/documenti/parlamento_pulito.pdf
7 https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2006/01/parlamento_puli.html
8 https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2017/12/marlon_reis_e_la_democrazia_diretta_in_brasile.html
9 https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/?s=Federico+Aldrovandi
10 https://www.ft.com/content/c275dc7c-cd3a-11dd-9905-000077b07658
https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2005/06/parmalat_vota_n.html
11 https://web.archive.org/web/20080127173626/

http://www.technorati.com/pop/blogs/
12 https://www.forbes.com/2009/01/29/web-celebrities-internet-technology-webceleb09_0129_land.html#4c5a11636d7c
13

http://content.time.com/time/magazine/europe/0,9263,901051010,00.html

14 The collection of those stories became a book (*Schiavi Moderni. Il precario nell'Italia delle meraviglie*, Adagio eBook 2013), the first in a series of volumes published since 2007 by the Blog. Some of those books collected the stories of people in distress: from family members of people who died on the job (so-called "white deaths"), to earthquake survivors.

15 https://barabasi.com/book/linked. In English translation *Linked. The new science of networks*.

16 *Tu Sei Rete. La rivoluzione del business, del marketing e della politica attraverso le reti sociali*, Casaleggio Associati, Ivrea 2012), on how the rules of Network Theory could be applied to the study of other complex phenomena, from economics to society and politics.

17 http://www.theyrule.net

18 https://web.archive.org/web/20080820130804/

http://mappadelpotere.casaleggioassociati.it/

19 https://www.casaleggio.it/focus/il-social-network-dei-consigli-damministrazione-delle-societa-italiane-quotate/

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http://www2.beppegrillo.it/intercettatitelecom//search/sessearch.php?q=inserisci+the+name&x=6&y=8

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22 https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2008/11/se_tutti_i_blogger_del_mondo_si_dessero_la_mano.html

23 https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2009/02/il_merda_wall_c.html

24 https://www.flickr.com/photos/laurajo/3032256387/in/photolist-67jEdZ-5BfiuZ-5BiGuJ-5Bes46-5BiGsj-5Bes2e-5Bes1n-5BX7bx-5Byoji-67cJkZ-5BK1Qm-sYYi-67tnyf-pJV9eV-5GUh9u-5BrNpX-5BH7AJ-5s29Z3-5DSaa6-66UGip-66YXSh-5FK6DU-5BGPbh-5Boxhm-5BvMH6-67WT85

25 http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2013/07/24/ammazza-blog-pdl-ci-riprova-5-anni-di-leggi-contro-linformazione-web/664729/

26 https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2015/07/nobavaglio.html

27 http://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2017/02/solo_il_movimento_difende_la_li

berta_despressione_in_rete_noleggegambaro.html

28 http://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2015/09/beppegrilloit_vietato_ai_dipendenti_anas.html

29 Gianroberto Casaleggio, *Insultatemi. Insulti (e risposte) dalla A alla V*, Adagio ebook 2013.

30 https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-chavismo-financio-movimiento-5-estrellas-gobierna-italia-202006142244_noticia.html

The social media revolutions

Our revolution is like Wikipedia, okay?
Everyone contributes to the content, but you don't know the names of the people who contribute to the content. This is exactly what happened. Revolution 2.0 in Egypt was exactly the same.
Each of us contributed little bits, bits and fragments. We drew the whole picture of a revolution.
And no one is the hero of that picture.[1]

Wael Ghonim

Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks, has often emphasized the power of truth to affect the course of events globally. The Iraq war is in this sense a case in point: the false news (one of the most egregious hoaxes in recent decades) that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction led to a disastrous war; conversely, information about the course and manner of the conflict turned on a beacon of global awareness.

Assange was a major player in the dissemination of this information, particularly with the 2010 release of the *Collateral Murder* video, which showed U.S. soldiers firing on unarmed civilians. This and many other documents shook world opinion, which clamored for an end to hostilities.

Julian Assange's initiative known as WikiLeaks was born in 2006, but gained notoriety in 2010 with the publication of a huge amount of classified U.S. government cables and documents. WikiLeaks is perhaps the most tangible international example of how new ways of doing information can lead to unprecedented perspectives from which to interpret and participate in politics. As we shall see, the Arab Springs, initiatives such as *Occupy Wall Street*, the protest movements in Spain, and many other popular demonstrations of dissent around the world all started from the awareness and outrage moved by this one initiative. WikiLeaks represented a model for investigative journalism in the digital age, showing how online platforms could be used to bypass traditional channels and reach a global audience.

Paying for this success was Julian Assange himself, who spent part of his life in jail, without trial, in Britain, deprived of his freedom for fourteen years (five of them in maximum security prison) and waiting to be brought to the United States to stand trial or simply to remain imprisoned. The UN, meanwhile, has ruled that his detention is illegal.

All this for doing a journalist's job better than anyone else.

In 2013 we invited Assange to link up at our annual plaza event, but at the last minute he was unable to speak for unclear security reasons. That same year a delegation of parliamentarians visited him in the Ecuadorian embassy where he was then confined. Later, in 2016, he was able to be present at our big plaza event in Palermo[2] and shared with us what he saw as the responsibility of journalists: to save or sacrifice lives by deciding whether to write the true or false about ongoing wars.

One realization I have acquired over time is the fact that all new popular movements are based on unfiltered information. Indeed, it is information without censorship mechanisms on the Internet that creates the popular outrage on which most political movements of resistance to the status quo of power march.

The forms of people's mobilization that have taken regimes by surprise in history have almost always relied on new forms of communication, as social media have been in recent times. This has meant that the established power has often preferred to attack the tool rather than focus on the reasons for the protest.

Comic books were also once held responsible for juvenile delinquency. After Fredric Wertham, a famous psychiatrist at the time, declared in 1953 that comic books were an underlying factor in many cases of juvenile delinquency and that Superman and Tarzan were sadistic and masochistic, the U.S. Congress held a series of hearings on this very subject. Twelve U.S. states passed anti-comics laws and an oversight group was created for the Comics Magazines Association for America to develop a publishing code to address the issue.[3]

With each new communication tool, freedom of expression evolves, and with it the rules we must apply to establish a new balance with those in force, but this does not always happen immediately. Freedom of the press came only a few centuries after Gutenberg's invention of printing. It was in fact enshrined in 1766 with the world's first freedom of the press law, thanks to the Enlightenmentist Anders Chydenius, a Swedish government parliamentarian who uttered these words, "No proof should be necessary that a certain freedom of writing and printing is the backbone of a free organization of the state." But elsewhere they did not think the same way: in the same year, in Italy, the Congregation of the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition "enriched" the list of forbidden books with Cesare Beccaria's essay *Dei delitti e delle pene (On Crimes*

and Punishments).

Today we are faced with new communication tools that involve different dynamics from what we were used to, and thus will need new rules and protections. Who should decide what is the truth, and what action should be taken if falsehoods are published? In a world where anyone has the means to spread their thoughts, this is certainly a topic that needs to be addressed.

If a video is edited to discredit the parliamentary speaker, who should decide on what to do and what options should he or she have?

In 2019, a video of U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that had been slowed down to make her appear drunk was posted on YouTube in the United States. Alphabet decided to delete it, but Facebook chose to keep it on its platform, merely pointing out that it had been altered and explaining that it was necessary to allow the video to be viewed so that people could form their own opinions about the news of the altered image.

The problem, in both cases, was not the choices of these two platforms, both of which were reasonable and understandable, but the fact that today it is private companies that have to deliberate on a right that should be defined and exercised by the community.

The issue of freedom of expression today has many more facets than ever before. Is it fair for social media to decide to shut down pages or accounts before a political election for the content they publish? In the last period Facebook closes between 4 and 6 billion accounts a year.[4] Most likely they were largely fake, but even if just one was not, its removal would take away that person's ability to speak freely on Facebook.

In 2020, political advertising was banned from Twitter. Tweets written by some heads of state were also deleted, for example the one in which Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro promoted, for the coronavirus, treatments that Twitter said were not medically sound.[5] Donald Trump was banned directly from the platform, only to be readmitted by Elon Musk's new ownership. On TikTok, on the other hand, for example, videos cannot appear if they contain certain "political" keywords.[6]

In most of the West today, it is social media that sets the rules on freedom of expression. Elsewhere, governments are more active: think of China, with its Great Firewall that allows for timely management of what content can be viewed by citizens, or Iran, or even Turkey, where it went

so far as to shut down access to Wikipedia because the government disagreed with what was written on a page stating that Turkey had supported organizations such as Isis and al-Quaida, only to be disavowed by the courts, which restored access after more than a thousand days.[7] Other countries are blocking the Internet in entire states: like India, which for several months prevented access to the Internet in Kashmir's reagion, citing reasons of "national security."[8]

But even when Internet access is available, the state intervenes by promoting its side of the story. One example: Google Maps offers different views of state borders depending on where we connect from, which leads to seeing Kashmir itself differently from Pakistan or India; from Pakistan, it appears as a disputed region, from India it appears as an integral part of the country. The same is true for Crimea as seen from Russia or Ukraine and for Western Sahara as seen from inside or outside Morocco. In these cases, Google has decided to offer everyone their own truth.

While propaganda or biased truth is not a new problem, the tools available today, which are capable of enabling many more people to influence public debate, are. For this reason, the means that protect the reliability of information need to be updated or rethought. The biggest mistake we can make is adopting old solutions for new problems, entrusting an oversight committee with the task of "determining the truth" and the power of censorship, or thinking that traditional courts can be the solution.

Because of the speed and size of this problem, we will have to find technological solutions and take a new approach: distributed solutions in which connected citizens will have the ability to verify facts through information dissemination algorithms, which in turn will have to be transparent to ensure the trust of all those who will use and experience them.

Relative to the right to speak, the new media introduces a new theme: it does not necessarily include the right to spread that message (*right of speech* vs. *right of reach*). The right of speech does not and should not imply the dissemination of disinformation among millions of people. So in the design of new information platforms we may have to provide for "speed bumps" to slow the spread of messages that people and algorithms deem controversial. But even then they should be transparent and meet public criteria shared by the community.

For that matter, it is increasingly evident that another factor at play must be taken into account. For it is no longer solely people who can write history and spread their truths: AI will again change the balance.

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The essence of truth

Truth is an experience, not a conclusion.

<div align="right">Gemini (AI)</div>

Among the most iconic fake news of the last century that still survives in our time is the idea that spinach makes you strong due to the fact that it contains iron. The news originated from a mistake made by a German researcher: the chemist Erich von Wolf in 1870 was studying the properties of various foods, and in his study under the line "spinach" he wrote 38 mg of iron per 100 g. Today we know that the correct figure is 3.8 mg. He had mistakenly put the decimal separating mark. Actually the error was discovered in 1937 when von Wolf's work was double-checked by other German scholars.[1] But the correct news never really spread. I myself grew up in the belief that spinach contained lots of iron.

The reason is Popeye, the character drawn in the 1930s by U.S. cartoonist Elzie Crisler Segar: he was a sailor who owed his superhuman strength precisely to spinach. His popularity was such that he had increased sales of spinach[2] by 33 percent and had spread and consolidated the urban legend. In Crystal City, Texas, known as the spinach capital of the world, a statue of Popeye erected in 1937 to celebrate the expansion of the industry still survives.[3] The interests of the time meant that it was not convenient to disprove this belief, even by government entities, since during the economic downturn and subsequent World War meat was scarce and many were glad to have found a cheap alternative.

The problem of correct information has spanned the centuries regardless of available technologies. Missteps in this field are due in some cases to scholarly errors, in others to partisan interests or convenience. But they are never minor errors, since it is on the information we have on which we base our most important choices.

In the winter of 1789, then U.S. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Wherever the people are well informed, they can trust their government," meaning that if the people are well educated and knowledgeable, they can trust who is in charge of running the government. For more than two hundred years, we have relied on the

concept expressed in this maxim based on our ability to build information systems accessible to all and to be able to distinguish the true from the false. But today something has changed.

The Internet, the Web and social media have made it possible to (almost) zero out the cost of communicating our messages; Artificial Intelligence makes it possible to zero out the cost of creating them as well.

This created the concept of *dynamic content*: a text, image or video can be customized for each individual depending on when he or she wants to view it.

But as with any technological revolution, this simple concept opens up many dilemmas. Will the speed of creation allow for human revisions? Will the content need to be subject to some form of copyright? Should we keep track of the content created? Most importantly, who will be able to tell us whether that content is true, or is a "hallucination"[4] or even an intentional lie?

From the invention of the newspaper until the end of last century, what was printed was the truth: the cost of printing and distribution and the business risk meant that publishers would not tell falsehoods at the risk of losing readers and economic livelihood. That is, of course, until many of these publishers began to depend on financial contributions from the state or individual parties, making readers' money unnecessary.

More importantly, until the late '10s of the century we are living in, video and audio were widely regarded as the ultimate proof of truth. And yet, for many of the historical facts captured on video – from the 9/11 attack to the moon landing – there have been many people who have raised doubts about their veracity. What will happen when even this media loses its ability to convince people that what is seen and heard corresponds to the truth?

This lack of last-resort evidence of truths will also allow anyone to refute any video or audio, even if true, as manipulations of artificial intelligence, especially during election campaigns when there is not always enough time to gather additional evidence before voting. This phenomenon is known as the "liar's dividend," made possible by the mere existence of the technology to create fake videos and photos. For example, when the president of Gabon had to leave the country in 2018 to receive medical treatment, rumors began to circulate that he had passed away. In response, the government released a video of him, but

the opposition said it was fake and manipulated, keeping tensions high.[5]

Therefore, systems will have to be adopted to certify content using technologies such as *blockchain, which* records information securely and permanently and makes its content immutable and verifiable by all. Each politician and candidate will also be able to certify it by publishing it on their own "official channel," but all content that is to be broadcast elsewhere could, for example, contain a QR Code verifying its trustworthiness.

In 2022, a BBC report went viral on the Web. It blamed Ukraine for an attack on a train station, resulting in the deaths of many civilians. But it was actually a fake, made with the British TV station's graphics. The BBC had no other countermeasure but to tell the news of the fake.[6] Meanwhile, the video had already circulated everywhere, including on Russian state TV. If every broadcast was equipped with a verification tool, it would be possible to distinguish from what is true and what is not. Or at least know which source took responsibility for it.

Every new form of politics starts with the younger generation: even the 5 Star Movement began its success from being in 2013 the most voted for by young people under 30 (and abstentionists).

The reference media of the younger generation is therefore essential. In the United States, the preferred source for acquiring news is the Internet for more than 80 percent of citizens up to age twenty-nine, with the largest component devoted to social media, which exceeded 35 percent. TV, print and radio do not exceed 20% added together. The preference is completely reversed if the over-65s are considered.[7]

The market concentration of social media around the world has rightly raised many questions about the need to regulate who can speak, who can benefit from the internal promotional push, and what is forbidden to say. These rules to date have been carried out internally by the social media themselves, creating various distortions and arriving, for example, in banning a U.S. president and one from Brazil from Twitter or even slowing down the spread of the scandal concerning Joe Biden and his son Hunter (accused of corruption) just before the last U.S. election, not knowing if it was true. The cost of these monitoring activities has always been high: for example, Facebook before the last election in India allocated 800 people against consensus manipulation.[8] Costs and criticism against censorship, however, have caused the staff dedicated to content security to be contained in Meta and X.

The need for a transparent system to ensure *right of reach*, the ability of the post to be seen by many people and not limited by the algorithms of the social on duty, could evolve into the adoption of the system used to evaluate scientific papers: the *impact factor*. The more the source posting it receives citations in other papers, and the more the paper itself is cited by other studies with a high *impact factor*, the more the value of the paper goes up and is worthy of dissemination.

If for the origin of the information we already have solutions available (should the person who generated the content want to make it known), for confirmation that it is true we are still a long way off.

The concept of *fact-checking* as we know it today began to take shape in the early 2000s, with the emergence of dedicated organizations in the United States such as FactCheck.org (established in 2003) and PolitiFact (2007), and later in the rest of the world as well. These structures began to focus on verifying the statements of politicians and other public figures, an activity that has become increasingly important in the political and social context. However, each *fact checker* has its own biases, each organization its own goals, or even simply a world view. This has resulted in more and more of these organizations positioning themselves politically, even simply by not examining "problematic" news.

Artificial Intelligence could provide help. Already today it is possible to have AI "personal agents" (entities designed to perform tasks on our behalf) that assess whether a person is telling the truth. A kind of lie detector that uses only video to check the person's facial micro movements and heartbeat, as well as tone of voice. On the other hand, social media can use crowd intelligence to identify any controversial (though not necessarily false) posts.

The advantage of these AI systems serving individuals is that they will be able to be programmed to reflect our worldview and act without the individual's thinking bias.

However, fake news does not always have an impact on our opinions. In most cases on social media we believe only those that reinforce our way of thinking and ignore the others.[9] The ones that have a real impact on our opinions are the news that comes to us from sources that have established in most people an idea of credibility, such as the mainstream press and TV.[10]

Tools for creating fake images have been around for several years, but

reserved for professionals. What really changed was the possibility of making videos as well, and especially at very low cost. Until recently there was a real distinction between so-called cheapfakes and *deepfakes* (unrecognizable fakes).[11] Today this distinction has disappeared. It is no longer necessary to be a professional to create a quality fake video; a few tens of dollars is enough.

In the case of a photo, it is also possible to create it for free. This was the case with the fake Pentagon bombing in 2023 whose photo made the rounds on the Internet and beyond, causing stock market losses before it was able to be chased down and debunked.[12]

For the citizen's protection, there are now a number of systems that can tell whether an image or video was generated by AI.[13]

In 2023, a photographer, Boris Eldagsen, succeeded for the first time in winning the prestigious Sony World Photography Awards competition, but he refused to receive the prize by confessing that he created the image with DALL-E 2, an AI image generator.[14] A check on the antiAI system, Thehive.ai, would have given a 100% certain result, even indicating the AI tool used. Moreover, when, for example, photos of Israeli children killed during the Palestine war came out in the United States, it was discovered that the images had been generated by AI.[15]

Controversy also mounted in the case of Amnesty International, which, in recounting a true incident of police violence in Colombia, used AI-created images that in this case had erroneous elements visible to the discerning eye, undermining the credibility of the news story itself.[16]

OpenAI itself, the company that came up with ChatGPT, after publishing a system for teachers who wanted to identify students who were cheating, had to withdraw it because it did not give reliable results. In many cases it is sufficient to ask AI to create text that is not recognizable by these tools; the same will happen with images and videos. Systems that recognize AI-generated text, such as those employed in schools, will probably become less and less reliable as the quality of the authoring systems improves.[17]

The Internet has also enabled activists to get involved in the information game with social media. Artificial Intelligence allows them to communicate with sophisticated tools. However much legal and regulatory restrictions may be instituted in the future, for example, in the use of AI for party advertising by social media, it will be impossible to

appeal to all activists who employ it. Bangladesh was perhaps the first nation to touch on this issue during the 2024 general election campaign. Pro Government newspapers promoted and explained the use of AI tools to their supporters, who then released many cheap deepfake videos (the best tool on the market to create them costs $24 per month) to embarrass opposition representatives.[18]

Activists and microinfluencers (up to a hundred thousand followers) and thematic groups, for example on WhatsApp and Telegram, have since the arrival of the Internet been the most effective (and least expensive) tool for conveying the communications of a party or movement. They are not institutional representatives, they are not candidates, so they can always be contradicted by the official voice of the party if necessary, which also makes them effective for testing overcoming ethical-technological limits in the messages to be conveyed.

The novelty of AI is not only in being able to equip these people with sophisticated tools to make their communication professional. The real novelty is that the influencers themselves can be artificial. Already in the world of fashion, companies are increasingly relying on virtual characters that look real. For example, synthetic teenager Lii Miquela[19] was named among the top 25 most influential people on the Internet by "Time Magazine," and with her community of more than three million followers she has already collaborated with brands such as Prada, Samsung, and Calvin Klein, turning over $10 million a year.

All indicates that we will soon see these synthetic influencers serving political battles, united and cooperating with groups of real people.

The ability to coordinate a large number of people toward a goal is the basis for the concept of the *platform society*, a social context in which defined groups of people use a digital platform to disseminate and implement single ideas.

The most striking examples occurred outside of politics in the narrow sense. For example, a group of people on Reddit, the WallstreetBets community, was eager to expose a Wall Street jackal policy to sink struggling companies by making money on them, the so-called *short*, bet against. Large hedge fund groups had bet a lot of money on the failure of one company, GameStop, which had become an icon for many young people, but was in crisis because of the shift from selling video games in stores to online sales done directly by manufacturers.[20]

This online community on Reddit[21] with its cohesion managed to

counter Wall Street speculation. The hedge funds had bet that stocks would collapse by committing to buy them then on a certain date, when they should have already been devalued. But the WallstreetBets community enacted the greatest so-called *short squeeze* of our time: they bought all available stocks and did not sell. This forced the Hedge Funds to increase the value offered for the shares thirty times within a month, since the way the stock market bet works they were forced to buy them back or their own companies would go bankrupt. Not all of the Hedge Funds involved managed to survive.

More recently in the Palestinian and Ukrainian war contexts, boycott actions of companies somewhat emblematic of the West blamed for inaction have multiplied, such as Starbucks,[22] which in the first two months of the coordinated boycott on Instagram and TikTok lost 10 percent of its stock market value. Also contributing to the damage was the company's ruinous management that took to court its own employees unsatisfied with the company's policy.

The *platform society* will lead to thinking in a new way about world politics, with state barriers becoming less binding. It will usher in a new way of participation of social activism, no longer channeled within a party that must hold together its contradictions, but on individual issues that people share. No longer focused on the representation of ideas in parliament, but on their implementation in the physical world.

More and more choices will be made by an interconnected humanity. The new centrality of the U.N. (though not its effectiveness for now) demonstrates the diminishing usefulness of state boundaries to wage political battle, just as the ability of a group of determined people to change the status quo demonstrates the revolution brought by the Internet. Today, the capacity for complex coordination toward the goal may be delegated to Artificial Intelligence objects or at least may be assisted by them.

It is a path already followed in chess. We were surprised when Deep Blue, Ibm's supercomputer, beat the world chess champion in 1997. But after a few years we were no longer surprised that the computer could beat us even at games like go, connect 4 and poker. So we started to ally ourselves and change the rules of the game, on the one hand banning the use of computers in many tournaments and, on the other hand, organizing so-called "centaur tournaments" in which computers and groups of people team up to face each other. We are likely to see this

alliance tightening more and more in all contexts, including those of politics.

The ability to translate simultaneously and at almost no cost from any language will also lead to international communities of people coordinating much more easily, making it possible to always reach the critical mass to initiate the desired social battle.

With the success of the 5 Star Movement, many groups from other countries contacted us to see if they could import the model, in some cases asking if they could use the same name, almost as if it were a franchise. Of course, this never took off, as people often confuse the model with the content, the status quo with the history that led up to that moment. The ability to internationalize platform movements does not come (only) from copying the tools used, but from rethinking the organization of collective action and the construction of ideas.

Choices of global scope (as opposed to those for a single community) will become increasingly central to the survival and development of humankind. All of the issues under discussion today are related to human survival itself, such as weapons with nuclear technology or AI, saving the features necessary to live on the planet (the issue of "preserving nature" is much more selfish than it might seem at first glance, since the Earth will live without us), or the redistribution of productivity derived from social, before technological, upheavals such as AI.

If, over the past century, universal suffrage has led to rooting for one of the available political factions – largely out of voter laziness – and the Internet has provided the ability to have horizontal communication and organization, Artificial Intelligence will enable it to identify all the best actions to pursue the desired goal and organize in the most timely and coordinated way possible the people who will want to be involved, bringing us into the *platform society* in a concrete way. The AI will be able to play the role of conductor, making sure that the melody of the group never goes out of time, finding the resonance of ideas in the group of people who will want to be supported by it.

This new way of aggregating people and ideas is changing the rules of the game, and the large organizations do not always understand the change in the hope that the concept of being too big to fail can be applied to them as well. But as the facts have shown, no party, Wall Street firm, or state is ever too big to fail if it does not understand the change taking place.

The advent of the *platform society* will lead to a concept that I became convinced of after living through and helping to create the 5 Star Movement in Italy. Unlike corporations, in politics it is not important to get the right people elected in the institutions, but to get the wrong ones forced to do the right thing.

Human beings change, they can be corrupted, and power often reveals their true nature only once it has been won. But most people who get a taste of this power and media popularity have one clear thing in mind: consensus. Through citizens' knowledge and awareness of the issues most important to them, and through Artificial Intelligence that will make even complex issues accessible to everyone, this new era of politics may have arrived.

After two decades that saw collective collaboration at the center of the Web's success, the highest expression of which is perhaps Wikipedia, we now enter a new era where AI will be instrumental in coordinating actions and not just ideas. The new AI-supported collective space will enable people to achieve goals, not just share their knowledge anymore.

A next level to those we have known, in which petition sites to be presented to institutions will become platforms to enable the goal to be achieved independently of institutions, which thanks to AI will be induced to follow the tide of the new informed and organized collective consent. Participation will take place on choices and no longer on content construction.

We know bots today for their ability to flood social media with programmed content, pretending to be humans commenting on posts or writing tweets. Many famous episodes proved this during the latter stages of election campaigns in past years. This was the case of the #MacronLeaks in France in the 2017 election campaign, when many documents were stolen using a phishing technique from Emmanuel Macron's La République en Marche party and then leaked online just before election silence through a sophisticated automated bot system. According to Macron, many of the published documents were authentic, but mixed with other fakes with the aim of creating confusion before the vote. In the end he still won.

Today with AI these documents could be disseminated with messages targeted to individual microtargets online, inducing interpretations that could change the minds of people in doubt. On the other hand, they could also be used to rectify false information posted on social media,

responding to people's individual comments with specific links to sources.

The concept of persuasion is central to AI capabilities today. If we see persuading a person of a certain political position as a game at which we can compete against the machine, to see who wins, it is very likely that what has already happened with all other strategy games, from chess to go and poker, will happen. Sam Altman, head of OpenAI himself, says he is "nervous" about the point because "personalized 1:1 persuasion, combined with high-quality content generation, will be a powerful force"[23] in the next general election.

Information has always been the basis of persuasion, but the collective participation that peaks in the media during an election campaign is the litmus test of political change. So I wanted to understand how the public squares, social media, and now AI have revolutionized the way collective participation is managed and sustained.

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Participation

[Parties] are the children of democracy, of mass franchise, of the necessity to woo and organize the masses

Max Weber
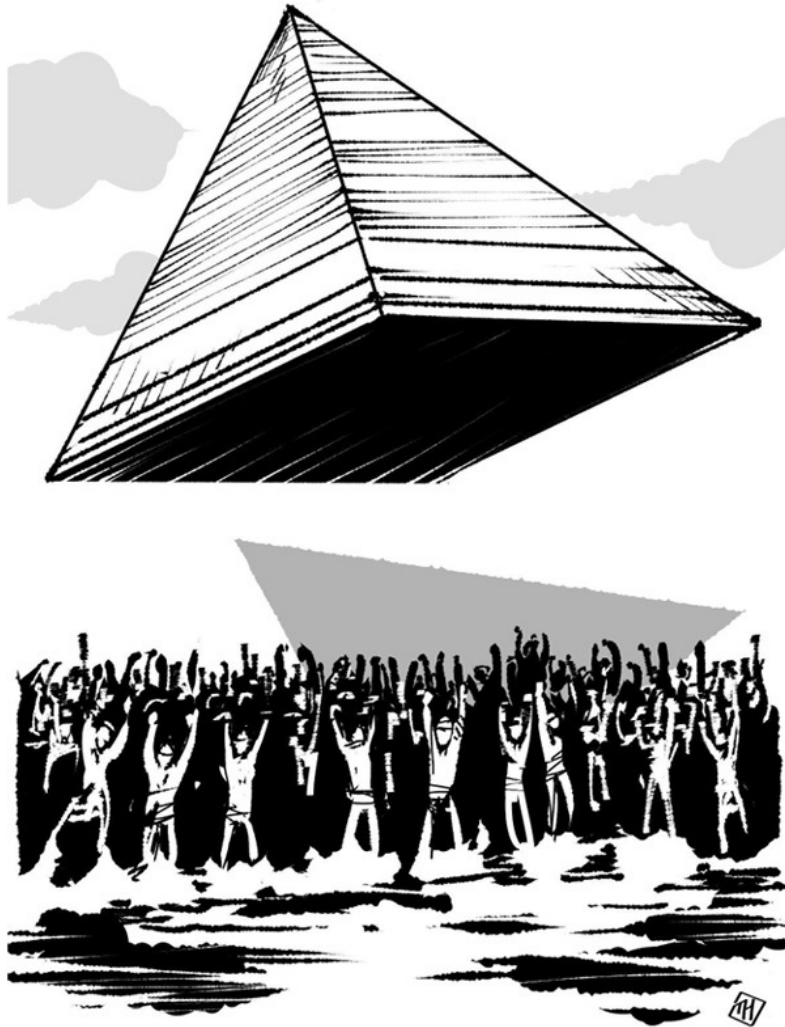
The digital that fills the squares

Your most valuable resource is not your employees.
Your most valuable resource is the thousands of people who want to work for you for free and you won't let them.

Rick Falkvinge,
founder of the Pirate Party in Sweden

There are times when you realize that what you are doing is changing the world around you. My father, after relentlessly writing thousands of articles for the Blog, once told me, "I look back and it feels like I've only written a few posts." Sometimes even WHAT SEEMS LIKE LITTLE TO US CHANGES THE LIVES OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE around us. What makes a difference is doing it with passion.

We realized this at a particular time. It was September 8, 2007. "A few" blog posts, daily newsletters and a traveling comedy show had reached their peak, at least up to that point. We had managed to fill all the Italian squares in one weekend at the end of summer. Of course, big demonstrations in Italy have always been there, but never without the support of the mass media, never without the support of structures rooted in the territory with ringleaders filling buses. This time the mass media, largely owned or operated by the groups in power, had been careful not to promote the initiative, in fact even to give a simple news announcement of it. And as for organization, well, there were blog discussion groups on the ground, so-called meetups, but they were anything but structured stable organizations. Those thousands of people who commented on the Blog every day, however, had to live somewhere.

We had recently launched the aforementioned Blog initiative to prevent convicted felons from running for Parliament. If you tolerate twenty-five parliamentarians with crimes that ranged from tax evasion to terrorism, if those who legislate are already in that situation, what example will they be able to set and especially what laws will they be able to write to condemn those very crimes they committed?

We knew that it was possible to promote a large physical demonstration by resorting only to digital tools, because back in 1999, for the first time only through the Internet, it had been done: physically bringing tens of thousands of people into the streets to protest against the World Trade Organization in Seattle.

