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Home > Papers > Daniel Greenwood

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The OpenGov Large-Scale eDemocracy Platform

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Abstract
OpenGov is a platform for large scale online democratic decision making, honed through exploration in two semesters of graduate seminars, and tested in the MIT Media Lab. OpenGov uses community filtering, electronic agents and modular rules to create a self-governing, participatory and deliberative formal decision making environment. The platform responds to the research inquiry: how can hundreds of thousands or millions of people meaningfully participate in a timely, free and fair democratic process resulting in formal, binding decisions. The free and open source software aspect of this platform is foundational to the socio-political hypothesis: large groups of people can take direct control and ownership of their aggregate affairs, including the processes and tools by which they govern themselves. OpenGov requires no appointed or elected moderators, chairmen, facilitators or other individuals or groups empowered to frame, prioritize or even lead development of agenda items before the group. Rather, the premise explored here is that any individual or group is equally empowered to raise any potential topic for discussion and potential inclusion on a formal, binding set of final agenda or ballot items. Through a series of "ascendant democratic" thresholds, as more and more members of a given OpenGov Community "buy into" a proposal, each topic comes closer to inclusion on a list of item for final, official debate and vote. Through a series of community rules, easily configurable to fit each community, various content, interaction, deadline, debate, vote, parliamentary and other procedural thresholds and rules may be set. The platform is designed, generally, to support and reflect the needs of large scale formal decision making by such diverse environments as town meetings, unions, internet standards bodies, state referenda, shareholder and NGO/non-profit members, religious global convocations or platform meetings, political party platform meetings, student governments and grass-roots organizations.

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Top

1 of 1   8/29/10 12:14 AM