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Term Paper

Representation of Democracy in Games

Authored by:

International Democratic Girlscouts Workers Party of ITU

Oliver E. Astrup . . . . olas@itu.dk

1.   Introduction

Democracy is quite an old form of government dated back to Ancient Greece, but it is still the most common type of government in the western world. In this paper I try and take this concept of democracy to games, that have long contained elements of democracy, but I have not been able to find studies trying to analyse them. I will compare real world democracy to democratic simulations like Democracy 3, but also deceit games like Among Us, that is heavily reliant on democracy in the gameplay. I also look at how these simulations or representations work and how the player agency affects these results, since games are created by designers, but played by players.

1.1   Disclaimer

Democracy is a broad subject and many people have different opinions on it. I have grown up and live in a democracy, that will have affected me and my views on democracy. I have also previously worked on a project closely related to democracy called "Oblivious transfer in voting protocols", that contains a lot of work about securing democracy though online voting.

2.   What is Democracy?

To understand how democracy is represented in games, we first need to determine what is democracy? For this we can look at Harrison and Boyd's chapter on Democracy[8]. Because of the big problems with defining democracy and it is use as a 'hurrah' word, they try to identify the key features that creates a liberal democracy. Harrison and Boyd acknowledges that the word "Democracy" has to be distinguish from actual democracy, since many countries around the word, makes use of the word, without having an actual democracy. They uses the examples of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini who both stated that their countries were democratic, and likewise is found with most other forms of dictatorships. This is from here that they raise their question of what is a democracy, to distinguish the western democracies from others.

2.1   Democracy as a system of government

According to Harrison and Boyd in Ancient Greece, they identified 3 types of government. Monarchy as a one person rule, aristocracy as the rule of a few high standing people and then democracy that is the rule by the people. They argue that most countries have a mix of these three types of government. They use United Kingdom as an example, but this could also be used in Denmark where we still have a monarch, and we have a small group of politicians that could be considered an aristocracy, but their argument is mainly that democracy weights the most when everything is considered. So it becomes about votes and public opinion rather then non-democratic countries where one of the other two factors might out weight democracy.

Harrison and Boyd also outlines two other clarifications for democratic governments:

Defensive democracy The defensive democracy is there to protect it's citizens from an outside foreign power, but it should not come close to the private life's of it's citizens. It is very common in these types of

democracy, that when the threat is not there, people stop participating in democracy.

Citizen democracy: This type of government is where the citizens of the country are more involved in the governing process, then normally found in a representative democracy. The prime example of this type of government is found in ancient Athens where citizens would come together and vote directly, instead of being represented. This type of government is hard to achieve in a modern world since there are a lot more people and it requires strong participation and involvement of all citizens, to be effective. Today we see it more in the use of referenda, where the citizens are allowed to vote directly on a specific subject, though the use of referenda is varying from different countries. Examples of this type of vote can be found in the the United Kingdoms 2014 Scottish independence referenda or in Denmark that has held referenda on the subjects of the Europa Union, their constitution and the voting age of citizens[12].

2.2   Democracy and legitimising government

Harrison and Boyd describe the legitimising of government with: *"The moral and political right to govern and expect to be obeyed"*. From this government is legitimised though that the people of a nation have the right to create and choose a government, but also the right to replace them, so there are no one that are born to govern. Legitimising also contains the consent of the people, that this choice have been made by some people, either directly or though mandate in a representative democracy.

2.3   Majority rule and democracy

Having a democracy is not the same as having majority rule, and in many cases the leaders chosen in a democracy, does not have a majority. Harrison and Boyd uses the United Kingdom in their example, but you can also see it here in Denmark, where the largest party in the 2019 election only gained 25,9% of the votes.

So a democracy might not have a majority rule, but as Harrison and Boyd puts it: *"In many ways the best criterion for judging a democracy is how it treats its minorities"*. So since democracy is run by the people, it should also care for all of those people, though it should never place minority opinions above those of the majority.