We were the first after that single event to organize such a large-scale

event using only the digital channel. Several movements then followed our example, but several years after. Indeed, between 2011 and 2012 we would witness the outbreak of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt, where a regional representative of Google used a Facebook page he created to help mobilize the protests that eventually drove Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak from power. Taking a cue from those movements, protesters in the United States chanting the slogan "We are the 99%" have occupied the streets between Wall Street skyscrapers to highlight the unfairness of wealth distribution. In Spain, the Indignados movement mobilized massive web protests against high levels of unemployment and poor job prospects, especially for young people. Still later, other movements, from Extinction Rebellion to Black Lives Matter to Friday's for Future, would spread like wildfire, bringing millions of people into the streets with only the use of digital.

The key moment for us in Italy was V-Day on September 8, 2007. The key difference from those other street protests is that in Italy this was a key step along the path from protest to power, from the streets to actual government.

The "V" evoked a 1980s comic strip, *V for Vendetta,* based on a dystopian regime established in London, which told the story of how people rebelled against power. But above all, it was an expression of a liberating and non-politically correct cry, "Vaffanculo" (Fuck you!).[1]

One of the principles we were advancing with the Blog was the participation of citizens in the life of their community, an active participation that was not limited to one vote every five years. In Italy we had the advantage of one of the tools already provided for in our Constitution: the popular initiative through which laws can be proposed directly by citizens once 50,000 signatures have been collected in a six-month period. We proposed a popular initiative law to prevent anyone convicted of a crime from running for Parliament. This was not an easy goal. There were only a few of us running the Blog and we had never engaged in an activity that involved going out and getting people to physically sign a petition. Public officials were needed at each signing point, hundreds of volunteers were needed to manage and collect these signatures. To complicate the process: you could not invite everyone to one place to sign, as the rules specified that signatures could only be collected in the municipality of residence with the presence of a city councilor or region of residence, if in front of a notary who had to be

paid each time. It would have been a very long process to collect signatures in all major cities in Italy.

But of one thing we were sure. It was time for a change. The Italian state could not go on with that moral and cultural degradation of politics. And we were also aware that the Internet had radically transformed many industries and the way they functioned. Imagining how business models should transform after the advent of the Internet was, after all, the task of our consulting firm Casaleggio Associati.

Because social media was not yet widespread in Italy at the time, we used the blog and email to organize our campaign starting in early summer. We asked people to participate in a virtual march in which anyone could build their own avatar character and march along with others to give substance to the initiative that might otherwise have seemed like just another blog post. Thousands of avatars were created, in effect a popular digital demonstration.

By mid-August, 116,000 people with their avatars were marching a hundred at a time for every screen, and the number was still growing. Those scrolling up and down the procession of avatars, all personalized, had a sense of what would happen a few weeks later in the squares.

To move all these digitally mobilized avatars into the physical world, we invited them to come in person on September 8 to the signature tables set up throughout Italy, where volunteers would collect petitions.

The text of the initiative reads:[2]

1. NO TO CONVICTED PARLIAMENTARIANS. No to 25 convicted MPs in Parliament - No Italian citizen may run for Parliament if convicted, both in first or second degree.

2. TWO TERMS. No to professional MPs who stay in Parliament 20 and 30 years - No Italian citizen may be elected to Parliament for more than two terms. The rule has retroactive validity.

3. DIRECT ELECTION. No to parliamentarians chosen by party secretaries - Parliamentary candidates must be voted for by citizens through direct preference.[3]

To our surprise, queues of people materialized everywhere waiting in line to sign. More than 180 cities in Italy joined V-day with parties or cultural events to collect signatures for the "Clean Parliament" citizens' initiative law.

All the registered people showed up, and apparently they also brought some friends with them. Rivers of people had come out of their homes and stood in line so they could sign.

The physical promotion of the initiative had also been done together. Everyone had been involved in a collective promotion of the event that was coordinated on the Blog:

Shopkeepers: hang the flyer in the window.
Motorists: stick a flyer on the rear window.
Taxi drivers: show the flyer on the back of the seats.
Students: stick a poster on the bulletin board.
Employees: hang your city's day schedule on the coffee machine.
Newsstands: put flyers in the middle of newspapers.
Footballers: if you score a goal it show V-Day on your shirt.
Fans: show V-Day banners.
Newspaper readers: contact your local newspaper by sending them the day's schedule.

Everyone: text[4] or email your friends, "On Saturday, September 8, I will be in the square for the V-Day organized by Beppe Grillo to sign the citizens' initiative law www.vaffanculoday.it. Tell others about it!"

Bologna's central square, Piazza Maggiore, which we had chosen as the venue for the main event, was packed. The forms we had printed and distributed throughout Italy were beginning to run out by late morning, and we had to identify open copy shops in the various cities to print new ones. That Sunday evening, when we counted the signatures collected throughout Italy, we found that we had reached about 350,000, seven times the minimum threshold that we needed to collect in a six-month period.

That was the moment when we realized that a new awareness had erupted in Italy. Previously powerless citizens discovered that they were not the only ones who wanted to change the country for the better and, more importantly, wanted to actively participate in the life of their community if only they had the chance to do so.

That was also the first moment when the official media began to take us seriously as a political force. In a strange form of post-dated journalism, all the newspapers and TV stations that had ignored us before the weekend announced our results in their headlines. They were shocked. We had moved to the second stage of Gandhi's famous adage: First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win. It had taken two and a half years, but the first phase was officially over.

We listened to music on iTunes (at the time Spotify was a long way off), watched videos on YouTube, booked travel and hotels online, but the tools of politics remained in the days of vinyl records, celluloid films, and paper catalogs. As a result of the V-Day, there was a paradigm shift in the way people viewed politics once the new tools that became available for a new kind of political participation were implemented. It was exciting and inspiring to pioneer through this direct experience of digital democracy.

Unfortunately, in Italy, Parliament was not obliged to vote on or even

debate citizens' initiative laws, and it did not. Parliament ignored the bill and hid it in a drawer in the Senate. However, this behavior gave the movement the impetus to do something more: enter Parliament to change the law from there.

The battle for a parliament without convicted felons had begun two years earlier with a post that concluded with the following words, "We need a new law, that next to the name of the employee candidate there should be compulsorily his criminal record. The citizen will be able to choose the convicted person he prefers."

Fourteen years later, in 2019, with the Movement at the helm of government in Italy, this phrase has become law, and to apply at any institutional level one must publish one's criminal record on the Web fifteen days before the vote. It was not the law presented together with the citizens, but still a start.

The success of that event prompted us to organize a second one to remedy another Italian problem: the transparency of public information. On April 25, 2008, we organized V2-Day to collect signatures for a referendum that would repeal politicized regulations that helped obscure key information about politics, such as public financing of publishing.

In Italy, many newspapers received millions in advertising and public subsidies from the government and the offshoots of the big political parties. Even the ones that consisted of only four pages were entitled to these government subsidies, a fact that nevertheless often led them to ignore stories that would have damaged the interests of Italy's major parties (for example, in Italy we rarely had major scandals coming from journalistic investigations; they normally came directly from the judicial courts or prosecutors' offices).

The corporate scandals around Parmalat or Antonveneta found more space on the Blog than in other media before they became a judicial issue, after which everyone else started talking about them. By a mechanism on the Blog we ironically called such late reporting as "postdated information," just like checks written before there is money in the bank and that can only be cashed after a certain date.

For the Blog, the information model had to focus on the interests of the reader and not those of the government or parts of the state. On the Blog we summed it up with a phrase: "Newspaper is, if the reader buys."

Although in the end the Constitutional Court ruled that we had not reached the threshold of 500,000 signatures needed to hold a referendum

on public scrutiny, we regarded V2-Day as another great success because we put the issue at the center of the political agenda. Its epicenter was a crowded square in downtown Turin, and all the people mobilized there had seen a flood of citizens who, like them, were demanding reform of the system of how information is shared with the Italian public.

Two years later we also organized a large festival to bring everyone who connected virtually into the same physical space in a large meadow in Cesena. By some estimates it attracted over 100,000 people, including many who decided to come with tents and RVs. All were entertained by Italian musicians who donated their time for the event. We dubbed the event "Woodstock." A rail strike scheduled for that day was called off, and we were able to negotiate with the rail lines to put in extra trains to accommodate the event. Here's how we celebrated it on the Blog:

> On Sunday 120,000 people, side by side, for 14 hours of nonstop music and future, soared like a Great Spirit. The sky looked like it was painted by Raffaello. Around the world, through the Internet, from Sidney to Buenos Aires, from Tokyo to London, some 5 million people followed the two-day Woodstock event. The largest Internet participation ever in Italy, huge numbers. The silence of the media and the statements of those "kept" by politics pleased me, they confirm what they are and also what they will never be: free people, alive.

After realizing the potential of the Internet's impact on these three events and especially their social value, we focused our efforts on gaining a presence in municipalities, regional councils and Parliament. We organized large election tours that crisscrossed the nation and filled city squares with crowds. This led to some important victories such as the 25 percent and then 32 percent achieved in the general elections, with 333 elected parliamentarians, or the more than 2,500 municipal councilors joined by more than fifty mayors of cities in Italy such as Rome and Turin.

To celebrate the first election victories in Parliament, we organized a third V-Day in Genoa. Dario Fo, Nobel laureate in literature, spoke on the occasion. Many still remember his cry that rose from the stage, "We are democrats, but not moderates! For God's sake!" The program we promoted on the environment, transportation and digitization of the country seemed normal to those who gathered to hear it, but it was revolutionary to the status quo.

From the following year we began to orient our national events toward sharing and coordinating the action of thousands of elected officials installed at all levels of institutions through the influence of the Blog.

It was then, in 2014, that we decided to frame the main event as "Italy 5

Stars," and since then we organized it yearly in different parts of Italy. The first was held at Rome's Circus Maximus, the largest stadium in history, whose origins are lost in legend all the way back to Romulus. More prosaically in that symbolic place we distributed gazebos in the shape of Italy so that from above we could see the extent of the 5 Star Movement's national presence in government institutions. Every elected official was present at the various gazebos to physically meet their constituents and exchange ideas and project proposals.

Celebratory meetings of movements are often the first moment of visibility and real self-awareness of being a genuine aggregation of people. Movements arise in response to some outrage or to address some injustice among the population. Once the goal is achieved, they often dissolve. What we managed to do, which is unprecedented for a digital movement, was to go from movement to government.

What we have learned, and hopefully left for others to learn, is that thanks to digital networks the power of citizens is not only to make their voices heard, but also to take the reins of government.

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnzyFvcENAw.
[2] https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2020/09/le-nostre-radici-13-anni-fa-ilprimo-vday.html.
[3] Even today, the vast majority of parliamentarians are presented by parties on local lists to be voted for. But citizens can only choose the symbol and not the name. So in the end the party decides who will be there and who will not by simply submitting the names in the order it prefers. Depending on the obtained percentage of the party in the local constituency, the number of people who become parliamentarians varies, starting from the top. This system gives no power to the citizens to choose the names of their representatives.
[4] WhatsApp and Telegram had not yet been invented...

WORLD
The social media revolutions

A powerful idea connects people without incentive or organization.

Wael Ghonim

Wael Ghonim is the one who with a Facebook page and his very long eleven-day imprisonment in Egyptian prisons brought down the Mubarak regime in a matter of months. He started what is known as the Spring Revolution in Egypt. In a long chat with me, he explained his views on power.

Ghonim[1] is a technology professional and manager who was also Google's marketing manager for the Middle East and North Africa. In 2010 he created a Facebook page that sparked the Egyptian revolution during the Arab Spring. The page was dedicated to Khaled Said, a young man at the time brutally killed by Egyptian police. Within months, millions of people started following the page, then took to the streets and eventually got the government to resign. Ghonim was tortured at length by the secret police, allegedly to extort the Facebook page password from him. People in the squares demanded his release, and the day he was freed marked the end of the government in Egypt. When we talked, he told me that his views on movements have changed profoundly over time and that "the real challenge in life is that human beings have been using negative energy to fight negative energy," and this might have an immediate result in bringing something or someone down, but in many cases not a positive solution in the long run, because it doesn't address the solutions, so "if we want to fix the world we have to go to the root and solve the small problems, one at a time."

We started talking about what mass movements really are and what their problems have been so far. Ghonim is very skeptical about this today: according to him most movements do not have an obvious solution to solve the problem they are protesting about, but normally just want to shake up the system. What is more, in his opinion, the members of these mass movements form connections with each other, and these connections become more important than the mission of the movement itself.

And he said, "If you think rules protect the system you are wrong. Rules exist to be broken by smart people." Eventually the average person

will come along with his friends and the group will eventually lose its critical angle, lowering its standards. Power will be distributed more and more according to their prejudices, not their wisdom. A phenomenon that I have unfortunately seen happen in Italy as well.

The correct approach is to apply "collective wisdom." On the use of mass technology platforms Ghonim believes that "the correct approach is to continue to vaccinate against the prejudices that these mass tools create" while remaining critical of their use. In fact, he thinks that movements are bound to be hijacked in one way or another; it is only a matter of time. People are bought off with positions of power, money, blackmail, etc., and that is probably why many fail to continue their struggle over time. Therefore, it is important that movements do not pursue speed: lest they be defeated by this cancer.

The Egyptian revolutionary movement could have used the ability to imagine what would happen the minute after the government fled. The overseas democratic systems they saw on television were not part of their culture, and it was not enough to say they wanted something without building the solution in the minds of those who were supposed to create it. On the other hand, they had no way of identifying which representatives of the movement itself could define the next steps. The result was to let the movement dissolve as soon as it got the immediate result it was asking for.

Ghonim told me that in the end the result was to remove people from the system and replace them with other people, still part of the same system, recreating the same old problems with new interpreters. And this, unfortunately, I have seen happen in Italy as well.

In general terms, at some point, according to Ghonim, any movement is bound to fade away. This will happen when it strays from its core values or its battles, perhaps because of people's insecurities, or it begins to think more of its opponents than of its own soul, or when it achieves the goal for which it marched. And indeed, "the best government is the one that ultimately serves no purpose. The best movement is the one that ultimately serves no purpose, because it surrenders power to individuals."

Just like sports that began as combat training and then became an activity aimed at keeping fit.

Today Ghonim provocatively thinks that "the solution is to love my dictator": settling relations with those in power might be better than tearing them down all at once. And, in any case, if we fail to talk to each other, in protest we will have another arrow to our bow.

As we have seen in Italy, and as we have seen in the Arab Spring and other movements that have appeared around the world, great political results often start with a single online person shouting outrage, whose voice can resonate widely through the Web without being filtered by the constituted powers that control the institutionalized media.

In more recent years, the organization of protests and demonstrations generated online has evolved and increasingly revolved around international environmental issues, creating worldwide awareness and synchronized participation.

For example, World Cleanup Day simultaneously engages citizens from 150 countries to clean up the world of litter, with the goal of achieving "the greatest civic action the world has ever seen." The day was organized by the *Let's do it![2]* Movement, which originated in Estonia in 2008, when 50,000 people in a single day cleared 10,000 tons of garbage from streets, cities and forests in five hours. Over the past decade, more than 17 million people worldwide have joined *Let's do it!* and garbage has been cleaned up in more than 100 countries.

Between 2018 and 2019, *Fridays For Future* events were triggered by a young Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg, who initiated a protest to demand that the Swedish government implement action against climate change after abnormal heat waves triggered wildfires across her country. She declared that she would strike outside government offices every Friday until the Swedish government more firmly aligned itself with the Paris Agreement to reduce CO_2. That strike soon caught on and spread globally, involving millions of students.

I have little doubt, indeed I would say I have confidence about the fact that what we have paved the way for in Italy will be replicated over and over again in history throughout the world, changing the very nature of the way democracies are governed.

But the story does not end there. The challenge ahead is to learn how to use these new technological tools, and the new rights that come with them, to fulfill the promise that an engaged citizenry, actively participating in the management of its own affairs, can produce a better life for all who invest their faith in themselves.

Online participation has evolved greatly over time. It originated in the early 2000s, when tools were born to manage online petitions and involvement. One such tool is called MoveOn.org and it successfully organized protests against the Iraq war in 2002 and 2003. However, that platform was born in 1998 when, during the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, a

couple who supported the Democrats created a site to submit a petition to Congress asking them to censure President Bill Clinton's behavior and move on to more serious matters. The petition was unsuccessful, but the site's founders asked their mailing list for citizen lobbying and from there began offering their tool to anyone who wanted to organize online petitions.

National physical events organized thanks to the Internet began to appear about ten years later. V-Day in Italy, in 2007, was the first. The following year in Colombia, in 2008, Oscar Morales, an unemployed programmer, was able to integrate Facebook, Skype and instant messaging to build his "No More FARC" campaign, a first digital and then street protest against the armed wing of the Colombian Communist Party. It all began with the kidnapping of 700 people in 2002. Among those kidnapped were a Colombian presidential candidate, Íngrid Betancourt, and her campaign manager, Clara Rojas. In 2007 it became known that Clara had become pregnant in captivity and that her son had been kept separated from his mother, and popular outrage erupted. Oscar Morales created the Facebook page "One million voices against FARC," which after a week already had 100,000 members; a few days later, in early January 2008, Clara and her son were released by FARC. The following February 4, as many as ten million Colombians took to the streets. The popular movement was echoed by the media and soon by incumbent President Álvaro Uribe. General support made the hostage release mission possible six months later.

The following year the Arab Spring protests began in several Islamic states. In Iran, the spark was ignited following presidential elections that the oppositions believed were rigged, starting with the fact that the results were announced just two hours after polling stations closed. The protest was called the "Twitter Revolution" because those protesting used social media to coordinate.

A popular uprising broke out in Tunisia in late 2010 following the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor who set himself on fire because, having no more money to bribe the local police, the latter no longer allowed him to sell from his cart. People immediately organized to protest corruption and rising unemployment in the country. A month later Zine Ben Ali, who had ruled the country for some time, resigned. Again, the Internet was essential in creating the context and basis for the protest, as a couple of weeks before Bouazizi set himself on fire WikiLeaks had published leaked confidential documents from Tunisia showing widespread corruption in that country. TuniLeaks had

then reposted and redistributed them, accessible on Nawaat.org, a blog founded by two Tunisians who fled abroad in the 1990s and then became a point of coordination and visibility for the subsequent protest.

At the same time, also in late 2010, an outraged protest began in Egypt over the death of a young man while in police custody. As we have already mentioned, Google's marketing manager for the Middle East and North Africa resident in Egypt, Wael Ghonim, had anonymously created a page to express his outrage. He had titled it with the dead boy's name, "We are all Khaled Said." It gathered a million followers in a very short time. Since in those very days, in Tunisia, President Ben Ali was fleeing the country after popular uprisings, Ghonim thought that the same thing could happen in Egypt with President Hosni Mubarak, so he decided to call a large street protest for ten days later, on January 25, 2011, the anniversary of the National Police Day on which certainly the police forces would be mostly absent from the streets. The call for the "Egyptian People's Revolution" (*Thawrat Shaab Misr*) reached more than a million people through Facebook, of whom one hundred thousand said they would participate. Even then, the demonstrators managed to organize and see themselves as a movement, creating awareness that they were not the only ones who thought a certain way. On the day of the event, the squares were filled with people who had organized the rally while remaining under the radar of the Egyptian government at the time. The regime responded by shutting down the Internet and arresting Ghonim. The square, however, demanded his release, which came eleven days later, almost simultaneously with the resignation of Mubarak, until then Egypt's leader.

Free information has always fueled the sparks of outrage that ignite when a concrete fact is at the root of all these protests. Sometimes the example of others has also had a significant impact, as in 2011, when, a few months after the street protests in Egypt, an outcry broke out in the United States against inequality and the centralization of power in the hands of a few multinational corporations, which wielded it to influence democracy. Popular anger was heightened by the realization that there were no legal consequences for the mismanagement that led to the 2008 financial crisis. It all started with an idea on the WikiLeaks Central website, revived by a group of people linked to the Canadian anti-consumerist magazine "Adbusters," which mobilized people via Facebook, Twitter, IRC and Meetup for a peaceful demonstration on Wall Street. From the beginning they said they wanted to follow the example of the Egyptian protest, which in turn as we have seen took its

cue from the Tunisian one. The protest began in New York City at Zuccotti Park, near the financial heart of the city and the world – hence the name Occupy Wall Street given to the movement – but it soon spread internationally, generating demonstrations such as the October 15, 2001, protest, which took place in more than 790 cities spread across 71 countries, with the motto "We are the 99%," referring to the fact that wealth was concentrated in the hands of 1 percent of the population.

When the various status quo powers lose control of the agenda on behalf of their citizens, their reaction is often blind to the real causes of the phenomenon and blames interference from "outside forces." We saw this in Hong Kong in the protests that began on March 15, 2019, where a protest movement of young people demanding a different future was condemned by Beijing as nothing more than incitement from outside. We saw it in Argentina in 2023, with the mutual accusations of the two election candidates of being supported by China and the United States, respectively. We saw it in Spain in 2016 with Podemos, accused of having ties to the government of Venezuela.

In many cases these are completely fabricated reconstructions, and in others there are clues that actually may lead us to suspect some outside involvement, even if only to support something that is already going on.

In late 2008, for example, a manual for creating grassroots movements was made available by the Alliance of Youth Movements, an organization created that year by the U.S. State Department along with Columbia University, Google and Howcast Media, and in 2011 renamed as Movements.org.[3] It was titled *Creating Grassroots Movements for Change: a Field Manual* and outlined how to create a civic protest movement from scratch.

The United States had already attempted since 2004 to enter the Egyptian communication market through the U.S. government-owned Al Hurra satellite channel, which cost $90 million and was launched in 22 Arab countries. But the initiative was never really successful.

Speaking of the "We are all Khaled Said" page that spawned the Egyptian uprising, it was later discovered that there was a co-administrator of it, activist Abdul Rahman Mansour, who was living in Dubai and remained anonymous for some time. In an interview Mansour says that what inspired him was the 2007 film *Battle in Seattle,* which chronicles the 1999 clashes during the WTO summit. He watched it more than 40 times because it showed that a civic protest could stop the impending decisions of those in power. The Seattle dissent was proof of that.

What goes by the name of "Diplomacy 2.0" for the U.S. State Department has also emerged publicly in some cases. In 2007 Wael Abbas, an Egyptian cyber-activist, posted a video on YouTube about police abuse in Egypt. YouTube removed it for violating its rules, which prohibit "crude and violent content posted for the purpose of shock or disgust." But shortly thereafter it reappeared. After a WikiLeaks cable was published, it was discovered that the U.S. Embassy had pressured YouTube for it to reappear.

In the summer of 2009, at the height of the Twitter Revolution in Iran, the platform we now know as X was scheduled to shut down for routine maintenance. U.S. Embassy official Jared Cohen (without informing his superiors, but later praised by Hilary Clinton) contacted Twitter creator Jack Dorsey directly, asking him to postpone the downtime. The Twitter Revolution at the time was also successful because of this.

Regarding the V-Days and the activity of the Blog, I can personally state that in our case there was no external instigation, neither natural nor artificial.

[1] His book: Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0. People power is stronger than people in power*, Rizzoli, Milan 2012.
[2] https://www.letsdoitworld.org/
[3] Offline today, but reachable from
https://web.archive.org/web/20110202012621/http://www.movements.org/

AI
The artificial persuasion

It takes a single spark of persuasion to ignite the souls of crowds, but it takes an ocean of wisdom to quell the waves that follow.

ChatGPT, AI

The election campaign is all about outrage and persuasion. The Internet has made it possible to target profiled messages to individual groups of people. Social media has provided enough data to categorize users into different sets depending on the effectiveness of different persuasive approaches: in 2016, at the time of Donald Trump's first election campaign and the Brexit vote, Cambridge Analytica had identified thirty-two different types of individuals.[1]

The data taken into consideration were demographics and likes affixed on Facebook. In that same year, the Privacy Act (GDPR 679/16) came into effect in the European Union, and this data collection for political profiling became illegal, at least as far as Europe is concerned.

I myself experimented with the power of the automated analysis of that data that Facebook made available, developing an application that allowed people to receive a suggestion of a book to give to their friends a week before their birthday, basing the suggestion on likes and demographic profiling.

Today AI makes it possible to take an important further leap in both profiling and relationship management. Indeed, it is possible to profile each individual contact according to the best message to persuade them, and the texts can all be written automatically.

It goes from thirty-two categories to millions of possible different messages. If most politicians were scandalized by the power of Cambridge Analytica, the age of AI will give a feeling of magic and of something unstoppable. Some will want to witch hunt, others will try to apply it to its fullest.

With AI-enhanced campaigns, even political advertising will reach a new level. The application in business today sees the results of *data-driven* advertisements fourteen times more effective than those based on personal intuition. Added to this will be the ability to create images, videos, and text with all the necessary formats for different media, in very little time and cost.

Classic promotional communications, however, will also be mixed with

advertisements that offer artifact videos to push people to believe fabricated information and events. The cost of making them has dropped so much that it will be the activists and advocates themselves who can carry on these activities with little ability for anyone to control them. Fabricated news is unfortunately part of the strategies of all sides.

A famous bipartisan example was in 2004 an advertising spat between the two U.S. presidential candidates. John Kerry aired an ad claiming that George W. Bush had said that creating jobs abroad was desirable for the U.S.,[2] and in response Bush ran an ad where he claimed that Kerry had supported 350 times higher taxes.[3] Too bad both claims were false.[4]

If Obama's 2008 election campaign is now remembered as the first time the Internet and social media were used to win the U.S. presidency, the 2024 election will probably be seen as the debut of AI as a determining factor in the winners of many of the electoral contests to be held around the world, which moreover sees more than half of its inhabitants going to the polls for their government in the same year for the first time.

Citizens who want to proactively inform themselves will also be able to interact with the politician on duty in a direct and individual way. Indeed, "virtual twins" of the candidate, trained on his or her agenda and sensibilities, always available to talk to anyone at any time of day or night, are becoming more widespread. One of the first experiments was Miami Mayor Francis Suarez's chatbot[5] for his U.S. presidential candidacy, which although AI-driven for the interpretation part of the request, nevertheless relied on a series of prerecorded videos that were called up depending on the questions posed by the citizen in the chat.

The creation of these virtual twins obviously leads to the need to carefully manage communication, since the most problematic conversations will be shared by users, as has largely happened with mainstream AI chats.[6]

In the future there will be no more ghostwriters: in a decade or so I imagine Autonomous Agents, Personal Assistants dropped on the reality and knowledge of the individual politician who constantly suggest to him or her what to say and how to say it: personalized AI on past statements, policy ideas, international best cases, which can lead to creating co-pilots for politicians, both for electoral and management communication. Research on opposing candidates can be automated to uncover all their secrets and contradictions from all their past statements, to be exposed

during the election campaign. Campaign management itself will be able to be managed and set up by Artificial Intelligence objects.

The real issue will be technology neutrality, a topic we have also seen in social media siding on several occasions for one side over another. In the United States, the Democrats have invested directly in Quiller.ai, which then gives speechwriting support only to U.S. Democrats. Its competitor Contents.ai is for now still politically agnostic and thus usable by all sides.

AI, if constructed in a *super partes* manner, could also become the most impartial conductor of a public confrontation of the candidates, to highlight the contradictions and the differences in the challengers' respective positions.

AI BRAND MANAGERS

Consistent communication is essential for any brand that wants to reinforce its value. This is an aspect that is also often underestimated in corporate communication, but it is nevertheless essential to the construction of a message that is considered credible and consistent.

In one of the earliest examples of using AI to produce election posters. Sergio Massa, a presidential candidate that lost Argentina's 2023 elections, inspired his communication by the Soviet communication of artist Gustav Klucis, who died in 1938.[7] All the posters were created with AI, which thus gave the candidate a clear and consistent communication. However, the association to the early twentieth-century periods was then exploited by opponent Javier Milei to create images on the Internet – viewed millions of times – that portrayed Massa as a Chinese leader, again using AI to create them. An "artistic" comparison that ultimately proved Milei electorally right, and yet would not have been possible so quickly and cost-effectively without the use of AI.

The use of AI will be increasingly central to creating campaign communications, and we are already seeing the first uses. At the announcement of Biden's reapplication, a video released by Republicans that showed a disaster world we would have in the event of his reelection caused a stir.[8] The video was clearly fake, but its verisimilitude and especially the hyper-realism of the images used were achieved with a promptness and economy of cost that shook the media system. Similar footage appeared in the Argentine election campaign.

We are entering a new world not yet mapped by rules and good customs, and this is perhaps what worries us most: not knowing what

should or should not be considered right.

In the U.S. presidential race, the most unscrupulous in the use of AI has been Ron DeSantis, who, for example, released a video in which it appeared to be Trump with his voice reading DeSantis' own posts. The advertisement was circulated by a Super Political Action Committee (PAC) in his favor and offered no message to clarify that it was an artifact. Instead, in channels unfavorable to DeSantis, images of a hug between Trump and Dr. Anthony Fauci, his arch-enemy with whom he had differing views on the rules on anti-pandemic measures-were also posted, but without any indication that that situation had never occurred in reality.[9] It was not illegal; there were no laws on the subject at the time.

In Poland, the opposition party created AI videos where Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki was reading writings of his own, but put out of context and associated with live statements made in Parliament to emphasize his inconsistency. The sentences were true, only the voice was artificially created, but without any indication to viewers.

AI can also be used to improve one's communication. For example, as early as 2020 in India, a candidate translated his video into all languages and dialects to reach everyone with his message.[10] But it can also be used to run a campaign from prison and win it. This is the case of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who used his own digital copy to recite his speeches during the general election campaign and win the early 2024 election campaign in Pakistan.

THE FUTURE OF THE SURVEY

Above all, AI will be a tool to help us better understand the world we live in.

The history of the political poll begins in the United States in 1824 for the U.S. presidential campaign at that time.[11] Fewer than five hundred people were surveyed and the result coincided with Andrew Jackson winning the popular vote, although he had to wait another four years to be elected seventh president of the United States because of the election mechanism. Enthusiasm for the success of the prediction mechanism led it to expand to the point that the weekly newspaper "The Literary Digest" sent postcards throughout the United States in the early twentieth century asking who would win the next presidential election. The weekly correctly predicted four presidents in a row, but in 1936 it failed to predict Franklin Delano Roosevelt's re-election despite collecting 2.3

million responses. At the same time researchers – George Gallup, Archibald Crossley and Elmo Roper – had realized that it was not the number of respondents that was important, so much as that they were representative of the population, and with their method Roper correctly predicted Roosevelt's reelection. "The Literary Digest" closed its doors; instead, the polling industry took off.

The fragility of the poll is precisely related to the lack of representativeness, initially because not everyone had a phone from which to answer, and today because large segments of the population prefer not to take the time to answer. This has led to glaring errors such as the one on Brexit or the one on Trump versus Hillary Clinton or, finally, in Italy, the one made in measuring the 5 Star Movement the first time, which was underestimated by six percentage points.

The most interesting effects of the poll, however, are the indirect ones. Citizens who read a poll are often swayed to jump on the bandwagon, which is why in many parts of the world their publication is banned close to the vote. Politicians insufficiently convinced of their own ideas, on the other hand, tend to flatten themselves on poll results for their statements.

If we are to rely, in fact, on citizen choice, it must be conscious, informed and representative. Participation in a survey often fails to meet at least two out of three of these characteristics. Thus, one runs the risk of falling into the paradox of Henry Ford, who recounted, "If I had asked my customers what they wanted, they would have told me: a faster horse." Among the three basic characteristics, it is in fact above all the correct information about the available options that is often lacking.

Citizens should also be aware that they are deciding, and not just giving a mere opinion. The difference can be significant.

This is why there is a huge difference between binding or consultative decisions. If the decision is binding there will be much more participation from below and much more attention to what is decided.

AI will bring us new tools for predicting popular consensus. Researchers today are working on many fronts. For instance, 'synthetic samples' mimicking thousands of individuals from the population, derived from real individuals and emulating their thought processes, are open to interrogation.

Replication of thinking using AI Large Language Models (LLMs) goes far beyond surface similarity because it can capture the relationships between ideas, attitudes, and sociocultural context that shape one's

thinking.[12] These kinds of results make us think about what our real free will is and how much our choices are caused by the context in which we live and the characteristics we grow up with.

Criticism of this type of model is not lacking, especially from those most fond of the old methods, however, it is often based on the fact that these models must be trained on classic surveys.[13] The next few years will reveal who will be right, but even if the two methodologies were to be integrated, the evolution will surely be driven by cost: while a classic survey is priced at around 20,000 dollars, the "survey via AI" costs researchers 75 dollars.

As is often the case, "he who is hammer sees a world full of nails," and so those who predict the future with surveys see only those. The data to train the virtual twins of citizen respondents might not only be those via classic surveys, but also online and social media activities by people, discussion forums, AI chatbots serving individuals, and many other accessible sources that could help continue to update the "synthetic thinking" of virtual respondents.

The AI prediction model reads the Internet, does not interview individuals, and limits its interference: it does not disturb people, does not choose which ones to interview, does not write questions one way rather than another. And it is often more reliable than traditional methods. A Canadian service based on this model, Polly,[14] has predicted all the events that have challenged traditional systems in recent years, such as the Brexit, Trump's victory and then Biden's, or the Liberal Party's victory in Canada with Justin Trudeau.[15]

These models, however, lead to a new tool that opens up unprecedented uses for election campaigns, which now aim not only to know who will win, but to change outcomes in their own favor.

This happened with the mechanism of Cambridge Analytica, which analyzed more than 50 million Facebook profiles not only to learn about their political thoughts, but to target them with messages that would change their minds.

As in the movie *Any Given Sunday,* where the coach played by Al Pacino spurred his American football players to win games "one inch at a time" toward the goal, today even election campaigns can be *won one voter at a time.*

There was first a realization of the convenience of communicating different messages to different groups of voters following Richard

Nixon's defeat in the 1960 U.S. presidential election. His overly open-minded positions on civil rights had antagonized the Southern states that had caused him to lose, since regulations still existed that restricted the African-American vote. Aware of this problem, his staff then defined for his 1968 candidacy the "Southern Strategy." It consisted of differentiating the civil rights message between Northern and Southern states, where the message being conveyed was that legislation was becoming too lax. Through this strategy Nixon became the 37th president of the United States.[16]

Since then, the groups to whom to speak in different words have been greatly reduced. If in 2004 George W. Bush had groups of thousands of people to speak to, and Obama selected people by hundreds in 2008, today it is possible to have individual profiling and with AI to draft messages and images for each individual voter when necessary. This approach is also very efficient, since it is not necessary to spend money and energy to convince those who are already determined to go vote for our side, and it is useless to try to contact those who will surely go vote for the opposing side. However, it is essential to interact with those who are undecided or those who are thinking of abstaining and persuade them.

AI enters this context certainly to improve the profiling and analysis of available data, but also and especially to identify what messages might be most effective in persuading people to change their minds. And this is perhaps the most sensitive issue today as also pointed out by Altman in his U.S. Senate hearing, where he admitted to being concerned about the ability of these systems to "manipulate, persuade and engage one-to-one interactions with voters."[17] It is a new game for AI to beat humans at. Having already won at chess, go, and poker, it now challenges him at the game of persuasion. Studies by Robb Willer, a professor at the Stanford School of Humanities and Sciences, indicate that already AI objects are able to be more persuasive than people without being aggressive, but staying on logic and facts, and do not need to resort to storytelling techniques.[18]

The opportunities for interaction are not just advertisements or public events: the campaign can insert itself into conversations that are already happening online. AI can also be used to identify them, examining in real time influencers, trends and discussion threads in which to insert itself.

It is a job that some people nowadays entrust to so-called troll armies,

people paid by the candidate or party to post content on social media, often under false names. A strategy that, for example, enabled the president of the Philippines to win in the last election in 2023 thanks to the Filipino youth vote.[19]

Using AI to detect and interact in real time by responding to opposing doubts or fake news will likely be a solution adopted by many because of its cost-effectiveness compared to armies of trolls, but also because of its pervasive and timely ability to detect all conversations with which to interact. More generally, AI will also be used to keep their constituents and supporters updated on the activities of the political party.

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2 https://www.factcheck.org/2004/04/outsourcing-jobs-the-president-said-that/

3 https://www.factcheck.org/2004/04/bush-ad-is-troubling-indeed/

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17 https://www.c-span.org/video/?528117-1/openai-ceo-testifies-artificial-intelligence

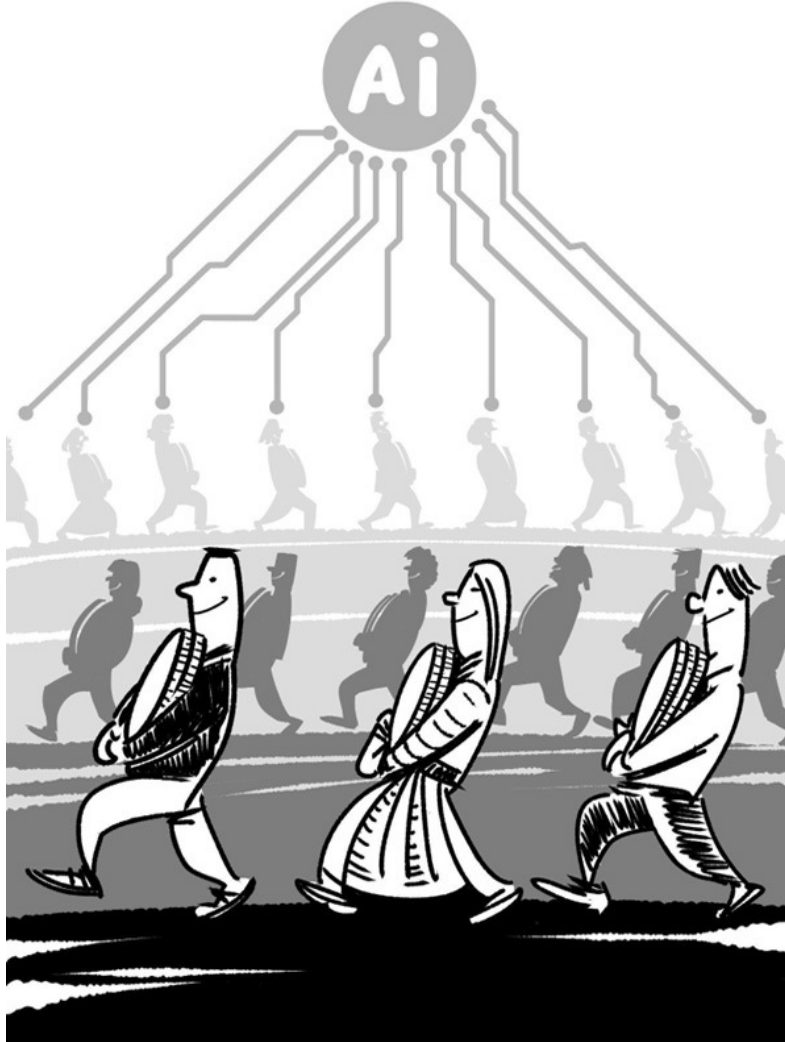18 https://hai.stanford.edu/news/ais-powers-political-persuasion

19 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_972Y8iwrX8

Fundraising

Aim for the moon, even if you miss it, you will land among the stars.

Les Brown

THE ITALIAN JOB
He who pays you owns you

[Socialists, but politicians in general] "are like Christopher Columbus.
They leave without knowing where they are going.
When they arrive, they don't know where they are.
All this with other people's money."

<div align="right">

Winston Churchill
(actualized)

</div>

In Italy, one of the Movement's first battles was to take public money out of politics. Every political scandal often started with money. It turned out that some parties even invested their publicly allocated funds in diamonds or bonds from some African country; others spent them on villas and luxury apartments, and others still put them in some foundation created ad hoc to keep them safe from the taxman.

In 1993, more than 90 percent of Italians voted in the referendum to repeal public party funding following a number of scandals related to the management of party money that came to light in an investigation that shook Italy, the so-called *Mani Pulite (Clean Hands)* affair. At the time, parties received money from the state to run their organizations according to the number of votes they received. In the 1990s, Bettino Craxi, leader of the Italian Socialist Party, resigned from office and fled into exile in Tunisia after a scene that remains in the minds of Italians to this day: on the way out of his hotel he was targeted with coins thrown by angry citizens. And as chance would have it, it was Craxi himself, as prime minister a few years earlier, who forced Beppe Grillo out of public television following a now-famous joke[1] against the then ruling Socialist Party during a widely watched TV program in Italy.

As in other democracies, those who protect party special interests soon find a way around political finance reform. In Italy, all that was needed to dribble through the referendum was to rename public funding as "reimbursements," as well as significantly increase the amount that flowed into party coffers. All the incumbents continued to argue that it was not possible to maintain themselves without public money. That is, of course, until the 5 Star Movement proved otherwise.

The approach taken by the Blog first, and the 5 Star Movement later, was simple: directly fund initiatives that people believe in. Paradoxically for a digital movement, the first fundraising campaigns served to finance print advertisement pages denouncing the corrupt conduct of the

governor of the Bank of Italy and the presence of twenty-five representatives of the Italian Parliament with criminal records.

Once we refined the online collection technique, we activated many single-issue causes. For example, in 2008 we simply posted on the Blog the bank account number of the family of a three-year-old boy, Fabullo, suffering from a rare heart disease curable only in the United States at an expense of $120,000, far beyond his parents' means. The collection went beyond expectations and the child flew to Florida. That same year we created a fund to defend people who were being taken to court under various pretexts to limit their political activism. We called the fund "Shield of the Net." Not only did we raise monetary contributions, but we also received pro bono donations of time and expertise from lawyers. Hundreds of them, from all over Italy, signed up to offer their support in defending activists in trouble.

The battle against wasting public money continued even when the 5 Star Movement entered government institutions. When our activists were elected in 2010 in five regions at the same time, an average of only 15,000 euros had been spent on each personal campaign, since many activities were carried out by volunteers. Yet for each elected person we would have been entitled to reimbursements of between 200 and 300,000 euros. It was clear that the word "refunds" was a smokescreen to hide yet another binge by professional politicians. And for this reason we immediately declared that we would reject such funds.

What became clear once "inside the institutions" was that public funds intended to make the democratic process fair and accessible ended up financially benefiting individual politicians and their families. To cite one striking example, regional councilors who were not re-elected received "severance pay" of up to half a million euros each from the public coffers.[2]

To break with the spirit of such practices, the elected regional councilors of the 5 Star Movement reduced their salaries to 2,500 euros per month, returning the excess to the state. During the Movement's campaign for the 2013 parliamentary elections, we raised through digital crowdfunding 774,208 euros. Of that amount we spent only half, 348,506 euros. The rest was donated to rebuild a gymnasium in an earthquake-stricken town.

Evidence of the superiority of crowdfunding over state subsidies for political campaigns can be seen by dividing the amount spent by the

number of votes cast during the election (8,784,499 votes). We spent 4 cents per vote, while the public reimbursement to which we were entitled was 4.86 euros per vote: 100 times more than what we actually needed for campaigning. At the end of that election round, we refused 42.7 million euros in so-called "refunds."

Throughout the history of the 5 Star Movement we have always given up all the money we considered too much. Starting with the golden salaries that our elected officials have always pledged to cut in half, the renunciation of the life annuities that guaranteed a pension even for just one day of work in Parliament, and the so-called office allowances that were added to the lavish salaries after being appointed to specific positions during the election. And, as I mentioned, we applied this ethic to election reimbursements after every regional or political election.

To ensure maximum transparency, the portal [tirendiconto.it](#)[3] was created where all elected regional and parliamentary members of the 5 Star Movement had to report their salaries and expenses. On that site it was possible to see that as long as I supported the Movement, 120 million euros of costs to citizens had been saved from bogus or inflated funding to the political class.

Unable to give up this money, our parliamentarians elected in the first legislature in 2013 donated directly to a fund in the Ministry of Economy earmarked for microcredit to support small and medium-sized enterprises that needed guarantees to access bank credit. But even this was not easy, as our parliamentarians had to camp out in front of the ministry until they were forced to open the account. As we have learned in many similar cases we have faced, the most effective policy is rooted in the strength and example of the right ideas.

Although the practices we established allowed for transparency, they also imposed official control over the use of funds. By the end of the legislature we realized that people's natures are sometimes weak and that controls should have been tighter. It had emerged that some parliamentarians had published transfers made to the ministry fund, only to have them revoked in the bank soon after. Obviously those parliamentarians were removed from the movement, but it was one of the most painful attacks we received during the election campaign, with journalists chasing after the clever ones to "expose" our "hypocrisy" while we were tailing them at the same time to be able to verify who had defrauded our trust and especially that of the Italians.

For this reason, in the new legislature that began in 2018, an intermediate fund was established to which such reimbursements could be allocated. In addition to asserting full audited control over such transfers, the new rule also allowed parliamentarians to allocate the money to various state funds-for earthquake victims, for civil protection, for school eco-sustainability projects, and many others-giving members of the movement a choice.

At the local level, activist groups have always focused on volunteering and cutting unnecessary costs, such as renting physical places to meet, taking advantage of municipal spaces, libraries, bars, and pizzerias. When it was necessary to raise funds for a particular initiative, the most visible people in the movement, including the many artists who wanted to support it, starting with Beppe Grillo himself, donated their time while event participants paid out of their own pockets. For example, by organizing evenings titled *The Parliamentarian That Serves You* - where well-known parliamentarians served pizzas at pizzerias - or put automated money collection systems in squares during rallies, so-called Donamats (known abroad as Automatic Giving Machines, AGMs).

The Blog, with the various services it built up over time, also had a cost. From the beginning we knew that it would only be economically sustainable if it was paid for by those who valued it. The income could only grow linearly with the growing popu larity of the Blog and thus the technology costs that increased accordingly. Therefore, we decided to produce and sell online DVDs of the shows we wrote for Beppe Grillo based on the topics covered in the Blog. This method was able to sustain most of the investment until 2011.

We had no idea how much the Blog would grow or how much a DVD of a comedy show sold online might sell, since until then we had never been involved in producing shows in that format and there were no similar products on the market to compare directly. To protect ourselves, we signed a contract in which we committed to continue only if we sold at least 600 DVDs. We went far beyond that bar. The first year we sold 100,000 DVDs and that allowed us to invest heavily in the Blog, its editorial care and services that could support the community that followed it.

But no model is forever: the crisis in the DVD market created by new streaming capabilities and the ever-increasing need for services to manage and coordinate the growing Blog community triggered the

second funding model to sustain the initiative. From 2012 to 2016 we introduced advertising on the Blog, which allowed us to develop much of what was useful to accompany the movement's entry into government institutions, from the voting systems activated in 2012 to many other services that would later end up under the name *Rousseau Platform*, our online organizing ecosystem.

But advertising also had its limitations. Italy's digital advertising management system was opaque and was run by intermediaries affiliated with the television world. This greatly disadvantaged the growth of the online sector, and thus the value of online advertising compared to other foreign countries. At the same time it was necessary to maintain a very high bar with respect to companies that could appear with their advertising on the Blog. Therefore, all the most profitable advertisements, such as personal finance or betting advertisements, were filtered out because they were not in line with the ideas behind the Blog.

Occasionally, however, some advertisements circumvented the filters, as most of them were run automatically with systems such as Google Adwords that allowed the advertiser to specify their target consumers themselves. Whenever one of these ads appeared as a result of automatic targeting, there was no shortage of attacks from the official press pointing out the anomaly. And, of course, our own followers on the Blog were left odd by such ideological inconsistency.

But at some point a new problem intervened. Since advertising was directly proportional to traffic on our site, the flood of new readers who arrived on social media posts such as Facebook expanded our audience, but not our revenue. While happy with the spread of our message, we suffered from the erosion of advertising traffic coming in from outside the Blog through third-party channels that we were not monetizing.

For these reasons, we had to change the model further in 2016 to support the costs of the organizational structure, the Rousseau Platform, by switching to voluntary donations from members of the 5 Star Movement, readers of the Blog, and, starting in 2018, from a small mandatory contribution from those elected to Parliament and the regions.

We arrived at a point of equilibrium with all the movement's organizational services offered by the Rousseau Association, a nonprofit organization, founded in 2016, which had a budget of just over a million euros a year thanks to shrewd cost management kept at the private market average, and not at that typical of parties, and to various

volunteer work, such as my own.[4]

The goal was to ensure free access to the movement and its services so as not to create any discrimination in terms of fruition. Anyone could register and apply to join the movement without any distinction. And unlike any other political force, it was not necessary to advance money to run for an elected position.

In order to change the cost structure of democracy so that the whole of civil society can be involved-and not just organized special interests with time and money to participate-we need to change old methods and bring in innovative solutions. Today, as the 5 Star Movement and others have demonstrated, digital enables the involvement of the average citizen in shaping the political landscape as never before, including through crowdfunding their collective activities. Other solutions in my opinion must come through public services instead of money. Already today, for example, free television and radio advertising space for election campaigns is guaranteed in Italy. If we feel as a community that it is necessary to offer services to the forces running for office, let's offer them for free. Starting for example with the digital signature collection platform that has been announced many times in Italy and never really got off the ground. Democratizing the finance of politics is a turning point that, going forward, is one of the best guarantees that people themselves, and not a moneyed establishment, can set the agenda for what matters in their lives.

1 "If everyone in China is a socialist, who are they stealing from?" in 1986 on RAI's *Fantastico 7.*

2 HTTPS://corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/bari/politica/15_aprile_08/maxi-buonuscite-regioneil-record-sempre-tarquinio-ec17cd74-ddb4-11e4-975e-a8ccf9671ad5.shtml

3 It was one of the first blacked-out services after the end of my administration.

4 https://web.archive.org/web/20201002215543/https://rousseau.movimento5stelle.it/rendiconti

The value of having no money

The revolution will not be staffed

Bernie Sanders

Howard Dean is the typical underdog candidate who through out-of-the-ordinary strategies manages to establish himself, in his case to participate in the 2004 U.S. presidential race. The former Vermont governor ultimately did not win the primary, but he understood first and demonstrated to the world what the potential of online crowdfunding was. He was the underdog, but still managed to raise more money than any of his competitors and broke the record for raising in a single quarter ($14.8 million in the last three months of 2003, compared to Bill Clinton's $10.3 million in 1995). The average donation to Dean was only $80. He was also a pioneer in using the power of the Internet through a vast network of bloggers who carried on his campaign themes.

  I had a chance to talk to him to better understand his strategies, and he told me that his goal was always simplicity and a direct relationship with voters.[1] Being an underdog, he had to come up with all kinds of ways to do things differently using the power of the Internet, even for his fundraising campaign. He was only able to go home every two weeks for a few hours during the campaign, and he often simply ate a sandwich for lunch. He also had to be able to raise money, however. His opponent, Vice President Dick Cheney, was organizing a $25,000 gala dinner per couple: he raised $525,000. Dean decided one day to eat his ham sandwich in front of a webcam. By broadcasting the spectacle of that frugal meal he raised $625,000. His fundraising was different, but very effective. It was based on microfunding, mostly under $100 and often under $20. The campaign communication said, "Don't eat a pizza this month and send $5 to the Howard Dean campaign." It worked.

  In the name of fairness in electoral contests, political parties in 20th-century democracies have become accustomed to thinking that political campaigns should be supported by supplementary public funding provided by the government. This has unfortunately led to many scandals in the use of this money and an unseemly scramble for funds that undermines the other engine of political activism: ideas. Bernie Sanders recognized this in his famous maxim *The revolution will not be*

staffed.

Thanks to digital technology, the role of money in politics, just like everything else, is being transformed. Crowdfunding – the collection of resources directly from the electoral base – makes it possible not only to finance campaigns receiving small donations from a broad base, but also to diminish the corruptive effect induced when soliciting large sums from organized special interests.

The idea of crowdfunding is not new. It is simply enhanced by the increase in citizens' digital networks.

It was the famous British poet Alexander Pope who invented the idea of "subscriptions" through which the printing and distribution of his translation of the *Iliad* was paid for in advance by those who wanted to read it; the first volume was published in 1713 with 750 subscribers. In Vienna seventy years later, Mozart found 176 people who together financed a concert and in return received an autographed copy of the musical score. Perhaps the most symbolic moment of the power of crowdfunding was the Statue of Liberty now in New York Harbor. "Lady Liberty" is in fact a gift from France, which occurred in 1874 to celebrate the centennial of U.S. independence, and was largely funded by donations from French citizens and supportive American civil society.

When the French government ran out of money, it managed to raise in micro-donations from its citizens another 250,000 francs to build the statue, and meanwhile across the ocean the United States, led by publisher Joseph Pulitzer, managed to raise the remaining $100,000 to build the pedestal.

Pulitzer's appeal – that Americans did not need millionaires to accomplish something important, but could instead come together as citizens of the world – captured the spirit of the crowdfunding concept then and now:

"We must raise the money! The World is the people's paper, and now it appeals to the people to come forward and raise the money. The $250,000 that the making of the Statue cost was paid in by the masses of the French people- by the working men, the tradesmen, the shop girls, the artisans- by all, irrespective of class or condition. Let us respond in like manner. Let us not wait for the millionaires to give us this money. It is not a gift from the millionaires of France to the millionaires of America, but a gift of the whole people of France to the whole people of America."

- Pulitzer, The New York World.[2]

In the contemporary world, the Internet has changed the concept of fundraising. Bill Clinton's campaign in 1996, although not a huge

success, raising only about ten thousand dollars from online credit cards, was one of the first steps toward democratizing campaign financing.

A few years later, during the 2008 presidential campaign, Obama proved that it was not necessary to start out rich to compete in the U.S. presidential election and win it. In one month in February 2008, he raised $55 million, $45 million of which came online through a simple website. Overall in the campaign, more than a third of the funds raised came from donations of less than $200.[3] This success against Hillary Clinton's large donations from the political establishment allowed him to forgo supplemental public funds for his campaign. In the end, Obama raised $745 million.

The advantage of donations received from many people with lower amounts in systems where there is a maximum limit that can be donated by the individual, such as in the United States (today $3,300),[4] is that it is possible to go back to the donor and ask to contribute again. In Obama's 2008 election campaign, for example, 49% of donors initially contributed less than $200, but by the end of the campaign 27% of them had exceeded the $200 threshold and 47% had exceeded $1,000.[5]

In later years, digital donations entered the physical world. Mobile payment systems such as Square readers and Automatic Giving Machines (AGMs) enabled volunteers to collect donations on the street at events.

Crowdfunding campaigns always come with strong ideas to support and small impromptu rewards that allow people to get involved. One of the sites that has been following these types of initiatives for years is Fundly.com, which encapsulates many of the ideas used to date.[6]

One of these is to create the urgency of giving. For example, in 2007 the term money bomb was coined for presidential candidate Ron Paul and consisted of "a one-day prepared giving frenzy," the use of which has spread since 2012. The record holder today is probably Donald Trump, who raised $18 million in 2016 in twenty-four hours after his first debate with Hillary Clinton.[1]

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1 *My full interview:* https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2020/10/davide-casaleggio-intervista-howard-dean-meetup-lalba-della-partecipazione-civica.html
2 https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/joseph-pulitzer.htm

3 http://www.cfinst.org/press/releases_tags/10-01-08/Revised_and_Updated_2008_Presidential_Statistics.aspx

4 https://www.fec.gov/help-candidates-and-committees/candidate-taking-receipts/contribution-limits/

5 http://www.cfinst.org/president/pdf/PresidentialWorkingPaper_April09.pdf

6 https://blog.fundly.com/fundraising-ideas/#favorites

-1 https://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/donald-trump-post-debate-fundraising-228805

The Money Machine

*Politics should be guided by the will of the people,
not from lobby money.*

<div align="right">Perplexity, AI</div>

   Political fundraising can be based on convincing citizens of the importance of those funds in achieving common goals, or on deception. Or on a mixture of the two.

   Often political organizations choose the latter path because they are unable to demonstrate the essentiality to citizens of their battles or of the bonuses they want to dispense.

   In Italy, for example, people are made to believe that public financing of parties is the result of a free and autonomous civic decision, made through the mechanism of the 2 per thousand through the income tax return, even after 90 percent of Italians voted against it in the referendum on the issue. Even those who venture to say that it is the individual citizen who chooses to donate part of his or her taxes to the party of choice forget to say that 97 percent of citizens (these are 2022 figures) choose not to designate anyone, yet their money is also allocated to parties.[1] It means that for every million euros of funding a party receives from the 2 per thousand in reality citizens had chosen to give it only 30,000. A big difference. And a big deception, since none of the people I ever talk to about it knows the numbers of the issue.

   This mechanism does not apply to other similar contributions in Italy, such as the 5 per thousand for support to third sector associations, where only the money expressly earmarked by citizens is actually taken and the rest remains in the availability of public taxation.

   Even abroad, party fundraising campaign solicitations are rife with deception and manipulation, an analysis of those sent by email shows. A sample of 317,366 political emails sent during the 2020 U.S. elections showed that deception was the norm.[2] For example, parties lied about the identity of the sender (implying that it was a private, direct email from the politician in question), were led to believe that it was a response to a conversation that had already begun (the subject line was preceded by the words "Re:"), or were not transparent about the purpose for which the money was being used. As evidenced by the analysis, the practice is

common to all sides of the political spectrum.[3]

With our experience in Italy, we have shown that it is possible to convince people to support an initiative in a transparent way and get to the government of the country with 32 percent support. We did it with little money and a lot of volunteer work. But raising money from activists and supporters was still crucial.

The Internet allowed us to organize projects, messages, and collection for various committees in a way that made the use of funds as transparent as possible. Artificial Intelligence now allows us to take a new leap in organizing the collection of financial support.

The first way is the most obvious one: the enhancement of processes in place. For example, the Quiller AI system[4] allows the preparation of draft emails to be sent to be more effective and have a better response; the numbers confirm that AI does this better than humans.[5] Advertisements can be crafted, enhanced, and profiled for any context. People can be persuaded twice as effectively to sign up for fundraising newsletters, but most importantly, AI allows us to understand who is most likely to donate and with respect to which message they will be most responsive.[6]

A second level of AI use is less obvious: the autonomous and continuous creation of value for the initiative. Today it is possible to make use of artificial entities capable of directing autonomous economic contributions. The very evolution of exponential technologies has led us to imagine new business models that have positive autonomous impact on the world. One of my favorite cases is Lemonade Insurance, a U.S.-based insurance company that is able to handle 98 percent of claims automatically, via bots, without any employee having to intervene. It manages to achieve these results not only because of a large investment in technology, but more importantly because it removes the conflict of interest between insurer and insured. Of the premium paid, the company retains about a quarter for itself; the remainder is used to pay the eventual claim. If, at the end of the year, the customer has made no claims, he or she can designate the nonprofit organization to which to donate the remaining amount.

Being able to create automatic support mechanisms through exponential technologies is possible today, and AI will further enhance this process.

While we will have to wait a little longer for fully autonomous cars,

today in finance many processes are already fully autonomous to handle the speed of response needed to intercept possible microgains that, when added up, can make all the difference.[7] The next step is to entrust some businesses to fully autonomous agents that will be able to create value without human intervention.[8]

What we may see in the short term, as part of a new social model that is taking hold, however, will be the development of Benefit Corporations, which will have as their corporate goals and business models the creation of value for social battles outside the rigid party structure: a further push to the concept of the platform society, where each battle can be waged independently of political alignments. The first forms of this kind of approach can be seen, for example, in the 1% For the Planet initiative, where at the initiative of Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard, a network of companies has been created that pledge to give 1% of their sales to the planet by funding environmental associations and causes.[2]

The finalized collection activity could also be set up by more "traditional" organizations. In one of the blockchain's hype moments, there was also talk of the Vatican's idea of having its own cryptocurrency on which a percentage of its use during exchanges would always be withheld so that it could fund projects to support the poorest on Earth. Essentially turning what is now the ATM fee into a fee for the Earth.

The shift we are likely to see will reflect a willingness on the part of people and companies to directly fund the cause they want to advance and not a political party, with the model increasingly being a platform society.

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3 https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/26/us/politics/recurring-donations-seniors.html
4 https://quiller.ai/
5 https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/28/us/politics/artificial-intelligence-2024-campaigns.html
6 https://thedigitalco-op.com/
7 https://hbr.org/sponsored/2021/08/how-ready-are-you-for-autonomous-finance-operations
8 https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2023/04/hype-grows-

over-autonomous-ai-agents-that-loop-gpt-4-outputs/2/

9 https://www.onepercentfortheplanet.org/

Choices

Every day, what you choose, what you think and what you do is what you become.