2.4   Equality of citizenship rights

This feature of democracy is described quite well by Harrison and Boyd:

"*Citizens (unless disqualified on legal grounds, such as imprisonment or bankruptcy) all have one vote, of equal value, in constituencies of roughly equal size. All citizens have an equal right to run for office. None of these rights can be legally circumscribed by property or by educational or social status.*" - [8] p. 68

2.5   Public opinion in democracies

This can be a rather complex factor to analyse, because what can determine what the public thinks? Harrison and Boyd puts opinions into three categories: Expert opinion, that comes from professionals and specialists in that specific topic, and might work as consultants. Informed general opinion, that follow politics and keeps them-self updated on what is going on, then there is the mass uninformed public opinion, that is groups and people that do not fall into the two first categories, and can be shaped by different media, but this is often just temporary.

Public opinion is important for democracy, as that is used to make decisions on subjects, but the hard part is to determine what is the public opinion, as people or groups might say that they are talking as the public, but they might just be a load minority with their own motives.

2.6   The rule of law and democracy

In the last of their functions Harrison and Boyd talks about where laws come from in a democracy and that there needs to be natural laws based on reason and universal moral principles. This is also central to democracy, since they are creating the laws the it's citizens have to follow and should be different from authoritarian or theocratic systems, where laws might not be based on these principles or only apply to specific groups of citizens.

3.   Analysis of democracy in games

3.1   The games

In this paper I will make use of 4 different games with the similarity, that they all contain democracy as a core mechanic in the actual game. Since there are many games that contain some kind of democracy, but not as a core mechanic, which might reflect in the gameplay so that people either don't think about it, never use it or it might be very far from actual democracy. Here is a short description of each of the games:

Democracy 3[5] is a democracy simulation where the player is the leader of a government in a country and has to make decisions on polices, but they have limited power and they have to try and get re-elected and avoid getting assassinated by angry citizens. An interesting point brought by Czauderna [3] is that this game is technically unwinnable for the player, this game lets you play the political game until your party loses an election or are killed.

Evil Democracy: 1932[6] is a historical simulation, where the player is the leader of a party in the 1930s, and have to try and get their party elected into a Parliament, either in Germany, France or United Kingdom. Here your selected party try to change history by making you the dominant party. Each party is at a different place in the political spectrum, that gives different opportunities for allies and dogmas to find and adopt.

Renaissance Kingdoms[11] is a little different since it is a role-play multiplayer game where the player is in a European town in the Renaissance period. But the developers of the game have chosen a very modern approach to the game by having elections for many different positions in the game, ranging from town mayor to bishop or king.

Among Us[9] this game is a multiplayer deceit game, it contains a very central democratic mechanic that is shared among many different very similar games about deception, where players have to vote each other out of the game in an afford to win. Similar games could be Town of Salem[1] or the non-computer games of Werewolf and Mafia, even that they might have different gameplay, the central voting mechanic is still the same over all those games.

3.2   Democratic features used in Games

Working with the features of democracy from chapter 2, I will try and find common ground and what is different between the games, to see how different games have been designed to represent democracy.

Starting with the first feature of **Democracy as a system of government** is the balance between the three different types of rules. I would argue that in the singleplayer games of Democracy 3 and Evil Democracy this is actually not democratic anymore, since they become on person rules, since the players actions are the only factor involved. This is also something that Czauderna[3] points out, when he talks about the game

and that even though the player has ministers, they do not make any decisions in the game. The same is true for Evil Democracy, the only actor making any decisions is the player, making it also a one person rule.

Here the multiplayer games distance them-self, since they have other players involved, so that the actions are no longer only that of a single player in the game, but reflections the actions of many players. Renaissance Kingdoms allowing parties to make county councils, that makes the governing rules for the rest of the players, the funny difference in that game, is that a player does have the option of not taking part in either the governing and the voting. This action seem to be more like real life, where citizens of countries have the same options, where in the two other games where citizens automatically participate in democracy. Though this would also show the difference between **defensive** and **citizens** democracy that Harrison and Boyd outlines. Renaissance Kingdoms seem to have a more defensive approach with much of it being role-playing, the government seem to be more on the defensive side then the two others where citizens participates in each elections.