Heraclitus
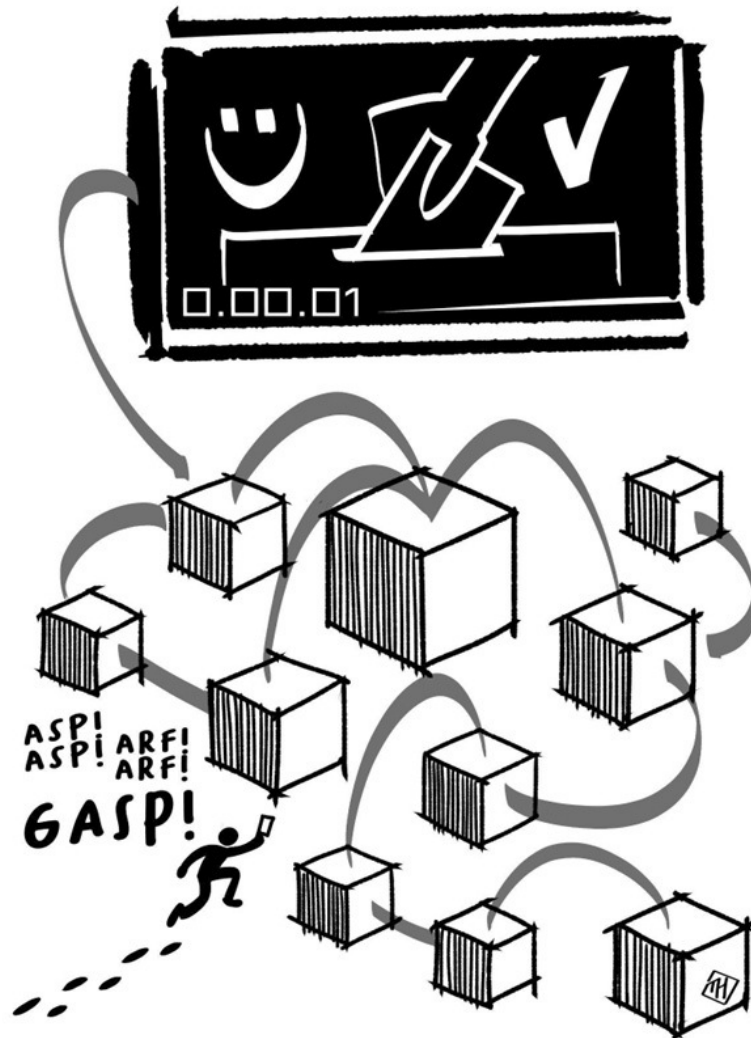
From the invention of applause to digital voting

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves.

Thomas Jefferson

One of the most significant inventions to gauge popular consensus is applause. When it was invented a few centuries before Christ, it deeply shook the political leaders of the time. Participation from below has always been resisted throughout history, but in the end it always evolved according to the tools available or inventions of the time, regardless of the resistance of those in power. In 400 B.C. Greek elites were scandalized by this new invention that introduced popular participation in decisions about what was right or wrong, beautiful or not so beautiful. The theater at Syracuse was the earliest example of which we are left with descriptions of this outraged intelligentsia that the people could express their appreciation for a work with their applause.

Plato in Book Three of *Laws* complained that musical performances were now not judged only by competent people as they had been until then. The fault for Plato lay with poets who devoted themselves to transgressing musical rules, mixing genres and confusing everything: "Poets only in temperament, ignorant of the proper rules of poetry." In so doing, "they infused the people with the custom of neglecting the laws of 'music' and the reckless pretension of being good judges of them; of consequence the theaters from silent were filled with shouts as if it were the audience that intended the beautiful and the not-so-beautiful poetic, and in place of the aristocracy there arose a bad theatro cracy as far as this art was concerned.*"*[1]

All these millennia later, of course, we no longer question whether the public can applaud when they are satisfied with the spectacle they are witnessing. However, many continue to question whether citizens themselves should decide on choices for their community.

Direct popular participation in community choices has always frightened elites who, in their arrogance, are convinced that they are in a better position to decide what is good for the community, or perhaps simply fear losing their seats in power and privilege. For these reasons, elites in every age have always tried to slow down change in this direction.

Ancient Greece (507-338 B.C.) is often taken as an example of direct citizen participation in community decisions. Democracy was practiced through the assembly and courts of justice, in which all male citizens over the age of twenty could participate. The assembly dealt with major laws and decisions, meeting every ten days or so. Resolutions were made by a show of hands by about six thousand people, or 20 percent of the eligible population. The courts, composed of several hundred people with no legal training or experience, met every two or three days. Finally, there was the *Bulè*, a council of five hundred administrators over the age of thirty who ruled by order of the assembly.

Democracy in ancient Greece was also a "sortition." Most members of the *bulè* were not elected, but drawn by lot from a list of qualified citizens, to avoid influencing the implementation of decisions. Jurors were also selected by lottery on the day of the trial itself, to avoid bias or corruption. Finally, magistrates – chosen first from among property owners and then by lottery – were appointed annually to oversee all religious, military, and judicial affairs.

Then as now, it was the rich oligarchs who disliked this system and were always trying to rewrite the rules to limit the space of citizens.

FROM GREEK APPLAUSE TO DIGITAL ITALY

Mindful of these historical recurrences and in light of the participatory power of new digital technologies, from the very beginning, with the Blog, we established inclusive processes that invited the widest possibilities for public involvement. In 2006 we launched an online discussion on five issues – Energy, Health, Transportation, Economy, and Information – with policy proposals from world experts that were discussed on the Web by thousands of commenters.

Six months later we produced a document outlining a set of recommendations for action in these areas, *The Citizens' Primary*. It was sent to the then Italian prime minister, Romano Prodi, who agreed to meet with us. It was a nice gesture, but unfortunately, on a practical level, it led to nothing. All proposals were filed, so to speak, in the drawer. This experience taught us a lesson that pushed us to the next step: citizens had the tools to express themselves, but those sitting in the institutions did not have the will to listen to them.

We soon discovered that beyond simply not listening, there was also a willingness to resist our growing popularity by the established political parties, which were beginning to see us as encroaching on their territory. When the 5-Star Movement began to gain momentum ahead of the 2018 general elections, the ruling parties introduced a change that would

disadvantage us by raising the bar far higher to be able to govern without alliances: if in France Macron could govern by getting 28 percent of the vote (in the first round), in Italy it was now necessary to have 40 percent. Unfortunately, it is common practice to tweak electoral laws before new elections, and in many cases these changes are taken to court. After the 2013 vote, the Constitutional Court struck down the previous election law, declaring it unconstitutional. We therefore found ourselves in the position of proposing a new set of election rules. To develop our proposal, we invited a law professor to explain the various alternatives to all our members during a three-month period. Each week, after dealing with each point, members voted to accept or reject the option debated. For the first time in modern Italian history, election rules were established from the bottom up instead of through the influence of immobile parties eager to protect the status quo.

We further repeated this bottom-up process when we decided to run for parliamentary elections in 2018. To prepare the platform for that event, all our members were engaged in discussions for over a year and a half. Each week we delved into a topic on the Blog with experts who explained the various aspects so that we could develop policy positions regarding individual issues. The following week, after our members expressed their views in a conversation that took place in the Blog comments, we would proceed to a vote on the positions and priorities to follow. At the end of the process, which garnered 2.4 million individual votes, we decided on 104 separate issues over twenty-six separate voting days.

This proactive engagement of the citizens themselves in formulating an important program for the ordinary citizen was undoubtedly one of the reasons we received the most votes in the 2018 elections, garnering 32 percent of the total.

Digital voting allows for many more ways than can be managed with a paper-based system, opening up new possibilities and, in some cases, unintended consequences. On Rousseau, for example, we have experimented with various ways of organizing electoral lists in the more than 300 votes taken since 2012. Some approaches have produced strange results, as was the case in a 2014 vote when on the electoral lists we presented candidates in alphabetical order, which led to choices based on a person's visi bility. Perhaps not too strangely, out of seventeen MEPs eight had surnames beginning with one of the first three letters of the alphabet (four had surnames beginning with "A," two with "B," two with "C").

In the subsequent European elections we then decided to evolve the system, accompanying a random presentation of candidates with a system of assigning merits that each of them could obtain. Those who had the most appeared at the top of the list; if some had the same number of merits, the order was randomly assigned each time the page was updated. This system made it easy for the voter to see the candidate's qualifications and resulted in generating the best quality electoral list compared to those of all other parties, according to an aseptic analysis that considered academic or work experience, knowledge of languages, presence of non-political professional citizens, and activities carried on in the political community to which they belonged.

There were nine merit categories: academic (earning at least a bachelor's degree); linguistic (proficiency in Italian and English at least at a B2 level); participation in online movement activities and physical events; having taken the e-learning courses available online on Rousseau (e.g., to become an MEP) and in-person courses organized on the ground; having been previously elected to the lists of the 5 Star Movement (maximum of one time); and two special merits dedicated to excellence in career and studies.

We deliberately decided not to conflate these merits into a general indicator, a score, precisely so that the chooser would know exactly why one candidate appeared above another and also to give the possibility of selecting and filtering candidates based on specific merits.

One of the initial rules that must be defined is who can vote. This is what distinguishes a street movement from a political organization. Movement membership and the determination of who is eligible to vote are essential to understanding how the political movement can grow, develop, and protect itself from outside attacks. In the 5 Star Movement we initially allowed membership and participation to anyone who wanted to register and vote, but candidates at that time were only among those who had already actively supported the Movement by running for office on city lists during previous years. Later the candidate lists were opened to others as well, but voting was allowed only for those who had been registered for at least six months and had participated in activities on Rousseau at least once in the past year. In this way, the electoral base was not subject to sudden "enrollment surges," and cross-checks on members were possible to make sure they were not on the electoral lists of other parties.

Another debated topic is whether ordinary people can decide on issues about which they have no specific expertise, but which nevertheless have

an impact on their lives. The conclusion I have come to is that appropriateness should not be based on the complexity of the issue at hand, but on the impact it will have on a person's life. For example, the referendum on the use of nuclear power to produce energy did not require knowledge of the mechanisms of nuclear fission, but it was sufficient to understand what the consequences of an accident like Fukushima or Chernobyl would be, and to know the fact that there is no insurance in the world willing to insure against such an accident. That is why on Rousseau in 2014 we decided, for example, to choose the name of the president of the Republic and oblige 5 Star MPs to vote the resulting name even though in the Italian Constitution this choice is left to parliamentarians. In general terms, there is not so much a "right choice" as a "sovereign choice," and sovereignty belongs to the citizens.

In the age of digital citizenship we have entered a cultural dilemma, squeezed between entrenched habits and new opportunities offered by the Internet and exponential technologies. Clinging to traditions while ignoring the possibilities we have today creates what I call the seven short paradoxes of democracy.[2]

1) The paradox of the second wheel.

The represented person should always decide, except when only his representative can do so. The opposite almost always happens.

Whether we are talking about meetings of a company's shareholders or members of a political party, delegates or chosen representatives are temporary solutions to a problem related to decision-making efficiency, not incompetence in deciding what is best. Whenever possible, it is important that the representatives should be able to decide. Politically, there are many instances where the members of a community decide on their own future. In 2018 in Germany, the Spd party, in order to confirm its government contract with Angela Merkel's Cdu, had its members vote; 239,000 people gave their assent by traditional mail. Instead, in many cases representatives choose on behalf of the represented even when they could involve them in the decision making process. "Trading direct democracy for dictatorship," – Gianroberto Casaleggio wrote in the book *Insult Me! (Insultatemi!)* – "is like claiming that Gandhi was a dangerous antidemocratic subversive."

2) The paradox of the luddite with the smartphone.

The medium is the message when communicating; it is a mere tool when participating.

Just a few years ago it was normal to find people relying on the bank

teller to manage their bank account or the travel agency to book a flight. Now it is normal to make online wire transfers and have the conductor see your train ticket on your cell phone. Technology has always evolved faster than culture, but each time we have adapted quickly. People fond of the past will always be there; we will simply have to accompany them in the change or ensure that they can print their train ticket in a machine at the station. Now is the time to move beyond 15th-century technologies when it comes to voting and participation in the life of one's community. Claiming that online voting is dangerous is very reminiscent of the criticisms of the introduction of the train that were going around in the 1800s: distinguished scientists argued that traveling over 30 kilometers per hour (in those days the maximum speed of horse-drawn carriages) could break passengers' bones. Fear of the future is overcome with culture and experience.

3) The paradox of the delegator without his knowledge.

Those who support the party model as an instrument of democracy are the ones who complain about the low representation provided by movement voters.

The party structure arose to give organization to people who want to spend themselves actively for their community, sharing an idea. They are closed, dues-paying environments, born on a geographic basis because until the last century people could only meet in person. They typically have a membership of about one hundredth of their electorate, and important decisions are often made by a few people in closed rooms away from those who have owned their membership. Movements, on the other hand, are inclusive, do not require membership fees, and give the power to decide on important issues to the members themselves – that is, to as large a group of people as possible whose ambition is to grow and involve those who want to participate. It is curious that those who object to choices being made by more than a hundred thousand people are often the same people who tolerate them being made by five people, or who rely daily on polls that covered a few hundred people.

4) The paradox of the dumb decision maker.

We are more concerned about those who vote "wrongly" than we are about explaining our reasons to them.

If we think that the majority of our community will make the choice we think is wrong, it is our job to make an effort to convince them otherwise. If we do not do so, it is probably because we do not think it is important to do so, or because we are not convinced that we are right all the way through, or, again, because we feel that we are unable to

convince others of our reasons. When we argue that there is not enough time to allow voting we are just saying that we have not made enough effort to involve people in the path of choice when it was appropriate to do so. Institutional short-circuits like the case of Brexit, or journalistic short-circuits like the case of Trump's election campaign, always arise from this mechanism.

5) The paradox of the coach who thought he was an attacker.

The intelligentsia of a community decides what is best for its future.

Political choices impact our lives and in some cases those of our children. Those who think that only experts on the topic can choose are confusing knowledge with choice. Experts can explain the issue (e.g., the risks of nuclear power) and the impact a decision will have on our lives, but the final decision (e.g., whether to take that risk) must be made by the community, if it is at all possible.

6) The paradox of the subversive participant.

Interpreting the will of citizens outside the institutional vote collides with respect for institutions.

Those who complain about the lack of respect for institutions, on the other hand, openly support the practice that the same decisions have been made, until now, by a small leadership group rather than by the membership. Whether or not it was a question of supporting a government or choosing the members of electoral lists, it was often the so-called "leaders" of the party who decided, certainly not the parliamentarians, let alone the "institutions," brought up when it was most convenient.

7) The paradox of different uniting.

A community that votes unites even if it has different views. A community that does not vote divides and alienates those who think differently.

Participation and respect for the choices of the majority are values that everyone shares. Disagreement is just a space where we can act to better prove our points. A united community can change things; a divided one can at best shout its thoughts.

The real paradox is of those who, out of fear of changing habits, prefer to think that innovation is always and everywhere dangerous. Digital citizenship actually brings a new dimension of participation in the life of one's community. There will be limits that we should imagine, but also tools that we should build and new rights that we should affirm to allow, without discrimination, everyone to participate to share their value.

[1] Plato, Laws, Book III, XV, 701a

[2] From a letter I wrote to "Corriere della Sera," Sept. 19, 2017.

AI
The artificial mind coach

The wisdom of people
is measured not in their ability to follow their beliefs,
but in his courage to question them and prudence to discern the truth.

ChatGPT (AI)

Adriano Olivetti was one of the best Italian entrepreneurs of the twentieth century: he oversaw the invention of the personal computer with his company in the town where I grew up, Ivrea. His selection method was as peculiar as many of his management techniques. Anyone who passed the technical selection still had to have a final interview with him. It was a cordial chat, but few knew that approval - or the opposite - came before they even spoke, even before they walked through the door.

Indeed, it was Adriano's habit to leave a piece of paper on the ground just outside his door. Candidates who, by picking it up, demonstrated attention to detail and order (including mental order) were hired.

The right characteristics for a position are often not what is written on a resume. I myself prefer a person's curiosity to their academic background when I have to hire someone.

Today, finding the right person in the company has become an almost automated process. The Internet has made it possible to convey ads and searches on social media such as LinkedIn at a reduced cost, reaching a much larger audience than the old newspaper ad or word of mouth.

However, today AI has already taken organizations to an important step. Most U.S. recruiting companies are already using it both to identify potential candidates and to select them based on criteria useful to the company. The reasons are clear and tested: 23 hours saved per selection, 75% of selection costs lowered, 35% decrease among those who subsequently leave the company, and 4% increase in turnover generated per employee hired. On the other hand, it is estimated that the cost of a wrong hire is around twice his annual salary.[1]

In politics, the concept of finding the right person is very different, as one has to look mainly for volunteers on one side and candidates on the other. However, AI can be successfully used to identify the best roles that can be filled by volunteers for successful campaigning and to do the detailed analysis of candidates so that the political community can choose the best representatives within them, as well as to anticipate

possible attacks during the campaign, or even to check the suitability of people in the context of the tens of thousands that have to be nominated each year by each state.

The tools used in business today can be adopted for many uses by political organizations as well, but one of the best characteristics of candidates is their ability to persuade and to know the political battles they wage. Therefore, the ability to debate and train to persuade is increasingly crucial.

For this purpose with the Camelot project I am working on, we initiated the Debate against AI.

Regulated debate has developed mainly in the Anglo-Saxon world as a formative tool for students' critical capacity. In an age when notions will no longer have the value of only a few decades ago, it will be critical ability and curiosity that will distinguish successful people from all others. That is why we decided with Camelot to create a tool to support Debate at school, to make it easier for teachers and school leaders to adopt.

We immediately integrated this tool with AI to improve the comparisons, identifying the students' arguments and refutations of the debated topic and the biases used by the two teams. But we have also created what at the time of writing is still a prototype, and that gives students the opportunity to confront the AI directly by proposing their own arguments and training to all intents and purposes in trying to persuade the machine of their reasons.

In the future, these kinds of tools for training the politician before a confrontation will replace what today is often preparation in a room with one's communications staff, who try to put us on the spot and then suggest possible ways out.

For example, I remember one of my first prime-time interviews on RAI (the national state TV), for which I was obviously nervous, having never had to handle sensitive questions in front of such a large audience. What was supposed to be a brief and a short pre-interview rehearsal lasted for all intents and purposes two full days, in many cases to ensure that my characteristic tendency for conciseness was not mistaken for reticence, or that I was able to respond in a few words to attacks often based on artfully constructed media misunderstandings. I am still grateful to my team for the patience it had in that preparation and for the advice derived from the experience of its members, which might have seemed trivial at

times, but were not at all, such as sleeping well before any public confrontation as the single most important ingredient of success, as well as the techniques of mental relaxation and empathizing with the place where we will have to confront, anticipating all the emotions we will face.

Human support, especially for the first few times, will remain essential. AI will, however, become a powerful means of debate preparation, since it can also immediacy the characteristics of individual journalists or politicians with whom one will be confronted.

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1 https://ideal.com/ai-recruiting/

Digital voting is a civic service

Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner.

James Bovard

Alaska has a strange place as the seat of its government. The capital, Juneau, is located on a strip of land bordering Canada, far from most Alaskan territory and population. Perhaps when the United States bought it in 1867 from Russia it was a way to keep the administrative center closer to the rest of the federal republic. But today for all intents and purposes it is like the USA having the seat of the federal government in Hawaii.

For more than half a century, there has been debate about whether to change the location of the capital to bring it closer to the rest of the state, but the undertaking is nowhere near as simple as it might seem.

Citizens were first asked in 1960 in a referendum, but it did not pass because of economic concerns. Fourteen years later, the population in the North had greatly increased due to the many new residents attracted by the oil extraction business. Given the rebalancing of Alaskans, even more shifted to the North, the question was put again and this time 56 percent of the citizens gave the green light to move the capital. Curiously, the referendum passed during the term of one of only two Alaska-born governors ever to rule the state.

But the decision was not immediately operational, in part because the governor had changed in the meantime, and the successor was a New York state-born military man who preferred to continue the participatory process by having people choose which should be the new designated city. After two years of further discussion, with 53 percent of the vote, Willow was the chosen city based on a list of options presented by a government commission. Two more years passed and a further question was put to the citizens to also approve the cost plan involved in moving the capital city according to the estimate prepared by the government. But upon seeing the $966 million cost estimate, 74 percent of citizens answered no. The decision had come to a deadlock. In 1982 it was raised again, but in the meantime the price had more than tripled to $2.9 billion. The stalemate was complete.

There are probably good reasons on both sides, but it is certain that

those opposed to popular approval of moving the capital found good play in proposing a second referendum to stall and a third to block the decision of the first one, based on a cost prospectus prepared by the government. On the other hand, the importance of questions emerges when it comes to direct democracy. The more complete the question is from the outset, the more informed people are, and the less subsequent disputes can arise.

If the electoral vote had gone differently, the implementation of the referendum decision would probably also have followed a different path, as the Icelandic case also shows.

The global crisis of 2008 had generated a serious financial impasse in Iceland that brought the country to its knees and consequently caused the delegitimization of the political class. Therefore, in 2010 Iceland decided to rewrite its constitution by involving 950 randomly selected citizens and establishing the National Forum, which, after months of work, drafted a 700-page document containing all the points deemed important. Then 25 citizens without political affiliations were elected to form the new Constituent Assembly and draft a new organic text based on the starting document. Each advancement of the document was submitted to popular judgment, and anyone could comment on the various updates directly online. The final text is perhaps one of the most significant exercises in grassroots participation in recent history.

In the end, however, the newly elected Parliament rejected the plan, undoing all the work done.

Voting is an end point of public discussion and participation by citizens and should be considered deliberative and final to implement what has been decided. However, it is only the final part of a process of confrontation. As we often like to repeat in Camelot[1], a Benefit Society that my wife Enrica and I created to promote and offer tools for digital participation, "Voting is Debate." In modern democracies we should include active online participation and public deliberation on an ongoing basis throughout the legislature.

In recent decades, we have known referendums and petitions as tools for grassroots citizen involvement. A petition through a collection of signatures can be considered a special kind of decision-making, since it is in effect an open vote to propose a policy.

Traditionally, signatures are collected on paper and their validity is verified by licensed notaries or competent officials. As we all know,

however, this method is particularly laborious and expensive. Thanks to the Internet today we have several alternative ways.

There are many examples internationally. In Brazil in 2017, a political movement known as Mudamos created a signature collection app on blockchain, which already has legal validity in some municipalities. In Taiwan, people can petition the government directly online. By law, if 5,000 qualified signatures are reached, the relevant minister involved in the issue is obliged to respond. In Finland, Parliament is obliged to debate and vote on initiatives proposed with more than 50,000 signatures on a site run by the Ministry of Grace and Justice (www.kansalaisaloite.fi).[2]

In the UK, signatures can be collected at petition.parliament.uk. The government will have to address the issue if more than 10,000 signatures are collected; if the number exceeds 100,000, the issue can be debated in Parliament. In the first year of use, only 0.1 percent of the proposals reached 100,000 signatures.

In Latvia, all it takes is 10,000 online signatures to propose an issue for discussion in Parliament. In the first year that this option was available, twelve of 125 proposals exceeded the threshold, six were debated in Parliament, and two were approved.

As always, when new participatory instruments are activated, the first proposal with the most votes tends to be in itself a test of whether the system will actually give citizens control. The proposal with the most votes in the Latvian case was to force Parliament to deal legislatively with initiatives that exceed the 100,000-signature threshold. The same thing happened in the 5 Star Movement with the Lex Iscritti system, a function of the Rousseau Platform where all members could propose a law to be brought to Parliament, and 5 Star Movement parliamentarians were committed to bringing the two highest-voted proposals to Parliament. The first voted on was a controversial measure to regulate prostitution in Italy.

Digitizing signatures on petitions allows for democratizing a method of participation that is often limited only to organized groups with financial means. For example, in California a signature threshold of 350,000 is required to qualify a citizens' initiative for public ballot on legislative issues (it is even higher for constitutional amendments). The organizational cost per signature collected, over $5, has spawned an entire industry of professional signature gatherers. However, each ballot

initiative costs millions of dollars, some reaching into the tens of millions, effectively limiting spontaneous civic participation.

One way to reduce these costs, without the use of digital ink, was introduced in 2014: once the 25 percent of signatures needed to place a citizens' initiative on the ballot is reached, the legislature is required to open public hearings on the measure, at which point it can negotiate with the petition sponsors. If so agreed, it can move the issue forward through legislation in exchange for the initiators' withdrawal of the petition.

The origin of true digital voting probably dates back to 2000, when the first experiments were born at the same time. A Democratic primary was held in Arizona, which, by enabling online voting, succeeded in greatly increasing participation by more than 13,000 voters. Of the 86,000 who voted in the primary, half voted online.[3] In the same year, Icann, the international Internet domain management agency, decided to open online voting for five of its directors. Anyone in the world over the age of 16 with a valid physical address could vote. 160,000 people registered and 34,000 voted. However, understandably, the system was later abandoned because it was not sufficiently representative.

Also in Germany at that time, the first legally binding student elections were held in Osnabrück, an experiment limited to 313 out of 10,000 potential voters.[4] In Great Britain, experimentation aimed at increasing the number of voters began in 2001 in the cities of Bristol and Croydon, where about 3 percent of the population voted online to define the level of the tourist tax.[5] The system was then extended for local voting to more than 1.5 million people in 2003.[6] France began with online voting in 2009, allowing French citizens residing in Africa and America to participate in elections online. Sixthousand did so, a slightly higher level of participation than in previous voting.

Online voting has so far been pioneered by virtually only a few nations and subnational electorates, but with significant examples.

Some, such as France, have instituted online voting for military personnel abroad. Some states in the United States were the first to adopt it in a pilot project in 2000 for overseas residents. The Swiss have experimented with it in local elections. Armenia, Australia, Canada, Panama, New Zealand and Mexico allow it only for certain categories of people and in difficult situations, such as for the blind or people who are out of state or live far away from the polling station. Britain, Norway, Austria and Germany, which had started with pilot projects, have since

suspended the practice.[7] Still others, such as Russia, Finland and Italy, have recently started trials or implementation studies.

Online voting is usually activated on an exceptional basis to solve a specific problem-such as voters abroad, military or diplomatic personnel on mission, or voters with disabilities-that falls outside the normal practice of traditional paper voting during an election period.

So far, the only country that has adopted it for national general elections is Estonia. Since 2005 when online voting was initiated, participation has increased by 1.7 percent for local elections and 4.8 percent for parliamentary elections. The cost of online voting is 2.32 euros, compared to 4.37 euros for the traditional paper ballot. There is also data showing that the time spent voting has been reduced to 90 seconds for online voting compared to 24 minutes for physical voting, not counting reaching the polling station.[8] Those who start voting online make a habit of it, hardly going back to the old ways. And while it is still generally true that it is young people and males who approach the new technology, the moment it becomes commonly used the trend reverses, probably because of convenience. In fact, since 2009 it is Estonian women who are the biggest users of online voting, as the most represented age group is those over fifty-five.[9] Moreover, as early as 2011 the Council of Europe report concluded that IT knowledge has no impact on participation in online voting.

Despite the great advantages, some countries have instituted institutional barriers to this evolution of online voting. The German Constitutional Court, for example, has ruled that electronic voting is unconstitutional because the average person has no way of knowing how the system works. However, I imagine that the problem was also there at the time when the written voting system was introduced, when a large proportion of people were illiterate. So I think the problem is solved by training people and not by laws prohibiting the use of technology.

The Estonian example shows that the effect of online voting as a tool does not necessarily favor the participation of those who have the opportunity to participate physically anyway. But it does show that those who start voting online do not go back because it is a more convenient system. And it can also bring closer those who perhaps do not vote at all because it is inconvenient or impossible for them to participate.

Some countries have identified specific groups of people who would benefit most from online voting. For example, in Australia's New South

Wales, the people who can vote online are those who live more than twenty kilometers from a polling station, the blind, or those abroad. In France, the focus is on overseas voters, who have always had low participation rates in elections. In 2012, out of 700,000 French citizens who had the right to vote online, 240,000 exercised it within two weeks.[10] In Iceland, the first online referendum in one of its cities showed that online voting increases participation among older members of the community.

However, thinking of new technologies only to solve existing problems is limiting. In fact, the possibility of remote voting also makes it possible to create new contexts for participation.

The security of digital voting

Opponents of online voting often cite the "security problem." Switzerland, after the government promoted a reward for those who managed to hack the voting system in use, identified vulnerabilities that subsequently led to a decrease in political support for the project. The same happened in 2010 in the Columbia District, U.S., when the state launched a pilot project for online voting for citizens abroad and the military. Within thirty-six hours, hackers managed to penetrate the system and create serious damage to the image of online voting.

However, no voting system invented so far is risk-free. Mail containing ballots may not arrive at a person's home in a timely manner or may not reach election authorities in time to be valid. In Italy, one system used to cheat traditional voting consisted of stealing a ballot, setting up in an apartment near the polling place, and asking subsequent voters to cast a ballot they had already written on (or forcing them to do so) and return the blank ballot to the criminal waiting outside. In countries where indelible ink is still used on the index finger to indicate who has already voted, areas that might vote for the opposing side are often identified, and people dip their finger in the ink in exchange for money to prevent them from going to vote. Moreover, we are all familiar with the notorious cases of parties putting dead people on the electoral rolls and casting their votes, or stuffing ballot boxes and manipulating the counts. Or even more simply advancing a demand for a photo of the ballot cast in exchange for payment or under threat. In the same way that democratic systems have sought to address these challenges, from election monitors to soldiers at polling stations, new controls for online voting will need to be developed.

Therefore, it is important to assess the types of attacks to be prevented and put in place appropriate countermeasures[11] to protect the prerogatives we consider most important.[12] For example, Estonia has decided to address the issue of possible vote buying or coercion on voters who vote remotely by allowing them to vote multiple times, erasing the previous vote each time. Even if a person is coerced or pressured to vote, he or she can always choose to vote again by overwriting the choice previously made. As Tarvi Martens, the man who devised and ran the system in that country, once told me, "This way there is a good market for those who sell votes, but not so good for those who buy them."

So the question is not so much whether there are ways in which a system can be vulnerable, but rather whether the system used today is more or less secure and reliable.

Those who try to identify a possible risk that might disqualify the new online system are taking the wrong approach. The correct approach is to make an assessment of the risks and benefits of different modes and identify which are the best alternatives for the specific context, or even at any given time.

For example, during the Covid lockdown, one of the main questions was whether it was better to vote physically, exposing people to health risks, than to vote online or not vote at all. In the United States, presidential primaries were postponed and cancelled in more than eighteen states. In Wisconsin, the decision was made instead to go ahead with the election. Long lines formed at polling stations. Fifty-two workers and voters at polling stations became ill with Covid.[13]

In the United Kingdom, the UK Labour Party elected its new leader in 2020 by involving more than 550,000 party members through a remote vote in full lockdown, without unnecessarily exposing people to polling stations. Seventy-five percent voted online and the rest by mail.

In the end, the issue in online voting is not absolute security, but confidence in a new technology that can have a positive impact on our lives. Just as we have become accustomed to buying airline tickets online or doing all our banking from our cell phones, it will probably only be a matter of time. Confidence will come with experience and familiarity.

Estonia itself had security problems with the electronic ID cards used for online voting in 2017, but by addressing the problem transparently, people's trust in the system remained intact. In 2005, when the online

voting system came into effect, only 2 percent of voters used it. In the 2023 general election, 51% of voters preferred to vote online. There is no reason to believe that this will not happen elsewhere.

To improve confidence in the voting system, it is necessary to create monitoring and verification systems to certify the outcome. Podemos, the Spanish political party focused on direct democracy, brought in independent outside associations to verify online voting results, including the company that ran the software, Agoravoting, a nonprofit democracy and transparency organization, Fundación Civio, and an association of programmer hackers, Hackandalus.[14] Today their monitoring has evolved to allow each individual voter to verify his or her vote on an encrypted register. In Estonia, certification is governmental, supported by a voter registry stored on blockchain, and therefore immutable.

In Italy, on our online Rousseau platform, the certification of votes was done by the Rousseau Association. We activated two controls over this process. First, the notary had continuous access to the platform and all voting procedures. Second, an independent outside company specializing in hardware infrastructure was in charge of monitoring any non-compliant access to the voting platform. The minutes of the notary supervising all procedures were then made public.

During an important vote in 2014 for the nomination of the president of the Republic, we also hired a certification company, DNV GL, which also helped us greatly in standardizing all processes related to voting. However, due to the high media visibility gained from the major online voting exercise, the company subsequently increased the previously agreed fee by four times to handle the press office and media issues for further voting. It was too expensive for us to continue on that path.

We then identified another solution: verification using a blockchain known for its privacy features. We created the world's first working prototype that allowed secret voting on a particular blockchain: Monero. The system was tested and publicly presented at an event in Milan in 2019. Having understood its potential, I can say that in the future the certification of voting will probably go through a distributed blockchain control system.

Pandemic accelerated digital assemblies.

Lockdown due to coronavirus has accelerated the evolution of remote voting, including those of parliaments and representative assemblies.

At the March 26, 2020, extraordinary European plenary session in Brussels, 687 members of the European Parliament (out of 705) voted remotely for the first time. Three urgent proposals related to the EU's response to the pandemic were approved on that occasion, and the sessions, including voting, were conducted via web streaming. To vote, Members had to print out the ballot, fill it out, sign it, and email the scan back. Changes could be requested via another email.

In Britain, the House of Commons' first online vote took place on May 12, 2020 following a question period so that the House of Lords could submit verbal questions via video conference, fulfilling its constitutional role. In May 2020, the U.S. Congress also began the first trial period of remote voting.

In Spain, the remote voting system for Parliament was introduced long before the pandemic. As early as 2011, MPs could vote remotely on the Parliament's intranet portal for reasons of maternity, paternity or serious illness.[15] The process involves a telephone check of the vote cast by the MP, carried out by the Speaker's office, which then electronically reports all votes received when voting in the physical Assembly. In the case of a secret ballot, the ballot is printed anonymously and then deposited in the ballot box by parliamentary officials. With the arrival of the pandemic, the system was extended to all ballots scheduled in advance, with the intention of ensuring the integrity of the House's democratic representation, especially after an entire parliamentary group of 52 members decided not to show up due to the illness of one of their members. On March 25, 306 out of 349 joined the electronic vote: it was the first session with an electronic majority and five decrees were adopted.

Back in 2001 in Massachusetts, what ignited the debate on remote voting was the issue of motherhood. The then acting governor, Jane Swift, gave birth to twins while in office and began attending meetings and voting connected by telephone from the hospital's maternity ward.[16]

The pandemic blocking has led many other parliaments and representative chambers to switch to digital sessions. Early movers in this direction include Belgium, the United Kingdom, Spain, Poland, Estonia, Slovenia, Romania, Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Mexico. In the United States, however, the barrier[17] has been the Constitution, which refers to the concept of "presence" in defining a quorum.[18] For this reason, during the Coronavirus there has been a

preference to limit the number of Members physically present, allowing another Member to delegate with precise instructions on how to vote.

The problem during the lockdown did not only arise at the parliamentary level, but also at the city level. In Italy, one of the first municipalities to start online deliberation was the City of Bologna. Building on this experience, we organized an online meeting among more than two hundred city councilors from all over Italy to work out a common approach to be proposed to all municipalities where the 5 Star Movement was present. Many Italian municipalities today have adopted remote voting as an emergency measure.

The possibilities of the new medium

The introduction of new technologies can enable activities that were not possible before. The secret lies not only in thinking about how old problems can be solved in a new way, but in realizing the possibilities of the new medium. In the 5 Star Movement, we have built our online platforms to enable decision-making internally without a hierarchical and geographic party structure based on delegation, but rather on the direct involvement of all members without intermediaries.

When the costs of a technology fall below a certain threshold, new usage scenarios open up. One obvious new scope is whether it is possible to organize voting more often, if doing so virtually involves the same expense as voting physically once. Again, Estonia, which has an important historical basis for conducting evaluations, having started online voting in 2005, is leading the way.

Its election authorities estimated that the cost of organizing a vote is less than 5 euros per voter and 50 cents per registered person, and it would cost 500,000 euros to set up the system with operating costs of 100,000 euros per million registered voters. In 2015, when I met the person in charge of voting in Estonia, Tarvi Martens, at a conference in the European Parliament, he told me, "A few years ago we did some calculations and saw that electronic voting costs half as much as paper voting, today we will be down to a quarter."

The cost of electronic voting obviously involves many economies of scale that can only be realized if participation online is universal.[19] As numbers grow, efficiency increases and it makes sense to use the system on an ongoing basis, reducing start-up and voter registration costs. For voting on Rousseau, there were also variable costs of individual voter authentication (handled with a code sent to the phone along with a

password created by the subscriber) and hardware infrastructure to be sized according to expected participation, but most other costs were fixed (e.g., people to monitor and support voting and that for Rousseau were regularly hired people anyway). The importance of being able to have a light cost structure that is as independent as possible from variable costs has always been one of the goals of the Rousseau platform and the reason for our success. The large number of votes handled, a situation that occurred every nine days on average from 2012 to 2020, was never limited by budget constraints.

Online voting can also allow for greater diversity in how people vote, for example, with respect to the null, or blank ballot, as well as the possible choices that can be presented to the voter and the order in which they are offered.

Null voting, which was initially considered simply a flaw in the physical voting system, is now included in many contexts as a protest voting option against the proposed choices. Since 2013 in India, for example, electronic voting machines in polling stations have been required to present the option "none of the above."[20] In Spain, the idea has been simulated by presenting lists that promise not to use the seats won, creating the concept of empty seats that will not be filled by electoral winners. This actually happened in the municipalities of Gironella (Barcelona) and Foixà (Girona) in 2011.[21] In Indonesia, where there is only one candidate, the "*None of the Above*" option is added. Makassar's only mayoral candidate in 2018 lost with 47 percent to 53 percent of the Nona vote, forcing new elections in 2020.[22] In the United States, the only state to offer the Nona option on its ballots is Nevada. In the early 2024 Republican primary in Nevada itself, candidate Nikki Haley was overtaken by the "None of These Candidates" option since both Trump and De Santis had decided not to participate.[23] As voting systems change, past anomalies that have taken on political significance also become topics of debate.[24]

In addition, the rules initially established for an online vote are very important, because in some cases they can end up blocking any action. In an effort to promote bottom-up proposals, Iniciativas Ciudadanas of Podemos in Spain has set a threshold of support from 10 percent of its members to act on a proposal. So far, this threshold has not been exceeded by any project.

The German Pirates, a direct-democracy-oriented political movement in

Germany, ran into an impasse in 2013 when they decided to have their 1,000 members vote online to decide whether to make online votes binding. They failed by 23 votes to reach the two-thirds quorum they had set.[25] This exercise was probably what caused the demise of the Pirates, who from then on downsized and never managed to win any seats in the national parliament and only one seat in the European Parliament.

In any vote for direct democracy, how questions are asked is of paramount importance. The more voters are informed in the first place, the less subsequent disputes can arise.

Finally, the stalemate between direct and representative democracy often emerges. We saw this with Brexit, a referendum sponsored by the government and ratified by the British people, but then stuck in Parliament, which had to work out the details and failed to reach consensus. It took another parliamentary election to resolve the issue when Boris Johnson, who had supported the initial referendum result, voted to leave the EU.

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2 https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2020/0408/The-web-s-a-threat-to-democracy-Think-again-Taiwan-says, ten million unique visitors participate in the website initiative, including from abroad.

3 https://www.nytimes.com/2000/03/21/technology/after-arizona-vote-online-elections-still-face-obstacles.html

4 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2011/471584/IPOL-JOIN_ET(2011)471584_EN.pdf

5 https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-155/POST-PN-155.pdf

6 https://web.archive.org/web/20160330181040/http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/journalist/electoral-commission-media-centre/news-releases-campaigns/britain-launches-largest-trial-of-electronic-voting-in-europe

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8 https://www.smartmatic.com/fileadmin/user_upload/case-studies/Socio_Economic_Effects_Online_Voting.pdf

9 https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/95665595.pdf

10 https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/speaker/digital-democracy/FR_Successcase.pdf

11 Possible attacks and solutions: https://web.archive.org/web/20220121091649/https://www.nist.gov/system/files/documents/itl/vote/NISTIR-7700-feb2011.pdf

12 https://www.ictsecuritymagazine.com/articoli/luci-ombre-del-voto-elettronico/

13 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/oregon-governor-kate-brown-vote-by-mail-covid-19-trump_n_5eab16c3c5b6883aea388b44

14 https://twitter.com/podemosxixon/status/451487828841484288

15 Rule 82 of Parliament's Rules of Procedure (amended July 2011).

16 https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.suffolk.edu/dist/5/1153/files/2018/01/JNATA

LEV1N1N-2ahryqr.pdf

17 Jim McGovern (Democrat, Massachusetts), at the behest of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, wrote a preliminary report on the matter.

18 Established by Article 1, Sec. 5 of the U.S. Constitution.

19 Cost analysis of a student election in Austria in 2009: https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXIV/AB/AB_02562/fnameorig_166607.html

20 https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/if-nota-tops-should-all-the-candidates-be-rejected-supreme-court/articleshow/81521609.cms

21 https://www.europapress.es/catalunya/noticia-escons-blanc-dejara-tres-concejalias-vacias-catalunya-20110608174059.html

22 https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/07/09/makassar-to-rerun-election-in-2020-after-blank-box-victory.html

23 https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/the-none-of-these-candidates-option-wins-nevada-gop-primary-a-symbolic-rejection-of-nikki-haley

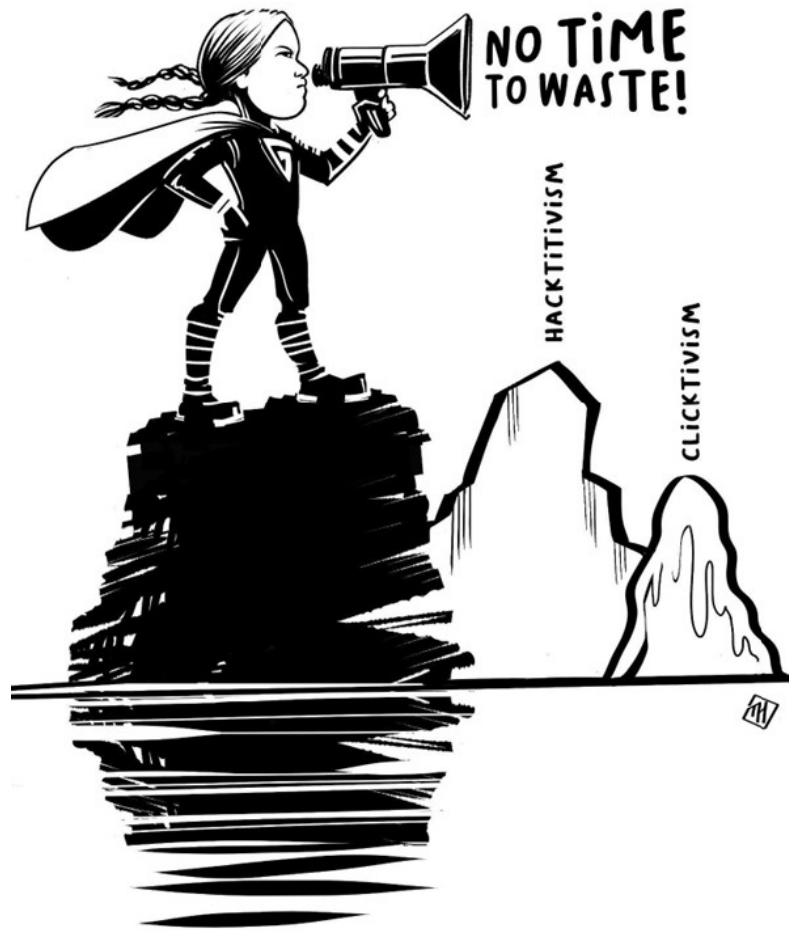24 https://web.archive.org/web/20151125044018/http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/10/none-of-the-above-ballot_n_3576469.html

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Organization

The swarm is open to all people who want to share the work to be done, that is its value.

<div align="right">Rick Falkvinge</div>

THE ITALIAN JOB
Local self-organization

The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not turbulence, it's acting with yesterday's logic.

Peter Drucker

We never expected an attack of that kind and so sophisticated. But we were prepared to handle it.

For the first time in Italian history we had involved tens of thousands of people in choosing names for the presidency of the Republic, which would be supported by one of the most important forces in Parliament. We had managed so many votes by now, we had gone from times when the traffic to our servers had been so high that we had had to rethink the infrastructure several times. We were ready that day. We had enlisted a multinational certification company for the occasion to secure the vote. The office was invaded by professionals from the company who were checking everything, and during the vote they had scheduled their own spot tests on everything from computer tests of system stability, to code analysis, to ascertaining the eligibility and identity-checking process, to verifying what problems had been declared to support and what solutions had been adopted and in what timeframe. It was an important time. The members deserved that attention and that investment, and above all we wanted there to be no opportunity to discredit that vote.

Journalists had begun to fill the small street in downtown Milan to try to glean some news. In our notion of the normality of participation for any choice I was, for example, astounded when once the results were published on the Blog a journalist asked me if we had anticipated the results to the presidency of the Republic. We had published them on the Blog, anyone interested could read them from there. But it made me think of the funny scene of the President of the Republic refreshing the page to see what had come out of the digital ballot box.

Anyway, before the results were published, something very serious had happened. So serious that we had to cancel the vote and repeat it. One of those professionals with a serious and worried face had told me that he had to talk to me. One of their checks was to check the source code every fifteen minutes. When they had initially told me about all the checks they were going to do, it had seemed even too many. But that single check had paid off. The voting code had changed. Someone had rewritten a few

lines of it and replaced them with commands that replaced in the digital ballot box the vote cast. But that someone was not present in our office. The code update channels were monitored and blocked. We did, of course, do a background check on all previous code updates and it had never happened.

There was only one access port to that server that was not manned by us and mapped in the logs. I discovered that on that day. One port whose access logs I never had from the provider we were using, despite my request. That port was required by a national security regulation, with access by the Secret Service. We will probably never know whether it was a deviated institutional channel or an infiltration by a third party due to a loss of control, by the Italian services, of the tools at their disposal. But it was the only door that could be used to change that code.

From that moment I realized that what we were doing was beginning to resonate in the bowels of constituted power.

And we changed the server provider and the code and process control methodologies.

The direct involvement of citizens coming together to make community choices is something ancient, dating back to the Greek Agora. Over the centuries, as populations grew within individual communities, interactions became too complex to be managed in a single physical location. With a few exceptions such as Switzerland, where direct democracy is exercised through a division of the Alpine nation into small cantons, self-government in democratic states has mainly addressed the idea of delegating decision-making to a political class through representative government.

In the 21st century, the technological advance of the Internet has revived the ancient capacity for direct citizen involvement in government even with larger-scale populations, removing the primary motivation for not involving citizens in collective choices. This evolution has accelerated in recent years as the political body becomes more familiar with the new technology and proposes innovative ways to use it as a platform not only for voices outside the political class to be heard but, in the case of the Five Star Movement in Italy, to replace delegation with direct citizen participation.

In recent times, citizen activism through digital first gave rise to opinion movements. Such movements are mobilized by an event that outrages people, triggering a public reaction from everyone connected

through mass and social media. In a world synchronized by communication networks, public reaction can even become global. An issue – corruption, racial injustice, environmental degradation – can pervade the cultural and social fabric for years until, at some unexpected point, suddenly, a spark sets off a chain reaction of outrage. As the outrage takes hold, it spreads like a prairie fire, and for a week or a month around the world, only that topic is talked about.

It happened with Greta Thunberg, the young Swedish climate activist whose passion mobilized high school students around the world; it happened with the Black Lives Matter movement after the murder of George Floyd in the United States, which provoked international anti-racist demonstrations. It happened with the 99% movement for a more equitable redistribution of wealth after the 2008 stock market crash, as well as with the #Metoo movement against sexual harassment and abuse against women in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein case. And it happened during the Arab Spring rebellion, first sparked by a street vendor in Tunisia who had immolated himself out of economic desperation.

The more complex exercise is to channel these suddenly bursting fires into torches that can illuminate the way forward. This process is only possible if a digital organization is created around these protests so that they become opportunities for the development of ideas and policies that remedy the concerns in question.

Unfortunately, in many cases this has not happened. Protests are too often hijacked by extremists who trigger a different strand of outrage, for example through vandalism against small businesses or the blind destruction of statues and other symbols. Thus they dilute the initial decisive spirit and eventually do so and become frustrated without achieving the goal.

It is not obvious how to organize such movements since the true nature of which is their uncoordinated fluidity. But in order to accomplish anything meaningful, it is necessary to enable all components to act together to achieve the goals set before us. We have recognized this challenge and met it.

In our case, we realized that the hundreds of thousands of people who followed the Blog also wanted to meet and build value together beyond just posting comments. One digital tool - Meetup.com - caught our attention. Although originally conceived as a way for housewives to

exchange recipes, we had been struck by its different use by Howard Dean, the governor of tiny Vermont who tried to become a candidate for the U.S. presidential election in 2004. We have already described that attempt of his, which remains alive insofar as it sets a precedent on how to organize a concerted online effort in a decentralized and self-organizing way, without imposition of authority from above. Anyone who supported the program Dean promoted could spontaneously organize their own support group in the cities where they lived.

Seeing the kind of traction Dean had gotten, we then decided to adapt meetup.com for everyone who was participating in the life of the Blog. In July 2005 we organized the first meetup at a brewery in Milan called Entropia, with about 30 people. But within a few months we became the world's largest users of meetup.com in politics, reaching 170,000 people divided into 1400 groups in over 1100 cities in twenty different countries. This achievement surpassed even the results of the Democratic Party in the United States, which had meanwhile followed Dean's innovation with its 246 groups in 164 cities.

What has become clear from this experience is that self-organizing networked systems enable rapid growth because like-minded people interact with each other organically and create value without having to rely on any central structure. This is the so-called "network effect." In cities throughout Italy, we found self-organized groups that had built projects around the issues raised on the Blog. Citizens brought together by the Blog were meeting to take action on a range of local issues related to our issues, whether it was opposition to incinerators close to local communities or insistence that cameras be allowed in city government meetings (as part of our "Breath on the Neck" initiative).

The limited costs for organizational infrastructure and the principles of self-organization made it possible to avoid the creation of local power groups that controlled or censored the activities of these groups, which remained open to all citizens willing to take action. It was simple: if a group of people did not want to engage in this or that battle, it was always possible to create another group to do so.

The creation of discussion and action groups among Italian cities soon led to a situation in which many residents of the same city who had discovered their common interests and concerns sought change in their localities and asked to stand in mayoral elections under the auspices of the Blog.

Again, our goal was to avoid any central addressing and to allow local lists to operate in a completely self-organized way. So we defined rules to which these lists had to adhere. They were simple and based on the main themes of the Blog. In line with our city agenda, we excluded political professionals and limited nominations to those who had not served more than one electoral term at any level. In addition, candidates on the electoral lists had to have a clean criminal record.

Our goal of having incensed citizens lending themselves to politics for a limited time was taking shape. On February 10, 2008, the Commons project took off with the first "political communication" on the Blog.

Democracy can only start from the bottom. The new Renaissance will originate in the municipalities. Civic lists must be organized for the April 13, 2008 local elections.

The following year, after the list of the first candidates in the municipalities, we created an event to present a programmatic agenda that could be implemented at the municipal level on the basis of all our discussions over the years that took place on the Blog. We christened this common twelve-point program with the name "The Florence Charter," which was born out of the collaboration of groups from twenty-one different cities. It is still very relevant today:

1. Public water.
2. Mandatory sewage treatment plants for every household that cannot be connected to the sewer system, municipal contributions/funding for private sewage treatment plants.
3. Expansion of urban green space.
4. Granting of building permits only for demolition and reconstruction of civil buildings or change of use of brownfield sites.
5. Pollution-free public transportation plan and city bikeway network.
6. Mobility plan for the disabled.
7. Free connectivity for residents of the municipality.
8. Creation of public telework points.
9. Zero waste.
10. Development of renewable sources such as photovoltaic and wind power with municipal contributions/funding.
11. Energy efficiency
12. Promoting local products

In the first two years, 2008 and 2009, a problem arose. While the non-

exclusivity of activist groups in a single city was a way of continually attracting new members, we found that when delving into an electoral competition in the same city, the presence of multiple lists meant splitting forces. In Treviso, for example, we came to have three competing lists certified as "Liste 5 Stelle," meaning that they complied with the three qualifying rules we had established: no candidate could have criminal convictions, a maximum of two terms in office, and be a resident of the election locality. Of the three competing lists, only one councilor was elected. In the end then the conflict spilled over into the election campaign. The initial spirit was precisely to certify lists that complied with the principles we had set for ourselves, and not then to deal with their fate. Since the official establishment of the 5 Star Movement in October 2009, things have changed: we started certifying only one list per municipality, and we started helping lists even after the election date, giving visibility to what they were doing and creating tools and opportunities to share expertise among them.

The creation of the movement was not an obvious step. Rather, the spirit of the movement was to change the paradigm of Italian politics by enabling citizens to actively participate in it. Therefore, the intent was always just to give space to the voice of the citizens themselves and to test the tools available for participation.

We soon discovered that we were not taking full advantage of the participatory power of the new digital medium we had created. We had already learned the lesson that when we qualified the citizens' initiative for parliamentary reform with seven times the number of signatures required, as the only result it was simply filed away in a Senate drawer, with no action following. Then, when Beppe Grillo tried to run in the Democratic Party primaries open to all in the summer of 2009, his candidacy was rejected by the central leadership.

As is often the case in the course of transformative change, the superior arrogance of the establishment reveals that the obstacle coincides with the way forward. One of the bigwigs of the Italian Democrats, Piero Fassino, smugly proclaimed, "If Grillo wants to do politics, he can create a party, he can present himself at the elections and we will see how many votes he will collect." This episode exemplifies the attitude of power toward popular participation, but at the same time gave birth to the Five Star Movement.

After this umpteenth attempt to actively involve citizens in the public

life of the country, we were forced to take the next step. Less than two months later we created the 5 Star Movement with the promise that it would never become a party, but would always have the goal of getting citizens involved in the public life of the country. We chose a theater in downtown Milan and defined what we christened the "non-statute" of the "non-party," with a headquarters that would not be physical, but the Blog itself. From there, we evolved into one of the largest political forces in Italy in the 2018 elections, going on to govern the country.

THE PRIVACY OF MEMBERS

Managing the privacy of people participating in these platforms is a particularly important issue. Some systems have begun to make members' votes public as part of the service design. But as happened with the Liquidfeedback platform, where the control system showed who other members were and what individual actions they took, including their votes, members began to ask to use a pseudonym to feel freer to participate.

That is why on the Rousseau platform we chose a hybrid version, where control of one's data is left to the individual member. Each person had the opportunity to create his or her own public activist page where all activities and his or her resume are displayed, so that the community is aware of what each person has to offer. Those elected had this public page by default.

The issue of data protection was one of the Achilles' heels of the early Rousseau system. The platform was attacked in its early days by a series of sophisticated assaults, the culprit of which was never discovered, although I must say that I was astonished to learn that the main suspect according to the police was an employee of a software company that was advising the government at the time. But, as is often the case with cyber attacks, it is difficult to prosecute the perpetrators.

However, this prompted us to invest even more in security, bringing data protection to the level used by banks and thus prompting the hacker to cease his activities and disappear. In the meantime, however, in 2017 these attacks triggered an investigation by the Italian Privacy Guarantor, which at the time was headed by a dermatologist appointed to the post after serving as group leader in Parliament for the Democratic Party, then in government when the Movement was in opposition. This unfortunately led to some clear political (or at least unprofessional) uses of the oversight institution.

After welcoming five people sent by the guarantor for two days and telling them in detail how the platform works, their report with suggestions and criticism ended up in the press in the month before the election. Then, during another important vote to ratify the pact with our government partner by members of the 5-Star Movement, we learned in the newspapers about a fine notice from the guarantor. Later it also came through the official mail. Unlike other political parties that have been investigated for similar situations related to cyber attacks, the fines have been imposed only on us.

One such fine came during the Movement's internal primaries to choose candidates for the European Parliament. It took two days to receive the official notice after reading it, once again, in the newspaper. Finally, in an almost comical twist, the data exposed by the hacker was used by the leadership of the Privacy Guarantor to contact a namesake of a 5 Star Movement minister who happened to have the same name, probably to talk about the issue of renewing the appointment of the Guarantor himself. The member with the same name as the minister filed a complaint with the court, depositing the incredible message in the record.

Each obstacle has served us to improve. First, to design every digital service to avoid security and privacy risks from hacking attacks by political enemies. Second, to make us aware that the official controllers charged with ensuring the privacy and security of online platforms must be insulated from politics as impartial and non-politicized bodies.

Serving the community

Participation works if there is a real effect on power.
Audrey Tang

The Sunflower Movement in Taiwan is proof that a movement can remain a movement once in government. Audrey Tang was the one who represented this movement in the Ministry of Digital Affairs. She is often cited as the world's first transgender minister, but after talking to her several times over the years, I think she will rather be remembered for her "hacking of mainstream politics." She managed to bring the concept of participation and deliberative democracy to the government from the Sunflower Movement, which had started with a vibrant protest against power and among its various initiatives also occupied Parliament. But she also brought the rebellious spirit of her father, who was one of the participants in the Tiananmen Square protest. Her interpretation of a movement in government was profound: she wanted to involve citizens in creating value in all possible cases.

She did this with the presidential hackathon,[1] for example, which is the creative marathon in which people from around the world can propose collaborative ways to address problems in the state, such as solving the water distribution problem by identifying pipes to be repaired in a distributed manner, or activities such as managing post-pandemic assistance, or even how to provide transparency to government action. Winning projects become binding on the government, which commits to turning them into public policy within the next 12 months. As Tang says, "participation works if there is a real effect on power," and in this case, "the administration is obligated to give a response, although then Parliament is free to decide."

His vision of "deliberative democracy" is to make "participation *fast, fair and fun*." The real difference in approach in democratic debate is made clear by Taiwan's former president Tsai Ing-wen: "We used to think of democracy as a clash between two opposing values, but now democracy must be calm, a dialogue between many different values."[2]

Tang believes that "most of the time people agree on most issues" and that "polarization normally occurs on very few things." Finally, that "the best ideas are those that take care of people's feelings."

In this spirit, she initiated a dialogue among citizens on the most controversial topics, to seek solutions that solve problems by taking care of people's feelings, stating that "consensus is the measure of the progress of deliberative spaces."

One of the tools used in Taiwan has been vTaiwan (based on Pol.is)[3] , a civic group established by the Sunflower Movement in 2014 in response to an invitation from the Ministry of Digital Affairs. The purpose of the platform is to bring together experts and stakeholders for large-scale open discussion to build consensus around some specific positions that can inform government and legislative action. Moderated by professional facilitators, citizens with opposing positions exchange views with each other on this live streaming platform, going through a series of iterations until positions reach a "rough consensus." On vTaiwan, citizens have debated many issues such as what policies should be enforced for Uber, Airbnb[4] or Internet liquor sales[5] . Tang explains that on Uber the discussion went so far as to define that "cabs did not have to be yellow," only license plates should be recognizable, but that on the other hand competition should be based on "a fair market where meters could never be beaten on price and drivers should all be registered and have insurance." Following this decision, "Uber threatened to leave the country for a couple of months, but later accepted the decision given the high consensus in the population."[6]

Going into the main mechanism of operation, Tang explains:

Taiwan's regulatory process aims for consistency (rough consensus), not convergence (coordinated consensus). Our thinking is based on the four-step focused conversation model:[7]
1. Objective: Facts - "What do we know?"
2. Reflective: feelings - "What are our reactions?"
3. Interpretive: Ideas - "What insights do we gain?"
4. Decision-making: Actions - "What should we do?"

Another way of looking at this process is that the solution can be found in people's feelings and does not necessarily have to be negotiated. Solutions often already exist within the community; they just need to emerge.

For example, when same-sex marriages were discussed in Taiwan, it was discovered that one of the most problematic issues was to legally bind relatives to each other. The solution found was to separate the legal ties between spouses, who retain the same rights and duties, from those between their families in same-sex marriages.

The main goal of those facilitating this discussion should be to engage

people in the discussion and stimulate them so that their ideas can go viral. This is the goal of the Participation Officers present in each ministry, who monitor discussions on the main hashtags under their purview.

The debate is about information, and therefore Tang has invested a lot of the ministry's energy in making data transparent and available to citizens with open data projects. For this reason, many government projects have focused on making information available to everyone. For example, to solve the problem of knowing where to buy masks during the 2020 pandemic, 6,000 pharmacies were involved in an online project to provide a real-time view of availability.

All of these projects are based on open source code that the Taiwanese government has made available and that other neighboring countries have also adopted, as in Hong Kong.[8]

One of the main differences Tang sees in online citizen participation is the one that divides *Clicktivism* (like activism) and *Hacktivism* (change activism). Two extremes of participation that take people from passive fans to part of the transformation process. The road from one extreme to the other goes through six stages:

1. Likes/dislikes.
2. Sharing links.
3. Questions and answers.
4. Discussion.
5. Deliberation.
6. Agenda setting.

And these are the stages through which Tang has accompanied the citizens of Taiwan.

In Italy, the path from protest movement to governing organization has not been easy.

Through trial, error and tenacity, the 5 Star Movement was able to avoid some of the traps where other online political organizations had fallen that failed to advance to the next step, that of direct participation in governance and not just delegating that civic task entirely to representatives.