Following with Among Us, this is much more closer to the democracy found in Ancient Greece, where everyone can talk for them-self and participate in the voting or abstain if they wish to do so. Though this every player around the table forms the government and is the voter, though the participation of this simple mechanic.

The next feature is then the **legitimising government** where the games have to show that the player have the right to rule. This is very present in both Democracy 3 and Evil Democracy since that is the losing condition for those games, if the player does not achieve the right to govern, the game is over. Where in Renaissance Kingdoms the focus is again on the role-playing of people, if someone is elected to a position in the game, it is very close to reality, that they expect to be obeyed, but they might also be replaced, if the vote is swayed in the next election. Then with deceit games, it is less shown, since there is no distinctive government, but instead the mandate is given by the mechanics of the game to all of the players, and there is no way of getting around that.

For the **Majority rule** feature of democracy, it becomes more scares with how they are treated, since it is much more up to the individual player. In Democracy 3, it is up to the player to decide what groups they want to please with their actions, so they can focus and many small groups and some large ones. Evil Democracy works slightly different from that, where it is more about swaying people to your party, but in the end if they player does not sway enough people, they can still make coalition governments with smaller parties, though a single party government does give more points to the player, making the focus more on the majority rule, rather then smaller minority groups.

Renaissance Kingdoms have an interesting mechanic when it comes to elected governments, since there is only 11 seats in a government, they are distributed between the parties depending on how many votes they have received, making coalitions almost always happen, if there is more then a single party in the election. This mechanic can limit the effect of majority rule, since the parties cannot rule alone, though a minority still needs enough votes to get at least one seat in the government.

Then when looking at deceit games, it would seem like there is no minority rules, since the votes in the game is decided by majority only. The difference is then that between votes in such a game, a minority can become a majority, based on simple actions in the game, so the sway is easier seen in games like this.

For **equality of citizenship** all of the games are not that different in that every citizens votes are counted and they weight equally. In the games where the player is in change, citizens are able to take office, by the player losing the game and in deceit games there is not really an office to run for, but instead this could be shown in that every player can be voted out of the game and every player has the right to speak their mind. So the games seem very set on this point, that there is no way of taking this feature away from the other players or parties in the game.

Public opinion is already had to find in real life, so how should it even be shown in a game? Democracy 3 have at the centre of the screen all groups current opinions of the ruling party, and then how each policy is affecting them in a negative or positive direction, so this is in a way a hidden public opinion, since you with some calculations, could sum up the options of each groups, to form a full public opinion. Looking at the groups, with the way the game is build, this looks quite like all of the groups are informed opinions, unlike in real life where most people would fall in the category of mass uniformed opinions. This can be seen as groups will always react the same way to the same policies and the effect is immediate, though different people in the same group still reacts differently, depending on how much they are a part of the group.

Here Evil Democracy handles it differently since it is more about swaying public opinion, until they agree with you. This is more like mass uninformed public opinion, that are shown by how easily people are going from one site to another. Since if a player stops focusing on a specific groups of people in the game, they will quickly lose them to the other players. There is though a mechanic about getting sponsors to your party, they are also swayed between players, but seem to be more closely related to informed opinions and are much harder to sway for that reason.

For Renaissance Kingdoms, it again emulates well with real life, as people have the option to participate in the democratic processes. So all of the three different opinions can be found in this game, and it is up to the elected government to decide to listen to it.

For deceit games is a bit more fun on this function, since I would argue that it contains no expert opinions, but only informed and uninformed, that is all dependent on the actions taken in the specific game. The goal of a game is then for the informed opinion to collect their knowledge, to make an informed decision on what player to remove from the game.