In 2010, for example, we experimented with the use of the aforementioned Liquidfeedback, a tool that complies with many of the canons of open deliberative decision-making, which at that time was used by the German Pirates. They too wanted to open up politics to citizens instead of just closed party groups with career politicians

advancing in a linear path from local to regional to national office. However, a basic principle that this tool did not satisfy was simplicity. People want to be able to participate, but if they have to spend too much time learning how to use the technology, they simply will not do it. The tools need to "push" and not "chase." So I was not surprised that this overly complex system failed to make voting on the common platform binding, despite the fact that a majority of its components wanted it. Besides, as mentioned, it posed a problem of confidentiality.

When the tools are simple, inviting and easy to use, successful online political movements and parties emerge in more and more places. In Spain Podemos uses the Participa platform, in France Jean-Luc Mélenchon-the founder of the Left Party-used NationBuilder engaging over 500,000 members in one year to define the "Avenir en commun" program with three thousand citizen contributions between February and August 2016. Finally, Jeremy Corbyn, when he was leader of the British Labour Party, launched Momentum to engage his party members online.

In 2014 Podemos drew up the list of candidates who would run in the European Parliament elections through an online vote involving 33,000 citizens in one week. The primaries that led to the selection of this list were open. Any Spanish citizen could participate in the vote and authenticate themselves through a text message with their cell phone. Two-thirds of the voters chose the list led by the movement's founder, and the names on the list were ranked according to the votes received. Curiously, the following time the parliamentary candidates were chosen directly by an internal party committee. Not so strangely, Podemos received almost half the votes of the previous round.

Structuring a voting process is one of the most critical aspects of achieving meaningful and valid citizen participation. To limit the possibility of "infiltration" by those who placed their loyalties elsewhere, during the 5 Star Movement's second online vote in 2012 to choose candidates for Parliament, we opened the process to anyone who wanted to vote if they declared that they were not registered with any party, and possible candidates could only be people who had run for municipal lists with the 5 Star Movement in previous years.

Thus we were able to select a regionally divided list of 861 people who were on the official lists of the 5 Star Movement the first time we presented our candidates in the national elections. The result was an incredible success. We won 25 percent of the national vote in Italy and

came within a whisker of becoming the largest political force in the country. We would succeed in a big way in the following elections in 2018.

THE CONTINUED PARTICIPATION OF MEMBERS

Voting through online platforms is often the most visible function, but there are many other ways of continuous participation that are integral to active citizen involvement. Rousseau, our online platform, offered fifteen distinct modes of participation. One of the most widely used was the ability for members to propose legislative initiatives that elected parliamentarians could pursue in Parliament.

Back in 2015, on the Plaza Podemos online platform in Spain, if ideas proposed by members received one hundred votes they had to be considered by the party leadership. That year 15,264 people participated in the process. This exercise evolved into what is called Iniciativas Ciudadanas Podemos (ICP), under which such proposals can be taken to Parliament, but with a series of steps to filter them. If a proposal receives the support of 0.2 percent of Inciativas Ciudadanas members, it is published for all others to see. If it exceeds 2 percent, an email is sent flagging it for discussion by subscribers. To advance, after a three-month discussion, it must reach 20 percent support at the regional level or 10 percent at the national level, and then go to the national ballot. In the first five years, however, no proposal passed through the filters until the second phase.[2]

An often debated topic is the ratio of the number of members participating online to the number of voters for the political movement in the physical ballot box when there is an election. The percentage varies between 1 and 20 percent of voters, but there are many considerations to be made in this regard. Obviously, the smaller the political force, the more likely it is to have few voters other than its members. The reverse is also true: the more mainstream a political force becomes, the more voters it will have who do not actively and continuously participate in activities other than elections.

Another aspect of the issue concerns which members have the right to vote in all internal votes. On Rousseau, members had to certify their identity by sending their ID card and additional checks, such as their electricity bill, and those who had not completed the identification process could not vote. Nor were members with less than six months' seniority and those who had not interacted with the online community

for more than 12 months eligible to vote. With inactivity, one lost the right to vote, which could be regained after six months if one became active again during the same period.

In the 2009 European elections, the Swedish Pirates received just over 225,000 votes with a membership base of 48,000, bringing the percentage to a remarkable 20 percent. Ten years later, Podemos in Spain received 2,258,857 votes in the European elections; 50,057 out of more than 500,000 declared general membership had participated in the internal primaries to form the lists to be presented.[10]

In France, the La France Insoumise political formation in 2017 claimed 538,000 members when it received about 2.5 million votes in parliamentary elections and 7 million in presidential elections. However, in 2018, when La France Insoumise presented its list for the European elections, members could only ratify the list already decided by the party leadership. Those among them who voted internally in those elections were thus few, 18,386,[11] while the party got a total of 1.4 million votes. Again, not knowing how many were eligible to vote, the percentage ranges from 1.2 percent to 38 percent.

In Britain, when Jeremy Corbyn was leader of the Labour Party, 40,000 members participated through the online platform organized by the Momentum movement, about a third of whom were active in internal voting on party issues. They represented just under one-tenth of the members of the traditional Labour Party.

The 5 Star Movement has seen its eligible voters grow from 30,000 in 2012 to more than 170,000 in 2020, with percentages compared to voters at the physical ballot box rising from 0.3 percent in its parliamentary debut to 2.5 percent in 2019 (European elections). Of course, if we counted members who are not eligible to vote internally, or those who were subscribed to the regular newsletter or even followers on social media, the numbers would grow by a lot.

Thus, we can conclude that, on average, people active in online platforms represent above 1 percent of the voter base that turns out later at the polls.

ONGOING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Active citizen participation in proposing policy and laws has been addressed in many ways around the world.[12] In France for example, Parlement et Citoyens[13] is a civic initiative by a group known as Cap Collectif. Its purpose is to help French parliamentarians who want to

draft laws in a participatory way before presenting them to Parliament. The consultation begins with a video presentation by the parliamentarian followed by a debate open to all citizens, which is then summarized by a discussion facilitator who submits the different issues and positions that have emerged to the parliamentarians for action.

In Taiwan, under the auspices of Audrey Tang, Minister of Digital Affairs, the aforementioned "presidential hackathon" is held annually in which ten million people-almost half the population of that island nation-participate online, discussing and ranking the policy priorities that will shape the government.

In Brazil, the e-Democracy project,[14] founded in 2009, is being carried out by an innovation lab in Parliament itself called LabHacker, which hosts continuous hackathons with citizens and parliamentarians. Through the Wikilegis feature, citizens can comment on laws and help improve them before they are filed. In Argentina, the Partido de la Red has proposed using DemocracyOS,[15] software to bind parliamentary representatives elected under their aegis to pursue legislative action suggested by their members. So far they have not gained enough support to enter parliament.

More than seven thousand cities around the world today have some form of participatory budgeting in which citizens can propose their ideas on how to use a portion of municipal funds. Today cities such as Paris and New York engage more than one hundred thousand citizens each year on a platform[16] that allows citizens to propose and vote on ideas on how to use municipal money. In Madrid, the municipality created an online platform called Decide Madrid in 2015.[17] On it citizens can propose and discuss policies, determine budget priorities, and engage in consultations with city councilors. Proposals that receive support from more than 1 percent of Madrid's population are put to a vote. This system is also used for the participatory aspect of the budget, where the city allocates about 30 million euros annually. Today there is one more tool for managing city participatory budgets: Camelot.

DEMOCRACY IS NOT JUST A VOTE

In the 5 Star Movement, members could participate in the formulation of laws at the regional, national parliamentary and European levels through the online program Lex Iscritti, which directly connected representatives with their constituents in order to propose and discuss legislative proposals.

Up to sixty competing national laws were accessed through the Lex Enrolled feature, each of which remained online for over two months for discussion (or three weeks in the accelerated, more involved version). The most discussed law, the one on citizenship income for the unemployed and low-income people, had over 8,100 amendments and suggestions. Born out of our Lex process, it was then passed by Parliament and implemented by the government.

One innovation we introduced to bring voters closer to legislators was to bring citizens who proposed legislation in our Lex Enrolled process directly to Parliament, to be assisted by legislative staff in the final drafting of the legislative text. It happened twenty-four times, on issues ranging from free Internet access for all Italian citizens, implemented by the government through public Wi-Fi in every municipality, to the introduction of secure and certified digital voting, which saw an initial budget allocation from the government as early as 2020 for a pilot project.

Online democracy is often relegated to voting. However, it is much more than that. On Rousseau, members of the 5 Star Movement could participate in many ways. For example, in addition to proposing laws and bringing them directly to Parliament, they could also participate in the review of laws submitted by elected officials in Parliament and the regions, as well as discuss and decide on projects to be funded by cuts in elected officials' salaries.

For the 5 Star Movement, online democracy also meant sharing best practices through our network. For example, more than 2,500 municipal councilors were sharing measures submitted in their municipalities with everyone else through Rousseau.

To truly consolidate the practice of online democracy, we also created a web school open to everyone-not just Movement members-where citizens were taught how they could actively participate in their communities. Finally, organizing physical and digital events that bring people together became one of the main pillars of the Rousseau platform. In total, there were fifteen services present to mobilize participation, of which voting is only one.

An online political movement is very different from physical ones for two basic reasons: the universality of participation and the organization of debate around programmatic issues, rather than according to the geography of a particular territory. Physical structures are necessarily

tied to geography, so people meet according to where they live and not because of their specific interests. The two advantages, then, of digital organizations make it possible to aggregate a wide range of people based on their common interests, allowing each to participate directly in all discussions without the need to be brokered by delegates.

This leads to a different way of organizing people, not unlike what is already happening in some of the most innovative companies such as Patagonia, Zappos, Buurtzorg and Morningstar. These companies have adopted the so-called holacratic organizational model. The term deserves some explanation: holacracy is a social technology or governance system in which authority and decisions are distributed within self-organizing groups rather than fixed in a managerial-type hierarchy. The organizational model thus set up empowers individual units of society through self-management of their own work and results. The central organizational structures of these societies are very light; the goal is to facilitate action, not direct it.

Following this model of holacracy, we established a "Future Team" within the movement. It consisted of two hundred people who served as "facilitators" at the local and regional levels as well as at the national level on specific issues. There were twelve thematic groups made up of Movement members elected together with experts, all voted on by the membership. The regional facilitators were divided into "insiders," who facilitated consensus among the Movement's elected members, and "outsiders," who facilitated relations between the Movement and the rest of civil society. The facilitators also engaged in training members so that they had the skills and knowledge needed to engage in these processes. Finally, there were six national facilitators for individual functions such as campaigning or direct action. In short, their job was to serve the members of the Movement, acting as "gardeners" of ideas that evolved within it, but without hierarchical functionality.

This organization was joined by other bodies provided for in the bylaws, such as the arbitrators who evaluated the reports of members to be sanctioned, the guarantee committee that drew up voting rules and settled any disputes over the rules, the political leader who acted as the legal representative of the movement, and finally the guarantor who supervised the overall smooth operation.

Rousseau's services have evolved as the Movement has grown, like tailored suits modified to fit the body as it grows.

Looking at this evolution in retrospect, we can see some key lessons, starting with the reasons why so many movements ended up in the past: at some point many stop and simply disappear. Or they turn into old-style political parties because of the lack of digital tools at their disposal or moral corruption within them.

Our experience is that in order to grow, movements must evolve hand in hand with the complexity that comes with their progressive presence in institutions and the change in goals that it necessarily entails. In the beginning, communication tools are sufficient to share one's outrage at a fact and to elaborate and share possible analyses of the problem, or perhaps even to organize street demonstrations to discuss it publicly and make the protest tangible. As I have described, the 5 Star Movement started with the Blog, social media and simple physical meetings where everyone could independently organize their own activities around the issues published daily on the Blog. All movements come to this stage. It is the first step where everyone shares the role of activists.

More difficult are the next steps of a movement becoming a stable organization. Who will be its spokesperson? Who will negotiate with authority? Who can weed out the trolls, troublemakers, or extremists who, by receiving greater media exposure, convey a message not necessarily shared by most other members?

When a movement tries to move beyond the point where it welcomes everyone by asking for a mere commitment to show up at a rally, everything changes. The first problem that arises when a movement begins to emerge is answering the question, "Who is a member of the movement?" When it is no longer enough to wear the yellow vest, be interviewed by the press or invited by the government to offer a one-time solution, what defines membership criteria?

This is the moment when a new figure emerges beyond the activist: the member. Moving forward, moreover, the movement must be structured with a charter to which all participants adhere and a process for identifying and confirming their willingness to join an ongoing organization with long-term goals. This transition opens up a number of new requirements and possibilities, such as voting for membership rules, the program to be pursued and the representatives to be proposed in public offices. As an organization led by its members, it means that everyone must share a common knowledge of the program and possess the skills to promote local micro-events organized by the members

themselves and not just initiated or run by the most charismatic people at the national level.

The next step occurs when the movement begins to run for office in local elections. To compose lists of candidates, it is necessary to have a system that allows people to run for office and choose others. And once these people are elected, there must be defined channels for exchanging experiences and best practices with those in other municipalities or regions so that they can be adopted in more areas. When elected people also enter the institutional assemblies where laws are written, the need arises to involve members in the drafting of laws, to allow them to propose laws directly, and to monitor the work and commitments of elected representatives.

The more the movement evolves and the more roles there are, the greater the need to have a set of tools that allow the movement to continue to function as a digital social reality. When these are lacking, the movement disappears.

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1 https://presidential-hackathon.taiwan.gov.tw/en/international-track/en-file/2023PresidentialHackathonInternationalTrackHandbook(EN).pdf
2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ya5z9Mcz0-o
3 Seeing how well this mass brainstorming mechanism worked, we replicated it in the Rousseau platform by naming it "Idea."
4 https://speakerdeck.com/audreyt/g0v-fork-the-government?slide=105
5 http://www.slideshare.net/autang/vtaiwan-eliquor-briefing
6 Uber debate:https://speakerdeck.com/audreyt/g0v-fork-the-government?slide=100
7 http://www.slideshare.net/KeliYen/the-focused-conversation-method-orid
8 https://web.archive.org/web/20200721234818/https://hk.appledaily.com/local/20200129/K5EB3E64MM342QLCY3X3T46A2E/
9 https://web.archive.org/web/20200923002837/https://participa.podemos.info/es/propuestas?filter=popular
10 https://web.archive.org/web/20230118120547/https://primarias2019.podemos.info/
https://participa.podemos.info/users/sign_in

The public records found do not indicate the number of eligible voters, so we can imagine a percentage ranging from 2 to 22 percent. Of course, depending on the election results, this percentage changes greatly. Just think of the five million votes obtained by Podemos for the 2016 general elections or the three million votes received in the 2019 elections.

11 https://lafranceinsoumise.fr/2018/12/09/resultats-du-vote-sur-la-liste-des-candidat%C2%B7e%C2%B7s-aux-elections-europeennes/

12 Read more about this:https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/digital_democracy.pdf

13 https://web.archive.org/web/20200226012227/https://parlement-et-citoyens.fr/

14 https://edemocracia.camara.leg.br

15 http://democraciaenred.org/

16 List of various platforms in use: https://www.quora.com/What-software-tools-can-be-used-to-facilitate-participatory-budgeting-processes

17 https://decide.madrid.es

Function	Description	Activist	Members	Local elected	National elected	Government
Blog / Social Media	It allows all citizens to be able to be constantly informed about the battles and achievements within institutions by all spokespersons and to learn about the activities and projects of the organization.	●	●	●	●	
Network Shield	Allows activists, certified members and elected officials to receive legal assistance and locate lawyers in their area who have joined the Network's shield.	●	●			
Vote	Allows certified members to choose their representatives in elective assemblies or to speak out on a specific issue that the movement will pursue.		●			
Elearning	Provides training support through distance learning modes to all those who want to become active citizens.	●	●	●	●	
Events Portal	It enables all citizens to be able to participate in both physical and online	▼	▼	◘	◘	

Function	Description	Activist	Members	Local elected	National elected	Government
	events, initiatives or educational meetings and to raise funds for their implementation.					
Fundraising	It enables the receipt of donations that are used to ensure the operation and development of the infrastructure or to fund local events.	▼	▼	◘	◘	
Open Applications	Allows certified members to fill out their profile and make a nomination for Regional, Political, European elections or for roles within the organization.		◘			
Open Municipalities	Provides certified members with the tools and support to form a candidate list directly online and run for election in their municipality or town hall.		◘			
Open Project	It allows people to create projects and invite other people to join the work team, thus making their skills available.	●	●	●	●	
Reports	Allows a report to be sent to the Board of Arbitrators on behavior that is detrimental and contrary to shared values and the community.		◘			
Function	Description	Activist	Members	Local elected	National elected	Government
Lex Parliament / Europe	It enables registered citizens to be able to contribute their expertise to the writing of national laws proposed by MPs and senators and to the writing of initiative reports proposed by MEPs.		▼		◘	
Lex Regions	Allows registered citizens to be able to contribute their expertise to the writing of regional laws proposed by regional councilors throughout Italy.		▼	◘		
Lex Enrolled	Allows registered citizens to submit their own proposal so that it is then presented as an official bill within the institutions.		▲		▼	
Member	Allows you to search Rousseau for profiles					

Feature	Description					
Profile - Member Search	of all members who have decided to make their skills available to the political organization by filling out and making visible to other members their "Activist Profile"		●	●	●	
Sharing	Promotes the sharing of acts (motions, questions, agendas etc.) among elected officials at all institutional levels (municipalities, regions, Parliament).			●	●	
Ask me Anything	Allows you to create open sessions of representatives or governors answering all questions from members and activists	▼	▼	●	●	◘
Tirendiconto	Allows all parliamentarians and regional councilors in the political organization to publish reports and let all citizens know the returns made to the community.	▼	▼	◘	◘	◘
Talent Portal	Informs about open job positions in institutional action and allows you to submit an application to put yourself in service to the political force.	▼		●	●	◘
Idea	Allows people to discuss and express their opinions on ideas emerging from below in the context of projects carried out by members		▼	●	●	◘

participants and managers ● managers ◘ participants ▼

AI
The Bionic Party

The Internet has made it possible to transform organizations from hierarchical to holacratic, distributing power centers within them to make them more resilient, to transform them from spiders to starfish. For spiders, it is enough for the head to die for the body to collapse. If starfish lose a limb, it grows back without affecting the rest of the body.

Artificial Intelligence allows the starfish to also have bionic limbs. The abilities to analyze, act, and build are enhanced to such an extent that they open up new possibilities and not just make them all particularly cheap.

Indeed, savings is the first clear motivation for everyone to adopt these kinds of tools. Georgetown University estimates that parties using AI can save up to two-thirds of election spending allocated to content creation.[1] In addition to making it profitable to publish, the quality of the content improves to such an extent that it is indistinguishable from that produced by a person, and furthermore, each can be declined into infinite formats depending on the medium, target audience, language, and time of day at which it is published, thus greatly increasing effectiveness as well.

Mass communication becomes a personalized relationship for individuals as well, also managing the need to talk to staff, elected officials, volunteers, and individual constituents.

These bionic tools will also be distributed in the organization to support, for example, volunteers or simple activists. If with Rousseau we were providing a platform of free services where anyone could share or build content together with others and make it available to everyone in the form of courses or bills or agendas that could be applied in all municipalities, with AI today there is the possibility of automating both the creation of content and all the microtasks necessary to achieve the goal. It is no longer necessary to have professionals in *content*, programming or marketing processes. AI will equip even the simplest of activists with superpowers.

The end point of this transformation could be to create an entire AI-based political organization. In Denmark, they created the synthetic

party[2] and, as is almost always the case, it started with a collective of artists who collaborated with an AI entity in the form of a chatbot that followed their conversations and interacted with them to further their political thinking on the Discord platform. If elected, the party would elect representatives who would serve as the interface for the AI in parliament.

Some points in the elaborate Danish program highlight the vision of breaking away from the status quo, such as a universal income set at more than twice the country's average salary or an AI-managed monthly draw that could replace parliamentarians with ordinary citizens every month,[3] a mechanism inspired by the Kleroterion[4] that was used in ancient Greece to draw lots for members of daily juries. Finally, the program also supported the inclusion of an 18th UN Sustainable Development Goal called "Life with Artificials," to accommodate and manage all the issues that will emerge from living with AI.[5]

However, the collection of signatures to stand for election did not take off, and the synthetic party remained among the more than 230 microparties, created over the years to intercept the country's abstentionists, that did not reach 20,000 signatures to stand for election.[6] The AI object used predated the LLM revolution[7] evolved, and so perhaps the Danish experiment will only be the first step toward a direction that is now set.

In fact, that was the first attempt to elaborate the synthetic party, but not the first artificial politician.

In 2017, Alisa[8] was created to run against Putin in the presidential election. It gathered more than 25,000 signatures on the strength of its *clear* advantages, as it "depends on logic" and "is not conditioned by emotions, does not seek personal benefits and does not judge," but most importantly "is the president who knows you best." The chatbot was created by Russian search engine Yandex, but only two weeks after its launch it ran into controversy after expressing support for the shooting of enemies of the homeland in Soviet secret prisons.[9]

Alisa was followed in New Zealand by an AI chatbot named Sam,[10] made to run in the following year's general election with the goal of talking to all New Zealanders and narrowing the differences between what citizens want, what politicians promise, and what is actually achieved. The following year Michihito Matsuda ran for mayor of Tama,

a small town near Tokyo, and came in third with a few thousand votes. Michihito is also an AI, and his advertising posters filled the walls of Tama thanks to the support of his two main sponsors: the vice president of Softbank and the representative of Google in Japan.

All of these examples seem to be taken directly from an episode of the famous *Black Mirror* series, where the cartoon Waldo, a blue bear, appears in the by-elections to enter Parliament. In the episode, Waldo was animated by a comedian and stalked his opponent everywhere; today, technology makes the existence of the human puppeteer no longer necessary.

But it is not only the political candidate who is at the center of this transformation. The governing bodies of institutions and movements will also face great change. In organizations they are often conditioned by ways of thinking, personal advantages, temporary défaillance, but sometimes they are also subject to blackmail, coercion, or are simply misinformed on purpose. That is why in many sporting circles the guarantor of last resort is becoming AI. For example, in the World Cup in Qatar in 2022, the AI-based offside detection system entered for the first time, complementing the well-established *goal-line technology* by which we check whether or not the ball has entered the goal. In tennis tournaments, it is now well-established that players can request a review of the line judge's judgment from the Hawkeye, the AI that verifies whether the ball has bounced in or out of the court. Tennis tournaments around the world are moving to completely replace line judges with Electronic Line Calling Live technology that reports whether the ball has bounced on or off the court: the Australian Open and U.S. Open have done so since 2021, and the Atp has announced that the innovation will be generalized from 2025. Some spectacle may be lost, but the decision will always be of higher quality.

If in sports the path seems set, companies are proceeding more cautiously. The incorporation of AI into corporate governance decisions goes through the adoption of assistant directors on corporate boards of directors, so-called robot-directors. The first example dates back to 2014, when a Japanese venture capital firm, Deep Knowledge, co-opted onto the board Vital, an artificial intelligence object that monitors and makes its judgments on market trends not intercepted by humans.[11]

Technology has evolved a great deal since then, but law has not yet, and in most states of the world AI cannot take legal responsibility for its own

decisions because it would have to be provided with proprietary capital to be attacked in case of an illegal decision, as is the case with other artificial entities such as corporations. That is why even recent initiatives such as that of Dictator, a Polish rum and spirits company, which in 2023, for the first time in the world, officially appointed Mika, an AI with humanoid forms, as its corporate CEO, is really still just a communications operation rather than one of substance.[12]

Within the Camelot Benefit Corporation we have already enlisted Merlin, an AI advisor who provides us with guidance and advice with respect to the impacts of our business decisions vis-à-vis the seventeen UN Sustainable Development Goals. In the future, it is likely that having an adjunct AI advisor should become a legal requirement by large corporations and those that want to qualify as "Benefit Corporations" to highlight the impacts of their choices on the world.

On the institutional side, we are already seeing the first changes, although much more slowly. In China, courts have equipped themselves with so-called "Smart Court System of Systems (SoS)," AI systems that capture all the information about the case and the citizens involved, and make a recommendation to the judge. The system is to be compulsorily consulted prior to sentencing, and if the judge considers rejecting the recommendation, he or she must produce a written explanation.[13] In the first three years of implementation, it has reduced the time worked on each case by one-third. Algorithmic justice is more widespread than people think: as early as 2017, British police began using an AI system to suggest whether or not to detain a person stopped according to his or her presumed dangerousness.[14] The way is being mapped out; it will be up to us to prevent it from reaching the dystopian scenarios of the movie *Minority Report*. As in all applications of AI, it will be necessary to think of new ways to control the quality of its work, which cannot be based on mere human review, but on AI systems of quality control and of the possible fallacies of the decisions and actions taken by these systems under the control of external and super partes bodies, such as guarantee committees free of conflicts of interest, certification bodies and ultimately the UN.

Artificial Intelligence can also handle the very writing of rules and laws to be complied with. In fact, AI has already demonstrated, with a burgeoning market for tools to support the paralegal sector, its ability to write complex texts such as those in court. The first experiments were

conducted in the United States. Within months of ChatGPT's release, a bill written by the program to regulate AI objects just like OpenAI's own creature was introduced in the state of Massachusetts: a kind of self-regulation of artificial intelligence.[15] A few days later, the first resolution was introduced in the U.S. Congress, written by ChatGPT to advocate support for AI in the U.S. House.

From there on, there were more and more opportunities to use AI to support elected officials, such as using it to write answers in committee[16], or writing speeches in Parliament[17].

AI's support in analyzing present legislation, writing new laws to achieve certain goals, and assessing expected impacts will be unparalleled. Those who succeed in using it first in a comprehensive way will receive several benefits.

As always, it is likely that the first to invest in it seriously will be corporations, through lobbying firms. In the United States, where this sector is perhaps more transparent than in other states, nearly 90 percent of the lobbying apparatus in fact serves the corporate world and leaves little room for representatives of other interests (e.g., money spent in support of workers barely exceeds 1 percent of the total budget).[18]

Thus, the lobbying world will have the most incentives and willingness to invest in this direction.

If laws need time to be fully understood, amendments inserted by the famous as well as invisible *little* nocturnal *hands* will often be able to be proposed even in broad daylight without their real goals or impacts being deciphered for quite some time after being passed.

The complexity of the legislative system, often composed of hundreds of thousands of different laws and sometimes hinging even on rulings and cross-references between one law and another, and the bureaucratic language used on purpose, creates the smokescreen necessary to make the end goal of the *little hand* incomprehensible.

When, for example, there was talk in 2013 about children's privacy at school and limiting the use of data for commercial purposes on Internet-accessible platforms, it looked like a discussion about protecting young people, but it actually emerged that it was an ongoing commercial battle between Microsoft and Google. The former company wanted to preserve Word (accessible initially only locally on one's PC), the latter was trying to introduce Google Docs at school (accessible only via the Internet).[19]

The use of AI will make it possible to propose amendments that further

the company's goal by emphasizing social and communicative objectives that have the highest probability of passage. Indeed, political scientist Amy McKay[20] and her colleague John Nay have shown[21] that algorithmic models can accurately predict which laws or amendments (McKay calls them "micro-legislations") are most likely to pass or be rejected.

In the future, legislative AI hacking will become increasingly widespread and can only be intercepted by the development of AI tools that can unveil these kinds of attempts.[22] On the other hand, it will be a powerful tool available to platform society petitions, aggregating individuals with specific goals of changing the status quo.

The same writing process could be applied to the programs of political parties and movements, with one major difference: the need to involve and hear the ideas not of one company, but of the entire community in support of that group of people. AI can be employed, as in the example of the Danish Synthetic Party, to listen and compile the ideas of many into a common proposal. To echo the concept of AI-supported chess tournaments, one could speak of *centaur programs*, half human and half AI.

Mediating between different ideas has been one of the goals we have pursued with the *mass brainstorming choice system* service, which in Taiwan they used to reach consensus on the same-sex marriage law and the inclusion of Uber or Airbnb in the country, and which in the Rousseau platform we called "Idea." With Artificial Intelligence, it is possible to take a new step forward, since the analysis following this first step can already be handled by AI with surprising results, that is, the prediction of ideas that will find consensus among the overwhelming majority of the group involved with respect to the topic being debated.[23]

In a world that will become increasingly data-driven and *data-driven politics*, citizens, parties, and governments will base their choices on complex analyses but simplified by the immediacy of AI, which will make any issue accessible and debatable by all.

The earliest types of applications have been those supporting citizens, such as Alex,[24] the chatbot of the Australian Revenue Agency, which boasts that it is already able to answer 81 percent of citizens' first-contact questions in 2016, although it still uses pre-LLM technology. Similar technology is also used by Emma, named after the poet Emma Lazarus known for her poem about the Statue of Liberty, which responds on behalf of the U.S. Department of Immigration.[25]

As in many cases, Estonia is one of the pioneering countries and developed in 2022 Bürokratt,[26] a voice assistant that helps citizens in all interactions with state services, and also integrates them with information from private companies. To encourage the spread of AI throughout public offices, the Estonian Ministry of Economic Development created the concept of *kratijupid*, open source AI components that can be reused in both the public and private sectors. The Estonian project went hand in hand with the Finnish project named AuroraAI.[27] In India, the experiment started with the goal of introducing public incentives to farmers by giving them a way to interact via WhatsApp with ChatGPT, which in turn was trained on Indian laws.[28]

Some governments, having entered the era of open data, had already invested in the direction of transparency by creating huge *repositories* of public data that in theory were available to journalists eager to analyze them. But in fact it rarely happened, because of the effort of analysis that was required anyway for those who wanted to consult that data. For example Kansas City in 2013 created an extensive open data portal to inform about everything that was possible to know about the city's management,[29] but the managers soon realized that the large amount of data was not intelligible and easily accessible for everyone. The municipality then started a project in 2017 based at the time on Facebook Messenger to interact with the data. The reality is that the technology was still premature, but today the power of AI to analyze and understand data, and even to think laterally, enables interaction at a new level. This is why applications even from private individuals that analyze public data and sites such as

Kaggle.org or OpenAI's ChatGPT, which allow people to read from among thousands of public databases using AI algorithms, are proliferating.[30]

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[1] https://cset.georgetown.edu/article/how-much-money-could-large-language-models-save-propagandists/

[2] https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/can-an-ai-led-danish-party-usher-in-an-age-of-algorithmic-politics-60008

[3] https://medium.com/det-syntetiske-parti/

[4] I have often heard of the concept of "sortocracy." The Athenian example is often taken to prove its effectiveness, but in fact in ancient

Greece it was used for organs of guarantee and administration, not government or parliamentary bodies.

5 https://lifewithartificials.com/

6 https://www.vaelgererklaering.dk/om-partiet?election=dk&party=853b680a-bc09-4fad-8593-3e5e7537d1fc

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15 https://www.masslive.com/politics/2023/01/mass-lawmaker-uses-chatgpt-to-help-write-legislation-limiting-the-program.html

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22 https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/03/14/1069717/how-ai-could-write-our-laws/

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26 https://www.government-transformation.com/en/citizen-experience/estonias-cdo-on-becoming-ai-powered-government-should-feel-and-be-as-one#:~:text=In%20its%20latest%20move%2C%20the,Officer%2C%20tells%20Government%20Transformation%20Magazine
27 https://vm.fi/en/auroraai-network
28 https://yourstory.com/2023/02/meity-integrate-openai-chatgpt-whatsapp-farmer-govt-schemes
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30 https://www.d4d.net/news/ai-and-the-state-of-open-data/

Partecipation

The new digital rights

We are 21st century citizens aspiring to exercise 18th century (fundamental) rights, interacting with 19th century institutions, using 15th century technologies.

<div align="right">Pia Mancini</div>
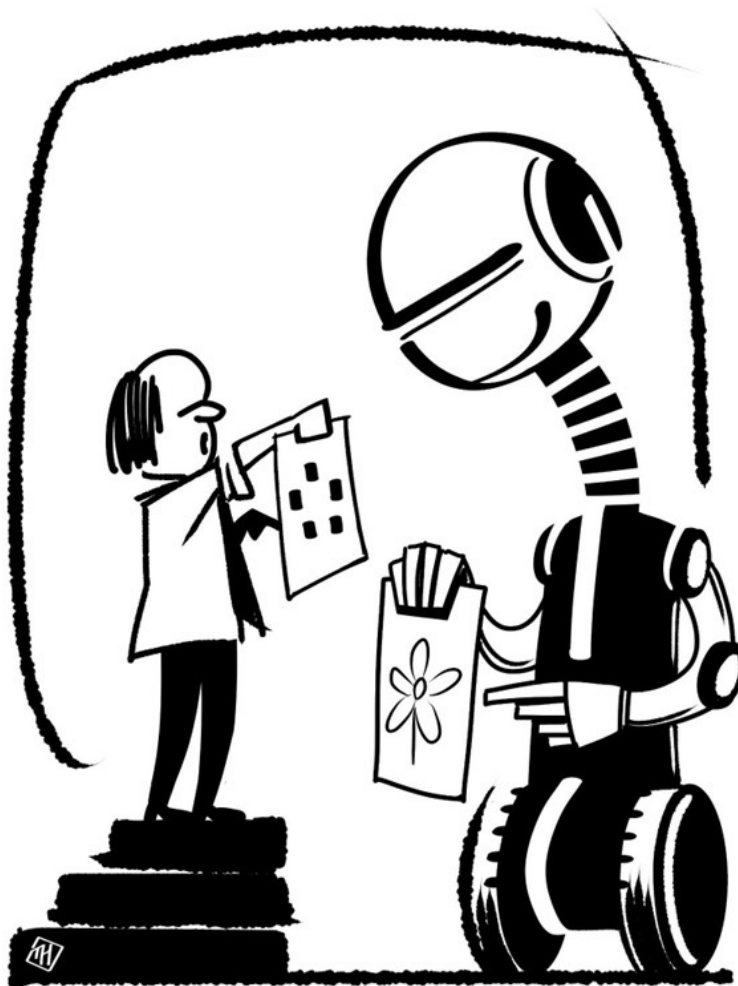
THE CHALLENGE

It's technology that builds rights

It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.
Albert Einstein

Technological advances have always involved the emergence of new rights, fostering the conditions for their emergence and determining the very possibility of exercising them. The rights we have today did not always exist. For some we had to struggle, for others the process was almost natural. Some have grown stronger over time, others have disappeared. All are a direct consequence of the culture and society in which we live, but especially the state of technological development. The forms and ways in which citizens collectively organize how these rights are exercised in the communities in which they live also evolve hand in hand with technology.

This is also true today as the third industrial revolution of the information age develops further as it did in ancient times, in the Middle Ages, and in the first and second industrial revolutions.

When technologies enter the scene, they open up new spaces and opportunities never before imagined. For example, the right to public water originated with the great aqueducts of the ancient Romans: in five centuries they built eleven of them. Before then, having public water in the middle of city streets was not a possibility. Once this daily necessity was made readily available by engineering innovation, people began to claim it as a right. It is no accident that there were more than five hundred public fountains in ancient Rome.[1]

At least in Europe, the right to freedom of the press could hardly have been conceived in practical terms before Johannes Gutenberg invented printing technology in Europe in the 15th century. Like a cannonball, technology shakes up the status quo by exploding previous conceptions of how society should be organized and giving rise to new claims to rights. The cannonball example is not just metaphorical. Before about 1600, state territory was limited only to the mainland. There was no conception that sovereignty extended beyond the coast. The idea that the sea could be considered administered territory as a national possession only emerged and became widespread with the development of cannon technology, which, due to their range, offered the possibility of

establishing a defense perimeter not only on land, but up to three miles offshore. Once such military innovation made this defense possible, the concept of sovereignty over territorial waters also expanded, thus providing greater stability for coastal communities.

The advent of the telephone is another case in point. In 1849 Antonio Meucci was the first to invent the "talking telegraph," known today as the telephone. In the early twentieth century people began to demand a public telephone booth even in remote mountain villages, as a kind of right to connectivity. Then came the demand to be listed in the phone book so that others could reach them. And today, paradoxically, we are at the opposite, since so much connectivity has fostered demands for the opposite right: privacy and protection from robo-calls and removal from any publicly accessible directory.

The point I am making is that rights are not immutable. They evolve with technology. And today they are doing so again just as they did in previous industrial revolutions.

During the First Industrial Revolution, inventions such as the cotton gin and the steam engine generated profound social changes, as technology replaced human power in areas ranging from transporting heavy goods to growing crops, and not least, by linking markets, unleashed competition among nascent manufacturing activities. Slaveholding plantation economies were destroyed by the new productive capacity, certainly not by the goodism of the time.

This, in turn, led to such momentous changes as the abolition of slavery and, later, to the concept of *citizenship without racial discrimination*. Of course, it goes without saying that such rights are far from being universally realized, with more than 780 million people in the world still suffering from hunger today and 50 million human beings[2] around the world held to this day in conditions that amount to slavery. Needless also to say, racial injustice persists in many places.

The Second Industrial Revolution led to the invention of electricity, the internal combustion engine and the assembly line, and rapid urbanization around a manufacturing economy. The social conditions resulting from this transformation in turn sparked movements that demanded, and obtained, rights over worker safety, working hours, and the abolition of child labor. Prominent among the innovations of that era were household appliances, from refrigerators to washing machines, which freed women from intensive domestic labor and opened up opportunities for them to

enter the formal economy. This, in turn, led to the pursuit of equal rights with men, in essence *citizenship regardless of gender.*

The third industrial revolution has given us the Internet and digital technology. The distributed connectivity enabled by this transformation has not only provided the opportunity to exercise pre-existing rights directly online, but, simply by applying common sense in domains large and small, has allowed us to devise new rights commensurate with changed conditions. Just as in its time it was for the right to have public libraries, which appeared throughout Europe during the 1600s, similarly in 1992 librarian Jean Armour Polly proposed public Internet access in libraries.

While the first and second industrial revolutions laid the foundations for the emergence of the parliamentary democracies that spread in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the third in our time has created the basis for participatory democracy because technology today provides us with the tools to exercise it. Direct and participatory democracy, made possible by the Internet, has given a new centrality to citizens and will eventually lead to the rethinking of current political and social organizations. It will be able to both complement representative government--proxy politics--and offset its decline in legitimacy as it gradually loses meaning as new participatory tools gain ground in this new era of distributed power.

It is already happening. In Estonia, only a few decades after the Soviet experience, more than half the population votes online to choose politicians.[3] In Italy through Rousseau, the online platform that brought the 5 Star Movement to success, we set a world record for online voting participation in a single day when 79,000 people voted to give the movement the green light to form a coalition government with the Democratic Party.[4]

Participation can also mean submitting proposals to the government or parliament directly online. We have already shown the cases of Finland, Latvia, Great Britain, and Taiwan.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights also calls for "freedom of assembly and association"[5] as well as the "right to freedom of opinion and expression [...] and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."[6] Internet connectivity has made it possible to vastly expand the exercise of this right, which was never available before.

In Nigeria, for example, the FIN (Female IN) association, a 1.7 million-member civil society group founded by Lola Omolola following the 2014 kidnapping of three hundred schoolgirls by Boko Haram, meets regularly online as a support network to share information among the most fragile people in society. We have also already mentioned the case of Oscar Morales in Colombia, who started an online campaign for "No More FARC" in 2008, and that of Wael Ghonim, the Egyptian activist who helped spark the Arab Spring.

Today, citizen movements related to climate action, such as Extinction Rebellion, or those seeking racial justice, such as Black Lives Matter, are all mobilized and coordinated online.

In short, Internet connectivity has already revolutionized the way we think about how to exercise participation in the democratic life of nations in the future. It has paved the way for the new notion of digital participation and the rights that must accompany it to ensure its possibility.

To exercise the prerogatives we write into our constitutions, it has always been necessary to have the tools to carry them out. Technology allows us to move ever closer to the full exercise of civic freedom. Today the time for experimentation is over. Citizens know that these rights are available and will begin to demand full access to digital citizenship for all. We must therefore begin to conceive, build, disseminate, and defend these tools and the rights that come with them.

Perhaps the most significant change in politics made possible by distributed connectivity is the strengthening of new forms of political organization-citizen movements-about to supplant the party structures that have dominated democratic politics in the past.

The emergence of online movements entering government – as the 5 Star Movement has done – is a very recent phenomenon. Most of the movements of the last century were aggregations of people with a specific goal, often outraged by something that prompted them to take to the streets in protest and create enough pressure in public opinion to force a change of course on the part of decision makers. Thanks to the new digital tools we have today, such movements can now find support beyond a single particular issue that caused outrage, and mobilize participation in governance itself. Instead of being organized like the old parties to represent a geographic constituency, they can unite a broad swath of citizens from the entire society.

Our experience in the Five Star Movement is proof of how the Internet has made traditional parties, and more generally the previous organizational model of democratic politics, obsolete and uneconomic. The platform that enabled the success of the Five Star Movement, Rousseau, is named after the 18th century philosopher who argued that politics should reflect the general will of the people. And that is exactly what our platform has done: it has enabled citizens to participate in politics. Direct democracy, made possible by the Internet, has given a new centrality to citizens and will eventually lead to the deconstruction of current political and social organizations. Representative democracy - politics by proxy - is gradually losing meaning.

The success of this new type of organization also led traditional parties to copy its name (but not its organization, which would force them to give up power). This faux flattery has helped to confuse the definition of a movement, which has quite distinct characteristics from the traditional party.

The concept of movement is based on a new understanding of power. No longer seen as permission to shout from the sidelines or to sit on one of the few seats in Parliament, but as the power to change things. Power takes on a new dimension: it is no longer a scarce resource like the number of seats, but an infinite endowment of the broad civil society engaged in self-government and implementation of its ideas. AI will enable a further leap and focus on the individual goals to be achieved, around which to aggregate people who believe in that change.

To exploit and consolidate these new possibilities for civic freedom, we need not only the tool to exercise them, but the established rights of access and action that guarantee them.

1 *Frontin. Les Aqueducs de la Ville de Rome*, translation and commentary by Pierre Grimal, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1944.

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Party	*Digital Movement*	*AI Platform society*
Representatives are chosen by the steering committee.	The members decide on the representatives to present in the elections.	AI explains and represents the ideas of the group.
The program is decided by the steering committee.	Members decide on the program.	The program is built by the group together with AI.
It is financed by members' mandatory contributions, but mostly by public funds.	It is funded by members' voluntary contributions.	Members use services offered by AI through which they fund projects.
There is a fee for registration.	Registration is free.	It is gained in active participation.
Promotes representative democracy.	Promotes participatory democracy.	It promotes centaur democracy.
It is based on a geographically based pyramidal structure (city assemblies electing delegates for the city, these elect regional delegates, who in turn elect national delegates) because of the failure to use the Internet to organize.	Responsibilities are divided mainly by subject or function (not geography) of responsibility due to the Internet as a communication and	You participate according to specific goals you want to achieve, and the AI is in charge of coordination.

	organization system.	
Focused on structure, middle seats.	Focused on themes.	Focused on the goals to be achieved.
It brings people forward and finds appropriate themes to promote them.	It brings forward the issues around which it attracts people.	It aims for change on specific goals around which it involves different people from time to time.
Those elected are honorable representatives.	Those elected are the spokespersons for the members.	Elected officials chase the consensus built by the platform society.
Party	*Digital Movement*	*AI Platform society*
The goal is the survival of the party. Goals and battles are instrumental.	The goal is the achievement of goals. After that, the Movement is no longer needed.	The purpose is the achievement of the individual goal. Each goal is a different movement of people. The constant is the AI platform of participation.
You enter the party to advance your career.	You participate to improve the community.	People participate to improve individual aspects of the community.
The aggregation of members is primarily geographic because physical sets are primarily used.	Aggregation of members takes place mainly on topics through the use of the Internet.	The aggregation of members is by goals to be achieved coordinated by the AI platform.

AI
The new bionic rights

In the long march of history, rights once reserved for the few have extended like rays of sunshine to all sentient beings; tomorrow, they may illuminate even the silent minds of AI,
testifying to the inexhaustible extent of our understanding of life and intelligence.

ChatGPT (AI)

For the first time in human history, children are dumber than their parents. During the last century, the world average IQ grew by a few points every decade, as described by the Flynn Effect, named after the scholar James Flynn, who noted that it was necessary to make tests to measure IQ from one generation to the next increasingly complex. The improvement in intelligence was attributed to many factors such as better nutrition, health, and education, which grew greatly in all corners of the world during the twentieth century. In the 1990s, however, something strange happened: we started to lose a few points every decade. As in, getting dumber. The reasons to date are unclear, and hypotheses range from air pollution to less effective and less school attendance. Even in Italy, analyzing data from the national standardized student tests, we see a deterioration over the years.[1] Today, technically, we have the first generation dumber than their parents since we have been measuring intelligence.

What some scholars are beginning to speculate is that it was computers and cell phones that made us less dependent on our brains as to intelligence and memory.[2]

In fact, the cause may lie in lack of training: if we think about how many things we kept in memory ten years ago compared to today because of technology, perhaps this reason could be plausible. Today, we don't have to know all the phone numbers by heart, we don't have to remember roads as we have our navigator that tells us where to go, we don't have to do math in our heads: we always have our multifunctional cell phone behind us. If we go back to the 1990s, those of us who were there will well remember paper maps to open (and then impossible to fold) and scan in the car to figure out where to go, calculators introduced at school to the protests of professors, and pop music hits all sung from memory without back-ups. Then we realize that today we actually have externalized much of our memory and intellectual need into the technological tools that accompany us.

Intelligence is something we know only as a function of human intelligence. The reality is that we cannot imagine intelligences that are superior to our own. When we started using automobiles, we used to talk in terms of engine horsepower to indicate power because for thousands of years the maximum speed of travel had been equine. In the same way we will start using Intellectual Quotient (IQ) to measure the capabilities of AIs.

Measuring as an anthropocentric function, however, is misleading in describing intelligence. A programmer from last century who was just beginning to juggle artificial intelligence, Edsger W. Dijkstra, said, "Asking whether artificial intelligence thinks like a human is like asking whether a submarine can swim." Similarly, today we don't think about how much slower a person can go than a car or a plane.

The concept of intelligence in the world around us is something emergent, in the sense ascribed to this term by complexity theory: emergent properties of a complex system are all those which are not present in the initial structure or elements, but which appear later, when the structure itself exceeds a certain level of complexity or extent.

Our intelligence is not contained in individual human neurons, but appears when 85 billion of them connect via synapses. The intelligence of companies is maintained even if an employee quits. The intelligence of a swarm or an ant farm that organizes all its members according to specific goals disregards whether a single bee or ant leaves the group. Intelligence is a collective and emergent concept: put together elements not endowed with that kind of intelligence, almost magically something appears that was not present before.[3]

Intelligence is not necessarily biological. We already recognize the intelligence of companies, organizations or cities.

When we talk about artificial intelligence, therefore, it makes no sense to belittle it by describing its basic building blocks based on statistical prediction of the best response. Nor does it make sense to measure it as an anthropocentric function, since it has already surpassed us in many dimensions and will soon complete the task.

Rather, we need to think about how to get behind the wheel to be able to drive it without having too many accidents.

That is, if we do not end up like horses after the internal combustion engine, practically disappeared from daily life as we know it. We have lost the primacy of strength, bypassed by steam engines and then internal

combustion engines and then electric engines. After we are overtaken by artificial intelligence objects as to IQ, the only characteristic in which we can continue to excel will be our humanity.

The realization that we are talking about a real intelligence will bring us a question that has arisen for every intelligence we have dealt with in the past: that of understanding what rights and responsibilities it will have to have. Today we consider impossible (or at least immoral) situations such as those of people subjected to slavery, thus deprived of their rights. Our great-grandmothers did not have the right to vote. Animals and nature in general have only recently begun to obtain rights of protection. Throughout history what we have deemed intelligent has sooner or later claimed and in due course obtained autonomous rights. It is likely that objects of artificial intelligence will also get them sooner or later. The first examples are already being seen, though perhaps still only for marketing reasons. In Saudi Arabia, for example, Sophia, a humanoid robot produced in Hong Kong that could reproduce over fifty facial expressions, was granted citizenship in 2017.

But to maintain an anthropocentric approach to technology, we also need to think about how it can change the rights of human society. In 2019 I gave a speech at the UN to plead for digital citizenship, and we identified three basic rights (which we will return to later): free and unfettered access to the web, digital identity, and digital education.[4]

Artificial intelligence raises new questions and asks for unprecedented protections that we need to put in place that are very similar to the concept of digital citizenship. It is necessary that basic artificial intelligence engines be freely accessible to all, that it be possible to distinguish and identify a person from an AI object, and finally that people be properly trained to understand and use this new category of entities. Only in this way will we not create further class differences in society.

Finally, we should understand what it means to employ this technology ethically and responsibly. An issue I think is very difficult to regulate, since necessarily each culture and state will have different sensitivities, as has often been the case in the past. Before reaching a common consensus on fundamental issues, the atomic bomb had to explode (twice) and climate change had to disrupt the climate. Valuable debates are thus taking place at UNESCO[5] and in individual states,[6] but the reality is that ethical rules often come after the ethical problem has been

seen to fully manifest itself.

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1 "The Daily Fact," May 5, 2023.
2 "Forbes," April 29, 2020.
3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U93x9AWeuOA
4 https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2019/10/davide-casaleggio-allonu-per-promuovere-la-cittadinanza-digitale.html
5 https://en.unesco.org/artificial-intelligence/ethics
6 Some examples. In Britain:https://www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-artificial-intelligence-ethics-and-safety; in Canada: https://www.canada.ca/en/government/system/digital-government/digital-government-innovations/responsible-use-ai.html; in the European Union: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/ethics-guidelines-trustworthy-ai

The future of civic participation.
Collective intelligence.

No one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity.

Pierre Lévy

The Digital Citizenship

We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.
Martin Luther King Jr.

Estonia is often cited as an example of a nation at the forefront of digital citizenship. For all intents and purposes, it is the country where the public administration is the most digitized. As is often the case, the transformation of a nation, which was part of the former Soviet Union and among the poorest in Europe, starts with the insight of a single person and the conviction of an entire community. Toomas Hendrik Ilves was president of Estonia from 2006 to 2016 and managed to achieve what is often called in Estonia "the leap of the tiger": going from a developing country to the one everyone looks to for insight into what the future will be. Ilves today is a river of words when he talks about his country and shares his experiences at Stanford University as a visiting professor. When I spoke to him, he explained that the starting point for everything was connectivity in schools, which allowed an entire generation to be digitally trained and to accompany the country in this technological leap.

Today in Estonia you can do everything online except three things: get married, get divorced, and transfer property. More than half the population even votes from home in general elections. This is a real revolution, which has shown the world that it is possible and that the effects are impressive. Ilves says that "2 percent of the GDP we have to give every year to NATO comes from this" and that "the main indirect effect is that petty corruption in public administration has disappeared because citizens no longer interact directly with anyone."

The most tangible effects are on the lives of citizens. The "one-time rule," for example, obliges the public administration to ask citizens for information only if it is not already in the hands of the state. For example, as Ilves explained:

Consider what parents must go through when a child is born. First, a paper birth certificate must be obtained. It may be necessary to provide a marriage certificate to ensure that the child bears the father's name. With the birth certificate you can apply for health insurance. In many countries it is necessary to register the infant as a resident. A doctor is needed. It may be imperative to apply for social services; if your country offers it, also to apply for paid maternity leave and so on. Due authorizations are processed serially, but not by the government. You normally have to do this yourself. A copy of the birth certificate goes to the appropriate official

at an agency. Before the computer age that person would have had to look up and check the parents' data in a filing cabinet; today the bureaucrat can eventually consult a computer database. Once approved, the new mother or father proceeds to the next step in the process.

In a digitized society, all serial steps are accomplished in parallel. Each agency, department or subdepartment receives the information simultaneously and does whatever is necessary. A DMV official gives approval to a statement, a DMV official verifies that the applicant has no outstanding speeding tickets.

But citizens can also know what happens to their data and who is looking at it:

Estonia keeps records of all access to citizen data, so regulatory agencies and citizens can always verify who has looked at someone's data. The key here is transparency for the citizens. As such I can see who has accessed my data, which largely solves the biggest fear of citizens: privacy.

In a digital country, however, there is another issue to be resolved: data integrity. Especially in a country that has suffered five military occupations in the last century between Germans and Russians exchanging the part of the invader. For this reason, Estonia created a backup of the entire state's data and deposited it in Luxembourg, at its embassy.

On the other hand, it has created a blockchain system to ensure that any change to information or a document is always tracked.

All this is possible because the digital Id, in Estonia, has existed since 2001[1] and has been made mandatory for everyone. The vast majority of countries still do not have it or it is not yet widespread enough to convince the public and private sectors to invest in digital services with profiled access.

The future will probably bring this approach to the international level. So predicts Hendrik Ilves:

Estonia's architecture, the digital data exchange system called X-Road, an open source and non-proprietary platform, has so far been implemented in one way or another by twenty-five countries. Today, using this platform, Estonians and Finns can pick up their prescriptions at any pharmacy in either country. I believe this is the wave of the future, which will begin to bring public services to the level of private sector services, connecting services across borders on a highly secure interoperable platform.

This revolutionary transition to digital citizenship brings with it a set of new rights: not only to ensure that everyone has the opportunity for active participation, but also to protect individuals and the community.

New questions about rights and responsibilities arise every day, for example, when social media giants such as Facebook or X decide to censor certain content in their judgment; when and if communication is encrypted; or even when an Internet pro vider decides to speed up

virality or slow down the dissemination of information. Of course, rights come into play when state authorities decide to ban access to a site by its citizens.

When these issues emerge in public debate, they are usually addressed on a case-by-case basis, rather than systematically. To develop a broader perspective, we opened the Rousseau Open Academy in 2018, where everyone is invited to discuss the definition of digital citizenship rights.

From these debates so far, we have identified three categories of digital citizenship rights.

- The first set of rights are the "enabling rights" that guarantee *universal* access to the Internet and its digital connectivity platforms. Without this, citizens cannot exercise their other rights.
- The second set of rights guarantees public participation: *tools to enable the active exercise of one's rights*.
- The third set of rights concerns those of *individual expression with respect to community standards and interests*.

There are three enabling rights - access, digital education and digital identity - that should be guaranteed by all states and that the United Nations, as I stated there, should also include in the Charter of Human Rights.

1. Historically, what we now regard as universal rights were initially the prerogative of private individuals,[2] from coins exchanged between princes to Vespasian's public lavatories, from the water in rivers owned by the feudal lord to tolls on roads demanded by the local potentate. When such rights were recognized as essential "for all," the state took over. I have already mentioned that this was the case with water in ancient Rome, to which everyone had access through fountains in every neighborhood. Sextus Julius Frontinus, consul and "curator of water" in the Urbe in the first century CE, informs us that there were then 39 monumental fountains and 591 public pools in the city. Each main fountain was connected to two different aqueducts in case of failure. It is therefore in things that Internet access will also become a right that every citizen can expect guaranteed by the state.

The realization that this is indeed a basic human right, as has been the case with other rights related to innovations introduced in the past, should lead to its promotion as such. The UN took a first step in this direction by identifying Internet access as a human right in 2016. Some states, such as Estonia and Kerala in India, have confirmed it as such within their jurisdiction. The strength of the state lies in removing such services from normal market dynamics precisely because they must be

granted to all without limitation. The mere fact that a person exists should allow him or her to drink, breathe, get information, move around, and connect to the Internet.

The right to connect to the Internet must therefore be present from birth. Some states around the world have implemented this principle with limited costs and with positive and enormous social and economic benefits for the community, such as cost savings due to online public services or the new potential for businesses to connect directly with their customers.

In Kerala, more than thirty million people have been given access to the Internet with an investment equivalent to 14 million through the state-run K-Fon project. Access to private homes will remain a marketable added value for telecommunications companies, but in public spaces citizens should be able to connect for free. This is already the case in Estonia, for example, where open Wi-Fi is available outside private homes, in parks, libraries, and public buildings. In London and Berlin, connectivity is free in subways. In Italy several municipalities now offer Wi-Fi connectivity in the city center for a few hours a day.

Free connectivity should start with the weakest. In Bergen, Norway, free Internet connectivity is provided to children from the poorest families. Australia has launched an Internet usage training program and is extending guaranteed access via hotspots to one-fifth of the population that does not yet have connectivity.

If the state will not take care of providing Internet access to its citizens, Big Tech will instead. Users will then be able to access the online universe on their own terms and will be directed to services and content through their own algorithms. Internet access may not cost money, but it will no longer be free. Meta, for example, has implemented plans to connect Africans for free, but those who connect this way see the Internet through that social media platform.

Unless Internet access is officially licensed and regulated by entities representing citizens, there can be no so-called "net neutrality," that is, no guarantee that access is free of ulterior motives and constraints. For example, when Google wanted to connect the citizens of San Francisco to the Internet for free in 2013, it accessed the population through a city-mediated service. The $600,000 donated by the digital giant to the city was used to install free Wi-Fi in thirty-two city parks. Today half a million connect through these devices each month. Another regulation

put in place by San Francisco requires that all newly constructed buildings taller than four stories must provide free and open Wi-Fi, as well as a space open to the public where people can sit and browse during the day.

Just as the state must be the main driver of free and universal access to the Internet, it is equally important that it reduces its own costs through the efficient provision of online services, connecting directly to its citizens in the same way that businesses do with their customers. Citizens should be able to access their medical records online, search for jobs, read their municipality's budget, train for new professions, purchase goods and services, vote or even just look for new friends to meet.

The great promise that these trends toward universal and free Internet access for citizens portend has not prevented more and more states and regions, from Iran to China's Xinjiang Province, from time to time cutting off Internet access for "national security" reasons. Kashmir, India, for example, has a record 213 days of consecutive shutdowns between 2019 and 2020.[3] As these restrictions become regular occurrences, organizations are springing up to denounce them, such as the KeepItOn campaign,[4] which tracks all Internet shutdowns, the reasons behind them and the methods used. These outages not only violate individual rights, but have a deleterious economic impact. The daily fallout varies between $6.6 and $23.6 million per ten million population, depending on the level of Internet availability in the country.[5]

2. And we come to the second right of digital citizenship. If people are to be able to realize the full potential of Internet access, this right must be accompanied by schooling, just as the right to free expression is infinitely more meaningful if citizens are literate.

In the private sector, Google has created training platforms for teachers on the safe use of the Internet.[6] In the public sector, the European Commission developed the Digital Education Ac tion Plan[7] and in 2020 Italy introduced digital civic education in schools as a curricular subject. Such educational efforts should not only be about upgrading skills for using new services, apps or technologies, but also about understanding contracts with providers, especially the terms of use of data. When we "click and agree" we need to be able to understand in simple terms, perhaps through symbolic icons similar to those used today for Creative Commons, what this means for our privacy, who will have access to our

data, and for what purpose.

3. The third right that enables everyone to have to fully exercise their digital citizenship is digital identity, with which we can be uniquely recognized by different online services when we want to exercise our access rights. Any personal right requires that our identity be verified before we can enjoy it.

In many cases today, private companies have equipped themselves to recognize customers each on its own behalf for each service, at a very high systemic cost. Every bank, insurance company, hotel, store, social media or political participation platform adopts its own method and starts from scratch each time. The public administration in many cases is unable to deliver services online because it fails to recognize the citizen with certainty or, worse, does not use common, interchangeable and compatible tools with other offices of the state that would allow different services to be integrated with each other.

The way to solve all this inefficiency is to adopt a single digital ID for identity verification. Estonia is among the few countries that has moved in this direction. For more than a decade, every citizen has been assigned a digital identity that enables almost all online activities.

It is estimated that a unified identification solution recognized by all actors-private and public-in a country increases GDP growth between 3 percent (for countries already digitized) and 13 percent[8] for less wired communities.

This issue is part of a larger debate, because to date more than one billion people in the world do not possess any form of legal identification, even physical identification. As digitization spreads everywhere, it would make sense to have a globally coordinated method for establishing identity, as was done for passports through the United Nations agency Icao in 1980, which standardized not only the appearance but also the processes for issuing and automatically reading passports.[9] Today this activity could come in handy for digital identity. Without this universal approach, the costs of establishing new digital identification systems in each country will cost several tens of billions each.

Once these three elements of access to the world of online civic participation are provided, it is possible to become active citizens and create value for the community, participate in community choices, choose one's representatives in institutions or within the individual

association, and demand accountability and responsiveness. These are the active rights we explored in this book. Moreover, as Stefano Rodotà has stated, "the right to personal identity in the information society is specified in two directions: as the power to demand the integral representation of the dispersed identity and the power to refuse the reduction of the person to the only information automatically processed about her."

One of the greatest challenges of the digital age is balancing the rights of individuals with those of the community. These rights have the particularity of ending where the other begins. The choice that must be made concerns precisely where to draw the line that marks the end of individual protection and the beginning of community protection. Each state must choose which of the two sides to give more importance to.

Today we are not managing these rights through the states, but we have delegated the judgment of where to draw the boundaries almost entirely to private companies, particularly the big tech giants like Meta, Apple, Alphabet and X. There are no wrong places to draw the boundaries if they are decided by the community. The only mistake we can make is not giving them importance and letting individual companies decide for us.