The **rule of law** for democracy is an interesting one, since specially in single player games, all of the rules are created by the player. An example of this could be that a player could choose to only teach Creationism in Democracy 3, then that is not based on reason and moral principles but on religious belief. However, on the other hand, the player is also able to follow reason for their decisions in a game, but it might not always be the path to victory. In Evil Democracy, the player should sway as many people as they need to, and can enact different dogmas to support this, all from universal healthcare to making a Superior race. Like with Democracy 3, this is all on the players actions to have or not have reason behind laws, and is just supported by the game.

Then in Renaissance Kingdoms I would again argue that since the game is so close to real life, it is also hard to determine where the rules are coming from. It should be possible to create a perfect democratic law system, but it is also possible to do the opposite. The difference here is that with other players in the game, you cannot do this alone, you need to have allies to support you actions, but if you have this, this it should be possible to create laws that are not by reason or moral.

And finally for deceit games, I do not think that they contain any form of law or moral principles, it is about deceiving each other by convincing you of something, even if that is not right. There is no way for the players to create laws in the spectrum of the game, though you can still make laws outside of the game, but then they are no longer supported in the game. This could be that people are not allowed to take certain actions, since that will reveal vital information to other players.

4.   Representation and Simulation

When writing about democracy in video games, you cannot get around the discussion of simulation and representation of real world phenomena in games. The term has been used for some time, and can be found in Chris Crawfords work[2], where he writes the following: "*a game is a closed formal system that subjectively represents a subset of reality*". This is also found in the work of Gonzalo Frasca[4] that argues simulation is an alternative to representation, with: "*to simulate is to model a system through a different system which maintains some of the behaviours of the original system.*".

An interesting part about Crawfords statement is that he calls for games to be subjective representations, not that they are fully subjective, but that they play between subjective and objective. Games might contain elements that cannot be recreated or found in the real world, but the players experiences in the game are no less real for that reason. A players actions in a game, can mirror their thoughts and actions from the real objective world, just realised in a computer game. But as Crawford putts it: "*A game creates a fantasy representation, not a scientific model.*", we cannot represent something in a game and claim that it is identical to the real world. But with respect to Frascas sentence, to call games containing democracy a simulation of real democracy, we do need to have overlapping elements from the real world system.

In the topic of representing democracy in video games, this is a realisation that we need to have. You might try and take real world element of democracy and represent it in a video game, but then we need to think of it as a part of a game now.

This is specially true, when you consider how different democracy is executed, in different countries. In USA you have the electoral college as a part of the presidential vote, another example could be the house of lords in the United Kingdom, that creates a two house system, but also a house without elected politicians, and in a country like Denmark, this would seem strange, since they removed their two house parliamentary system in 1953.[1]

With these elements, how would you be able to represent a universal democracy game that would properly simulate how democracy works, since it is all dependant on how the democracy is actually used in a specific country, if we want to have elements of the real system, what system is it then we should choose to go with?

Crawford even goes further to also talk about simulations, that he describes as: "*A simulation is a serious attempt to accurately represent a real phenomenon in another, more malleable form.*". Crawford states that games are not the same as simulations, as he continues to talk about how games often are simplified and focused around the specific parts of the element that they try to simulate. In our context this could be shown in a simplification of democracy, as I have written above, some elements are not the same in each country and you might remove factors from the game, to even make it technically possible to create the game and then also in the design, to make sure that the player can actually understand how the game works. Looking at a game like Democracy 3, where many elements have been striped away to only focus on government, opinions and policies, but not about the way the elections are held.

This is also shown in the last part of his statement, that games only contain a "*subset of reality*", since it would be both infeasible technically to create a perfect reality and though design make it work in what is the players reality, since it might not be the same as the designers. Even different designers of the same games, might have different visions for the game and for what reality that is found in.

For a more modern look at video game simulation, reading Karhulahtis paper[10] on the question if video games really can be simulations, also brings up some interesting thoughts. He argues that components

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[1]A funny element to note here is that the upper house in Denmark actually worked with electors, just as in the current American system.

that are called simulations, should have a role in a valid model of a system, but video games are not these systems. Instead video games are for entertainment or education, and is very closely linked to the designer. It is the designers idea to try and simulate elements though video games, but only with their own intent.