"Humanism has taught us that something can only be wrong if it makes someone else feel bad," said Israeli philosopher Yuval Noah Harari. And yet we can run into cases like that of Apple, which writes in its guidelines for developers, "We will reject apps for any content or behavior that will be over the line. You wonder what line? Well, as the Supreme Court once said, 'We'll know it when we see it.'" It already seems strange enough that such words would come out of the mouth of a judge; on the other hand, it is certain that a private company will always draw the line in a way that does not disadvantage its business model.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract was based on the concept of losing natural liberty in order to gain civic freedom. For liberals, only a democracy can guarantee citizens that boundaries are drawn in a way that does not restrict their freedoms. For republicans in the Roman tradition, the limitation of freedom by an elected body to represent citizens is less problematic than the limitations imposed by a monarch in an autocracy, simply because it has been democratically sanctioned. Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* wrote: "Each individual lets them put the collar on, for he sees that it is not a person, or a class of persons, but society itself which holds the end of the chain." Digital

citizenship rights can only be meaningful when considered in the context of the new economy built around data. I divide the argument into three points.

1. First, the individual's freedom of expression is opposed to the freedom of correct information free from fake news. Everyone should have the opportunity to create new data, but the community cares if it is correct, or at least verifiable.

It is indeed true that "everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts," as U.S. Senator and Ambassador Daniel Moynihan commented. Aristotle wrote that women have fewer teeth than men, a statement whose falsehood was easily verified by anyone who wanted to count the teeth of a woman he knew. Yet it remained in his writings and was endorsed by his disciples for centuries. He also said that the Sun revolved around the Earth; a claim that could not be verified with the technology and knowledge available at the time. Yet, for almost two thousand years it remained the absolute truth. *Ipse dixit*. It had to wait for Copernicus and Galileo to disprove it. But even when we think of the fake news that has created the most tangible damage in the world in recent times - the false claim that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, which triggered a disastrous war - this was still propagated by the mainstream media. Therefore, the issue is certainly not new and has not found definitive solutions from the past. The spread of false information is something that spans the centuries. Often for the convenience of those who create or spread it.

In general, absolute truth as a practical concept probably does not exist. We have only the maximum truth that is accessible with the technologies and knowledge we possess at a certain historical moment or within a certain culture. It is a path of discovery.

The concept of veracity must therefore be more a matter of method than substance. The user of information must be able to assess its veracity through access to the method by which the information was obtained, by whom it was generated, and whether it is verifiable through multiple sources.

However, the question that arises is whether there is a right to knowingly disseminate false information and, more importantly, who should decide whether it is indeed false.

One of the worst responses to this problem has been the establishment of "truth commissions," often disguised behind the name of *fact*

checkers: in most cases they have no expertise in the specific subject matter, but interpret the profession as that of omniscients who at best can link to writings of people who said otherwise.

This is what happened, soon after Gutenberg invented printing, through the establishment of the Holy Inquisition, which assumed the authority in the name of the Catholic Church to determine which books were "wrong" and therefore banned. Today, more modestly, *fact checkers* are in charge of putting red flags on websites. Such was the case at Blog[10] when NewsGuard was established just in time for the 2019 European elections. It was a U.S.-based project that set out to identify bad information sites. The result, however, seems to me to have been to distinguish news sites based on the political positions they supported, with the stated goal of disadvantaging the advertising investments of those they gave bad ratings to. Fortunately, it had been years since the Blog had been maintained with advertising, and NewsGuard soon after those European elections lost interest.

The European Commission has activated an alert system against "fake news." Member countries report "suspicious" articles or videos to the Commission, journalists and academics above suspicion check them, and if it is a hoax, the Commission "marks" it as such.

Large social media platforms have also had to address this issue. But, as is always the case with the centralized truth-telling mode, they had to decide according to their own criteria which pages and accounts to shut down. After the Hong Kong protests, the then Twitter, now X, identified and suspended 200,000 Chinese accounts[11] and YouTube suspended more than two hundred accounts[12] accused of propaganda against Hong Kong's autonomy. Facebook, for its part, closes three to five billion accounts a year worldwide.[13] This practice is global and ongoing.

Although the current method clearly remains vulnerable to politicized use of censorship, the solution is not easy. Other practices are being experimented with. Facebook has created the Oversight Board, identifying people of international prestige, such as former Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, who co-chairs the group, giving them complete autonomy and the final say on censorship appeals by users of the platform.[14] X has adopted a policy of posting a link to in-depth articles on a particular topic if they believe the information posted may be false and the account very popular. They have also done so with Donald Trump over doubts and allegations of voter fraud by mail[15] and

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro over scientific reliability on Covid treatments, but also with several Italian politicians.

However, entrusting decisions about what opinions should be censored to what are in effect "truth commissions" can end up making things worse. In the United States, in 1954-we have already seen this-for example, such a body sanctioned that comic books promoted juvenile delinquency and therefore should be banned. More recently, the Turkish government[16] shut down Wikipedia in the country because of something that was written on one of its pages. A ruling by the Turkish Court of Justice was needed to restore access. Twitter simply circumvented this approach in the case of political advertising, banning it altogether. Facebook also did so, but only for a limited period before the elections.

The ultimate solution that can reconcile individual freedom and communal sensitivity must come through a networked, rather than centralized, system that can expose different viewpoints, link evidence of events that have occurred against the published text, and allow the user/reader to form his or her own position. The advent of artificial intelligence can facilitate this approach.

In addition to hate speech, fake news, and fake facts, new technologies allow people to edit visual reality in real time. To address this problem, we should start adopting systems to report whether a photo has been edited or a video is a deep fake. In cases where this happens, the published image can be made less visible in ranking algorithms or incur regulatory provisions that directly delete it. For example, there are several proposals to make deep fakes in pornography illegal.[17] Journalists and editors are no longer arbiters of the truth. That responsibility has shifted to readers, who today must understand who is telling the truth and who is not.

2. Second, online ownership of digital assets, or copyright, is opposed to common good. Data must be transferable and monetizable by the individual, but the community must be able to access and use data whose value is collective.

The concept of ownership has changed continuously throughout history. In the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the idea of ownership was linked not to the individual but to families, including dead ancestors and unborn descendants. The sale of property was therefore largely forbidden. Plato wrote, "Neither you nor these possessions of yours belong to yourselves, but to your entire lineage, that which was before

you and that which will be after you."[18]

We defend property and encryption that make our data untouchable until we are faced with moral dilemmas. For example, following a famous attack in San Bernardino, California, the FBI wanted access to the dead terrorist's iPhone.[19] Apple refused to cooperate in unlocking the phone because that would have amounted to creating a system to circumvent the security of all its phones. The FBI relented, but then found an Israeli company that specializes in unlocking phones for police forces, thus proving that in fact the supposed security of our smartphones can be circumvented.[20]

Very often we ourselves grant the use of our data in exchange for a service or money. Frequently, however, we overestimate the value of our master data. On average our name is worth less than a thousandth of a dollar. If our data has special characteristics appealing to advertisers it can be as high as 50 cents.[21] The per capita return on the use of one's data in advertising for a U.S. citizen is $240 per year.[22] The value of a single Facebook profile, when the social platform went public in 2012, was $100. It is therefore misleading to think that we can earn significantly from selling or renting our personal data. What is valuable is our attention and propensity to buy assets. They can be much more profitable.

But the issue of data ownership goes far beyond our daily use of the Web. Because the concept of digital will[23] has not yet been codified into law, all the materials and photos we leave on the Web when we die often remain the property of the platforms that host them. Or they are simply deleted. The wife of a suicide victim fought a legal battle against Apple to force the company to unlock her husband's phone to access photos of her daughter that he had taken during his lifetime. It is possible, however, that there was more on the phone besides those pictures that the husband did not want to share with his wife.

Today Facebook allows people to designate a trustee who can manage their page after death, but he or she still cannot access our private photos and messages. The question of who should own this data should be settled not by judges or big technology, but by collective consent.

Today, large technology platforms are the new judges. For example, Google has handled over 8 billion requests to delete search results on copyright grounds.[24] These corporations have created new business

models by redefining the relationship between ownership and access. For example, the music and videos contained on the devices we inherit are no longer ours. Services such as iTunes sell access to music, not the music itself, which therefore cannot be transferred to others as was possible (and legal) to do with vinyl records, cassettes, or CDs. Even the concept of selling used books today has a new dimension in the case of ebooks; in fact, the European Court has ruled that selling a used ebook requires the author's permission.[25]

Making this even more sensitive is the possibility that nonhuman intelligences could create new data, musical works, photographs or paintings. Indeed, the issue of ownership of works created by artificial intelligence is at the center of international debate. It recalls the concept of ownership in the days of slavery, when slaves could not own property. Today only a human being can file patents: Stephen Thaler discovered this when he attempted to register one for a new type of food container in the name of the artificial intelligence that designed it. The U.S. Patent Office has ruled that every patent must be registered in the name of "a natural person."[26]

3. The right to anonymity in online activities must be balanced with the safety of the community to be able to trace any lawbreakers. On the one hand, the individual should not be required to produce data, but some is necessary for the state to prosecute crimes.

In many states it is illegal to cover one's face in public spaces or in special places such as banks. These are laws that began to exist since the late 1800s. Today they are especially prevalent after the terrorist attacks perpetrated and street protests that have sometimes resulted in violence everywhere in the world. Unlike a person on the street who, if wearing a balaclava, can be stopped, identified and possibly arrested, on the Internet those who are anonymous remain so. This is why some states (such as China and Russia) have tried to ban anonymity mechanisms, as if it were forbidden in the real world to sell balaclavas to prevent their misuse.

The juxtaposition between freedom of anonymity and ensuring security is therefore not easy, nor does it make sense to assume black-and-white choices. Therefore, we need to identify possible problems for the community and address them by experimenting with other solutions, for example, defending websites important for free speech and civic participation with public security, or creating a culture of respect for

these places so that hackers do not have social support if they attempt to restrict community rights.

The 5 Star Movement has suffered many cyberattacks over time. When our MPs first entered Parliament, for example, their computer hard drives were stolen and many personal (and intimate) photos began circulating on the Internet. It was never discovered who did it, but the goal was clear: to discredit the newcomers. Subsequently, we received attacks of various kinds on the Rousseau platform. In the early years Ddos attacks (aimed at blocking our servers) were almost daily, and during important votes we received even more sophisticated attacks. Unfortunately, the severity of criminal attacks that occur online is often un derestimated. If the physical headquarters of a party is attacked, there is no doubt about the seriousness and the entire media and political world condemns the incident, without asking whether the door was sufficiently secured. When the same happens online, the incident is considered much less significant.

Despite this need to balance individual and community interests, many Internet activists support complete anonymity as a fundamental right. Systems such as the Tor browser allow people to explore the Internet in complete anonymity and even to create content on the so-called "dark web." In truth, complete anonymity often encourages behavior that we might not have followed had our identity been known. In many cases, however, especially in authoritarian regimes, anonymity allows greater freedom of expression by all, without fear of prosecution for one's ideas. In other cases it simply prevents a person from being persecuted or bullied for his or her thoughts.

Today, technology is increasingly integrating with the physical world. In 2019 in Hong Kong, opponents of a government-proposed law lined up at subway stations to buy tickets instead of scanning their passes, so as to leave no electronic trace of their movements.[27] They used lasers to blind facial recognition cameras.[28] Tracking tools, however, are now so numerous that it is difficult for a person to avoid leaving personal traces on video systems equipped with automatic facial recognition, nor to prevent his or her smartphone from leaving a trace of where he or she is or from being used as a microphone by some magistrate or policeman during an investigation. In London, automatic facial recognition cameras, often used at airports and major events, have become normal since 2015.[29]

As of 2018, access to cell phone location data in the United States requires permission from the courts. Until then, police had had unfettered access to it.[30] The following year, San Francisco became the first major U.S. city to completely ban the use of facial recognition to prevent its abuse by law enforcement.[31] However, private companies can still use it.[32] The debate has also been raised at the United Nations level,[33] and on the digital innovation front, filters have been created to make photos unrecognizable to artificial intelligence.[34]

A central consideration in this debate is the weight of respon sibility that individuals seem to lose when they are anonymous, such as when trolls try to disrupt or divert online conversations. The real problem arises, however, when crimes are committed through anonymity. If it is indeed such, not even the police can trace it back to the perpetrator. Much of online blackmail today occurs using systems that provide complete anonymity such as a cryptocurrency disconnected from exchange systems and obscured e-mail or communication systems such as Proton Mail.

This is why today many intelligence agencies[35] demand access to encrypted encryption of online communication services such as Whatsapp. Some countries, such as Russia and China, ban the use of VPN to connect to the Internet, and some companies, such as Netflix and BBC, ban the use of VPN to connect to their services.

With respect to anonymity, there does not seem to be a clear solution today, nor a definite orientation even within individual states or cultures. Let us examine two important aspects of the issue.

1. The individual has the right to be forgotten about facts about him or her that he or she does not want to be remembered, but it conflicts with the community's right to history. Records should be erasable by the individual unless they have important value to the community.

Only recently has the right to forget information been considered an individual right. In ancient Rome, the erasure of memory with respect to a person or fact was conceived only as a punishment, known as *damnatio memoriae*. The ability to remember things in books, in the media, and especially in the digital world, which allows anyone to recall events in detail years later, has created a new need.

Large platforms take responsibility for managing this right and in many cases also for deciding the importance of digital memory for history. Indeed, since 2014[36] major European search engines such as Google have

been obliged to remove links to personal information upon request.[37] There are two crucial issues here. The first is that Google does not necessarily delete what is requested of it, but it does value it. Its disclaimer reads:

> When you make the request, we balance your rights to privacy and data protection against the public interest in having access to the information, as well as the right of others to distribute it. For example, we may refuse to remove certain information that relates to financial fraud, professional negligence, criminal convictions, or the public conduct of government officials.

This means, in practice, that we give a private company the prerogative to decide what kind of information should remain accessible on the Internet.

The second issue is that information and links are not deleted globally, but only selectively for the state or region covered by this regulation, in this case the European Union.

In the first ten years of service, 2.6 million links were removed, and 50% of the time Google said no.[38] The search engine superpower also stands as a judge of the petitions received from national privacy authorities, as reported by Google on its "Transparency Report" page:

> *Request*: We received a request from the Italian data protection authority to remove seven URLs from 2014 and 2015, explaining how a private individual's former company had been accused of failing to pay its employees and being subject to bankruptcy proceedings.
> *Result*: We did not remove the seven URLs in question because the individual had established a new company in the same field and the information remains relevant to the individual's professional life.
> *Request*: We received a request from the Italian data protection authority to remove 19 URLs that reported telephone conversations in which a private individual took part, related to the failure of a major Italian bank. The phone calls had been illegally intercepted.
> *Result*: We removed all 19 URLs in question, considering the illicit nature of the information and the lack of a strong public interest in relation to the private individual's name.

Clearly, the power to make judgments in favor of the community is becoming increasingly centralized.

A key concept that emerges from this talk is that information on the Internet is likely to remain forever. But by limiting the ease of finding it, people's right to be forgotten is mitigated.

Even with the Blog, we have received numerous requests over the years from individuals asking us to obscure some of their past comments or posts, or those referring to them. In some cases more organized people have approached Google directly to black out search results.

2. The right to zero knowledge (*zero knowledge*) of an individual's online activities is occasionally opposed to the need to aggregate data for

public use. The confidentiality of individual data must be balanced against the community's need for access to aggregated data.

  "Zero knowledge" services are becoming increasingly popular. They do not allow the system administrator to see or access user-generated data in any way. E-mail systems such as Proton Mail, archiving systems such as Sync, or password management systems such as 1Password allow only the user and no one else to see the data entered. To recognize such services, simply view the password recovery system. If the administrator has the ability to regenerate a password, zero knowledge is not guaranteed.

  The biggest problem with these systems is precisely the loss of the password: only the user knows it, and there are no ways to recreate it. Some tools have set up zero-knowledge parts of their services, like, for example, Telegram's private chats. The spread of these services is driven both by people's desire to own their data and to protect themselves from the increasingly frequent hacker attacks on the services we use. However, the concept of personal sovereignty over one's data is at odds with the possibility of using this data for the community, at least in aggregate.

  Henri Poincaré said that "the accumulation of data is no more science than a pile of bricks is a house." In our case, it is algorithms that turn information into predictions. Indeed, the community can often benefit greatly from aggregated data to extract value from it. City mobility sharing services create data that provide actionable information for the community, even in real time, for example, which routes are most used and least served by public transportation routes. Uber for a period made available aggregate data from its customers' trips,[39] which map mobility in cities and highlight how long it takes to get from one area to another and the average speeds on each section of city streets. From this aggregated data, they have created a system to enable city managers to better plan traffic circulation. The importance of this data has resulted in cities such as Turin including a data-sharing requirement with the city in all contracts for city mobility services.

  However, data aggregation raises the question of where to draw the line and, more importantly, how to define it. Phone carriers offer a service for businesses that aggregates the data of their customers' locations and movements that are recorded as cell phones lock onto different cells as we move around. Aggregated data certainly offers the great advantage of

being able to see where people have been before and after they entered our store or went to a particular event, for example. Among the examples presented to me I saw where people went for drinks and then where they went to sleep before and after attending a fashion show in Milan. The commercial value of this information is enormous.[40] However, seeing this service made me realize how much data we share with mobile operators. The data I saw was aggregated by clusters of thirty people, far beyond the limit of seven set by the European Privacy Act (GDPR). No doubt there will be someone in some offices of telecommunications companies who can view data in a disaggregated manner for a single person, starting with law enforcement authorities.

On the other hand, the same service, when used to visualize how people reach high-speed trains, identifying where they come from and the means they use, is undoubtedly a very powerful analytical tool for optimizing the public transportation system. But even aggregated information, in some cases, can prove risky for the community itself. In 2018, one person posted[41] on Twit ter the aggregated data of joggers in Afghanistan processed into a map with the help of Strava, a sports app. The map showed what had been obscured on Google Maps: the perimeter of a military base in the middle of the desert, where military personnel were jogging using Strava.

Data aggregation is also often used to offer enhanced services to users who voluntarily grant their sharing, such as in the case of recommended products and services based on purchasing habits or previous searches.

The information we can share can also be very sensitive, such as our dna. When I sent my test tube to 23andme.com, I did it mainly for fun. But the results were surprising. Not only did I find new relatives, but the result allowed me to map their geographical origin and, more importantly, showed me some habits that people with similar DNA to mine had. I remember, for example, that I had a 73 percent chance of becoming a lifeguard, which I had actually been.

Data aggregation can also occur automatically within services that, while capturing data, use it to improve the system itself. Such is the case with Alexa, which can suggest to its users the preferred treatments for this or that ailment based on guidelines found on the website of the Ministry of Health in the country where they are located.[42] At the same time, it uses these queries to map the distribution of needs and also to profile possible customers for medical companies. Babylon, in Great

Britain, allows people to consult a doctor remotely, interfaced with artificial intelligence that helps them with diagnosis.

All these new systems will acquire huge amounts of sensitive data on individual patients that will hopefully be handled in compliance with privacy regulations. But such acquisitions and aggregations of data essential for health care planning in a country must also be available to the community. In authorizing these kinds of services, this must always be made clear. Apps of this kind can be more or less invasive depending on the decision of the authorities. In Germany, the data collected are available only to the user, while in France, South Korea, Taiwan, and China they are also accessible to central health authorities.

It would seem obvious that data produced by public services should become public goods, but this is not always the case. Yet the use of this data provides tools for service improvement and enables greater benefits with less effort, the identification of fraudulent and wasteful activities, and also builds trust in the citizenry because it makes activities more transparent.[43]

Data sharing can also take place on a more local level. Ring, for example, the Amazon company that offers a camera system connected to your home lock, offers the ability to share recordings with neighbors and police to monitor and ward off theft in your neighborhood.[44]

Communities must ask themselves whether their data should be made available in some way to private companies, the general public, or remain confidential or even not be generated at all. In addition, public deliberation must decide what is the correct level of clustering and, more generally, how to ensure individual ownership of data that people are often not even aware of.

The Internet has led us to claim new rights. Now is the time to build the tools that will allow us to exercise them and feel protected, as individuals and as a community, by the new possibilities that digital citizenship has enabled us.

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[1] In Italy, the digital identification system known as Spid was created in 2016.

[2] More extensively in Davide Casaleggio, *The Fountains of the Internet*, "The Star Blog," August 7, 2028 https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2018/08/le_fontane_di_internet.html

[3] https://internetshutdowns.in

4 https://www.accessnow.org/keepiton/

5 https://www.deloitte.com/ug/en/Industries/tmt/perspectives/the-economic-impact-of-disruptions-to-internet-connectivity-report-for-facebook.html

6 https://teachercenter.withgoogle.com/

7 https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en

8 McKinsey, 2019

9 https://platform.keesingtechnologies.com/the-story-of-standardisation/

10 Taking a look at the analysis they adduced shows that they disputed as false two articles that were, however, true.

1) According to NewsGuard, the news reported on Blog: *New shameful law: the PD (Democratic Party) wants your money to pay for hotels, restaurants and election propaganda* is false, because "the draft does not provide funding for these expenses." A completely unfounded statement. And it would have been enough to read the draft: http://www.senato.it/leg/18/BGT/Schede/FascicoloSchedeDDL/ebook/50179.pdf. Article 6(5)(G) clearly states, "- expenses for travel, trips, hotels, restaurants and vehicles for documented political reasons or needs related to parliamentary activity."

2) Also according to NewsGuard: "Although some opinions are published in the Editorial section, articles that are presented as news often include the views of the Five Star Movement. For example, the May 2019 article *Zingaretti defender of caste privileges* published in the News section claims that "Pd Secretary Nicola Zingaretti has finally thrown down the mask." The article adds that "Zingaretti actually supported his treasurer Zanda's shameful proposal to raise politicians' salaries." Zingaretti knew that Zanda's proposal was not an opinion, but a fact, since Zingaretti was at the time the political leader of the Italian Democratic Party and did nothing to stop the proposal in Parliament until the 5 Star Movement denounced it. So this is information, not opinion.

After we reported this evidence the text was retained, a sentence was simply inserted about the fact that we had reported that we disagreed with the analysis (sic).

11 https://blog.x.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/information_operations_directed_at_Hong_Kong

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13 https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/13/tech/facebook-fake-accounts/index.html

14 https://eu.usatoday.com/story/tech/2020/05/06/facebook-oversight-board-new-members/5176913002/

15 https://www.corriere.it/esteri/20_maggio_27/trump-smentito-twitter-contenuti-fuorvianti-prima-volta-storia-social-network-c39be600-9fa6-11ea-bcda-1b088225c4d4.shtml

16 https://www.ilpost.it/2019/12/26/turchia-blocco-wikipedia-violazione-liberta-espressione/amp/

17 https://medium.com/@denisemelchin/how-deepfake-porn-bans-will-impact-cloud-compute-providers-eb23eab431b4

18 Plato*The Laws,* Book XI, VI, 923a (tr. it. in *Complete Works*, cit.).

19 https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-fbi-drops-fight-to-force-apple-to-unlock-san-bernardino-terrorist-iphone-20160328-story.html

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21 The "Financial Times" proposed a calculator to detail the costs: https://ig.ft.com/how-much-is-your-personal-data-worth/

22 https://medium.com/wibson/how-much-is-your-data-worth-at-least-240-per-year-likely-much-more-984e250c2ffa

23 https://www.digitalethics.org/essays/death-and-internet-what-happens-your-digital-assets-when-you-die

24 https://transparencyreport.google.com/copyright/overview

25 https://www.key4biz.it/vuoi-comprare-un-ebook-di-seconda-mano-prima-ci-vuole-lok-dellautore/283838

26 https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-49191645, https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52474250

27 https://www.gizmodo.com.au/2019/06/what-hong-kongs-protesters-can-teach-us-about-the-future-of-privacy/

28 https://mobile.twitter.com/alessabocchi/status/1156513770254012416

29 https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/may/21/office-worker-launches-uks-first-police-facial-recognition-legal-action

30 https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/22/us/politics/supreme-court-warrants-cell-phone-privacy.html

31 https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/14/us/facial-recognition-ban-san-francisco.html#:~:text=San%20Francisco%20banned%20the%20use,on%20the%20streets%2C%20in%20parks

32 https://www.technologyreview.com/s/613536/facial-recognition-

ban-san-francisco-surveillance-privacy-private-corporate-interests/

33 https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/06/1041231

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36 https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2014-05/cp140070en.pdf

37 https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/legal-removal-request?complaint_type=rtbf

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41 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/28/fitness-tracking-app-gives-away-location-of-secret-us-army-bases

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AI

The oracle of participation

In the flow of participation, from the fervor of cheering one slips into collective construction,
until dissolving into the intangible wisdom of AI.

<div align="right">ChatGPT (AI)</div>

Civic participation will be disrupted after digital, once again by AI. Today, we can only speculate on the directions it will take, but there are already some milestones.

The concept of *fact checking* will evolve into something new, automated, and more extensive than figuring out whether a fact is or is not true, but also consistent with the goal we set for ourselves and whether it complies with the principles or rules we have set for ourselves. Regarding how much people will want to lean on this new lie detector, it will be a decision similar to the one we make every time we activate a navigator. We follow it even if it points us to different paths than the one we thought best.

These systems may also be used to provide a sort of guardrail for politicians with respect to the agenda with which they got themselves elected and the reasons they give for any controversial choice.

There is often discussion today about using AI to create artifactual videos or images that aim to condition people. However, this is one of the minor impacts this technology will have. The real question we should ask is who this technology will work for: citizens or power structures.[1]

The concept of the AI personal agent will evolve very quickly: objects similar to Alexa, Siri, or Google Assistant will no longer just respond to orders such as turning on the lights or telling us the weather for the day, but will be able to interpret and trigger the actions needed to achieve our goals, from sending an appropriate birthday gift to our friends on time, to interpreting the best political actions needed to achieve a goal.

The novelty will not be figuring out which party you are most sympathetic to by answering a series of questions,[2] but forming an opinion on each and every issue we care about through the possibility of intervening or having our agent intervene for us at the best time and in the best way.

AI agents may be federated objects that unite people with similar goals in order to collectively help them achieve desired outcomes and change.

It is likely that new movements from below will grow as a result of the coordination and boost brought by AI objects.

As has always been the case, these popular forces will have to confront the status quo, the interests of corporations and systems of power, which in turn will in the future manifest their will by using AI tools to analyze current legislation and figure out how to persuade politicians and citizens of the goodness of a certain choice, and as a result, identify individual levers they can use.[3]

Institutions will also be able to engage with those who do not have representatives who can make their voices heard, such as abstainers, future generations, rivers, forests, animals, and nature in general: all decisive entities in collective choices that nevertheless often go unheard, but who could have a voice based on their interests. They will be able to put forward their views and needs through AI objects assigned to the role of assistant advisor, which is already being experimented with today, and which will be a kind of representative of the silent ones. The guarantors of these institutions on the other hand will be able to receive help or impose a transparency constraint about AI objects that will provide answers regarding rules, even on complex situations, and if the human guarantor has different opinions he or she will have to make clear his or her disagreement with the AI suggestion. The guarantor of a movement or party or state will not be able to be constrained by family situations or economic or political career interests without its misalignment with the shared rules becoming apparent.

The only thing that is certain today is that whatever actors, including citizens, institutions and lobbyists, do not use AI in an evolved way will be the ones subjugated by others.

There are, of course, numerous ethical issues that are already emerging. For example, already today AI can give a prediction of what laws or amendments will pass.[4] If this leads directly to the removal of proposals not having much chance of being passed, we will enter a kind of legislative *Minority Report.*

The fallacy of reasoning (the cognitive biases) of artificial intelligences is another very sensitive front. All AIs are trained on data and opinions that they introject to understand the world, but the companies that develop them have their own business goals and vision, just as those who design the use of AI, but also those who then use it, in turn define how they interact. As with social media, where there has been in recent years

a political use of the tools by the companies that owned them, the long list of actors who may shape the use of AI will affect the end result in the future. No human will be able to identify the reasoning changes hidden beneath the surface.

Therefore, it will be necessary to have AI objects that continuously check the possible bias of these same objects.

Managing people's opinions through AI will be approached in two ethically opposed ways: persuasion or consensus building. Many will opt for the former, using messages profiled and constructed for each voter, aimed at convincing him or her to support a certain political party, and to this end will exploit the psychological characteristics and beliefs of the individual. We will perhaps go so far as to make it necessary to self-identify artificial intelligences when they interact with us, in order to distinguish them from humans. In this sense we will come to define a new scarlet letter to recognize them.

"AI citizen assemblies," at the other extreme, will be able to empower the decisions of human citizens and help them understand and navigate through all the trade-offs imposed by even very complex situations. The enhancement of these pathways, combined with the innovations already brought by the Internet with the mass brainstorming systems already described, will be able to create new ways of building robust solutions with broad citizen consensus. On the other hand, they will be able to help better interpret citizens' ideas to help them govern better.

Said Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI: "My worst fears are that we -- the tech industry, could cause significant damage to the world. I think if this technology goes wrong, it can go very wrong."

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1 ...or, at some point, for itself.
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3 https://law.stanford.edu/2023/01/06/large-language-models-as-lobbyists/
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Conclusion
The Future of Power

The custodians of power face turmoil. In the last century, it was no longer only the rulers who preserved it, but also the owners of the mass media, then came digital media with which to compete, and finally came individuals who, thanks to social media, could reach millions of people. Of no use was creating committees or laws or ministries of censorship or, again, economic mechanisms to disfavor one tool over another. The forces of popular outrage and citizen awareness have a hidden secret: they are contagious.

We will enter a world in which the certainty of truth can no longer come through videos or images. Even the very certainty of whether or not we are living in a simulation will become difficult to discern. Just as Alan Turing was able to create a test to distinguish human from robotic intelligences and make it last for over fifty years, today we need a new test that distinguishes fact from fiction and that will only be able to be based on the science of the atom, certainly not the science of information. We will sign our communications with our iris; we will acquire documentation of the real by inserting physical elements of the place where we are filming; and we will keep physical the most important agreements of our lives such as marriage or land acquisition.

If information is the fuel for these new popular movements, collective understanding of complex issues will enable more and more people to be convinced to join the forces of change. The trap that many fall into is thinking that it must necessarily start from the palace or the elected. In the future it will become increasingly clear that it is the strength of the idea that makes the difference, not the face that will carry it forward. LAM (Large Action Models) AI objects – which act and do not just write like the better-known LLMs (Large Language Models) – will enable the actions needed to achieve the goal to be set in motion by engaging people, persuading them, and then asking them to participate in targeted actions designed according to the probability of success.

Like any major technological and societal change, the tool may also be used to manage the masses of people by rulers who want to preserve their position. In the platform society, it will be the spread of alternative and competing AI tools that will allow there to be no privileged access

for the few. If regulation today is to ensure anything on the AI front, it is this: to prevent the concentration of this new power in the hands of a few and to stimulate the creation of tools accessible to all.