With video games having elements of democracy in them, the creators of these games show their intent and focus for the game, though how they have designed how the game should be. Specially as video games have grown to bigger and bigger audiences, some games might not state their intent anymore, and then you come into the point where Karhulahti argues that if the player can make their own reference of what a game simulates, then what does it simulate anymore and can we even find out what it is?

Though simulation games are not just for entertainment, they can also be used to study how people act in different situations like Woods have written about in his paper[14], about the seriousness of video games. His paper focuses mostly on multi-player games and how players act with one another, so this could be applied to how players act in a democracy like in Renaissance Kingdoms. As I have written more then once in the analysis in chapter 3, this game continues to distance itself from the others, by its ability to try and emulate a real society. Woods works on social simulations games and describe their possibilities to *illicit critical reflections in the player* and *evoke the subjective experiencing of issues as diverse as abuse of power, cultural differences and the function of the state.*

However, I do not think that this is only limited to multiplayer games as Woods describe it, looking at both Democracy 3 and Evil Democracy, they can both force their players to make decisions to reflect upon. A simple one from Democracy 3 could be the those between teaching Creationism, Evolution or both in the schools in your country, this will effect the simulation the game tries to create, but the same policy is technically also possible for politicians in real life, and it all depends on the players personal view on the subject.

5.   Agency in Democratic Games

Agency has been discussed in games research for some time, but I have lightly touched upon it in chapter 3, with some functions of democracy in games being dependant on the players actions, decisions and choices. In Wardrip-Fruins paper[13] on agency it is discussed that actions that players take are *supported by an underlying computational model* and in Harrell and Zhu's paper[7] that states: "*Both player and system need to be taken into account as part of the discourse about agency play.*".

We must then be aware of the game design, and what actions they allow the players. Going back to the example of Evil Democracy and the ability for the player to use a dogma to make a superior race in the game, is this then the players actions or is it an action created by the designers of the game. So when looking at democratic games, indeed the player has choices, but they might not be free to make any choice they want, or they might get punished by the game.

But this can also work the other way around, as seen by players of Renaissance Kingdoms that have rules for elections. An example of this could be the election of a new mayor in a village, if no-one runs for mayor, the previous mayor is automatically elected again, this is then used by villages no need for new mayors to circumvent the participation fee, by just having the same mayor for an extended period of time.

Though this is only possible in extensive systems, as deceit games is very clear about your options: Abstain, vote no-one or vote someone. There is no way around this, there is no ways of tricking the vote and it is identical to the options that you would have in a real world democracy.

And maybe even without intention, other writes like Czauderna[3] seems to agree with this position,

that it is the systems that allow for the player actions, as he writes in his description of Democracy 3: "*Players can freely try out a certain set of coherent set of ideal policies, implement them and test its effects, check whether they lead (inside the system of the game) to an expected utopian or dystopian outcome.*". He then goes on to talk about how the player have all the actions of the game available to them, to try and achieve the goal of getting reelected and create a utopian or dystopian society, though this is fully up to the players what that means, since the game only contains the options to do as the players want.

6. Conclusions

Even though democracy has been simulated in games for quite some time, it seems like there is still a lack of talking about how it is actually used and implemented. In this paper I have tried to start the conversation on some of the subjects that can be used to simulate and tried to use examples from games to support this. Though it seems like different games does not seem to fully agree on an implementation and differences between multiplayer and singleplayer games seem to have quite an effect on the result. Hopefully the discussion is continued and reflected upon, so we get democratic games that are democratic.

6.1 Further work

This paper has a high focus on games that contains democracy as part of both the game design and implementation. It would be very interesting to change the focus to games where this is not the case, as an example many big MMO games have big groups of people organising them-self, with little or no support from the game. This is out of the reach of this paper, but looking at the organisation and seeing of it contains elements of democracy would be very interesting, or if democracy is not found in these groups, what is used instead? I think there is still lots to explore in that subjects, that could yield results, that could possible be compared to how groups organise in the real world, and see what is the most effective.

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