

# New technologies: A two ways road for the democratic development

# DEMOCRACY VERSUS AUTOCRACY. WHY THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM IS SUPERIOR AND HOW IT CAN DEFEAT AUTOCRACY

**New technologies, a two ways road for the democratic  
development**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper will analyse biggest threats and opportunities the European Union that new technologies bring to us and how they influence in our democratic systems, such as the communication methods or the suffrage system. Additionally, this paper will conclude with some legal proposals to adopt our current legal systems to this new situation.

## SOCIAL MEDIA SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to analyse which are the biggest opportunities that new technologies can offer to the democratic system of the European Union, analysing success cases at regional, state and international level.

## KEYWORDS

#Democracy #tech #digitaldemocracy #digitalization

## SHORT BIO

Asier Areitio, current president of the YDE, has a bachelor in business administration and a bachelor in laws on the UPV/EHU. He is committed to the European politics and has taken part in many movements in favour of the integration and federalism of the EU. Nowadays he works in a public-private hedge fund focused on the investment for the creation of technological or innovative start-ups on the territory of Biscay.

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## TABLE OF ACRONYMS

EU - European Union

EC - European Commission

EP - European Parliament

NGO - Non Governmental Organization

# INTRODUCTION

The adoption and creation of new technologies (artificial intelligence, quantum computing, blockchain, Internet of the things, or crypto currencies) has opened a new gate to our liberal democratic systems. This gate gives the chance to offer surer electoral counting methods, predictability of social movements or safer economic space, but at the same time it gives access to new threats such as cyber-attacks, spread of fake news or misinformation and cyber scams (Ken, Juliet, & Werner, 2000).

These new technologies represent big opportunities for our democratic system, as well as one of the major threats liberal democracies have suffered since their adoption at the middle of the XX century.

A proper use of these tools requires the adoption of a new legal framework that puts fences on this specific field, and especially on its use in the context of any democratic process.

Therefore, this paper will discuss the biggest threats and opportunities the European Union (EU from now on) will face with new technologies how different aspects of the new technologies influence our democratic systems, such as the communication methods or the suffrage system. Additionally, this paper will conclude with some legal proposals to adopt our current legal systems to this new situation.

# MAIN THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

It is obviously not easy to identify and classify all the opportunities that new technologies offer to the democratic political systems. Therefore, this paper will identify some of the topics among which new technologies can offer new guarantees for our democratic systems, and show how the use of some of these skills may reinforce the rule of law and the democratic guarantees in the EU and all of the democratic states on the globe.

## Security

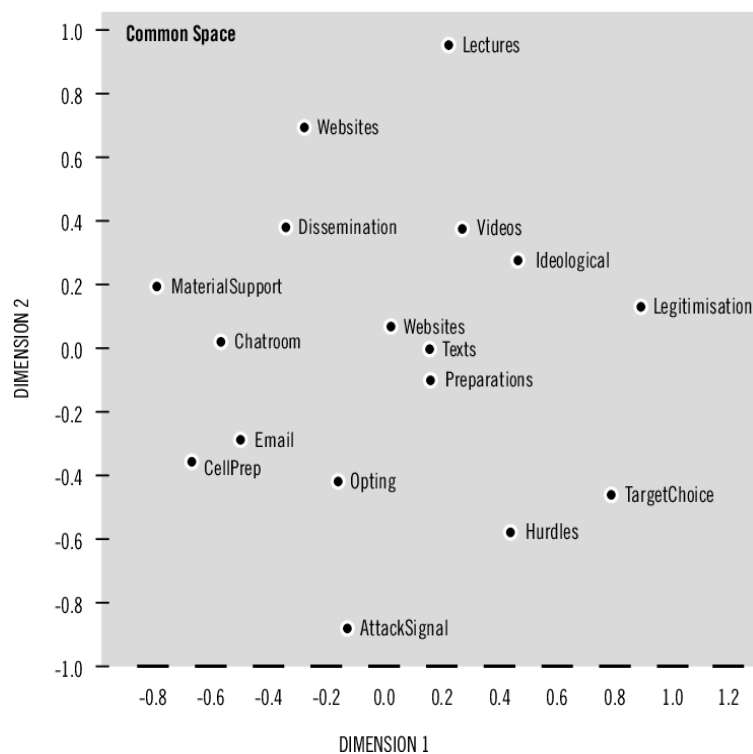
As well as being one of the biggest threats that is often related with new technologies. As an example, the importance of digital communications in the recruitment processes of Islamic extremist groups was anticipated by Hiebert in a keynote speech at Bledcom 2004, in which he spoke of “landmines ahead” in the convergence of new technologies, public relations and democracy, with fast internet used to “revolutionize the recruiting of angry and disaffected audiences.” (Public relations review, 2017).

This field has been particularly growing on the academia for the last years and many analysis have been made, regarding two main aspects, the use of different digital figures in order to catch new members on these organizations, and how these interactions have finally lead to a terrorist attack.

On Figure 1 we can see how this analysis can be divided in two

dimensions. This dimension recreates the Jaccard coefficient, which represents the level of association between two variables, for each pair-wise set of variables. The closer two variables appear within the matrix, the higher their co-occurrence across observations. This matrix shows how the attack signals and the legitimisation of the attack rarely co-occurs. Nevertheless, we can see a clear reconnection between the offenders that opted to engage in violence and got prepared in virtual spaces for their attacks and that much of this was promoted by online ideological content (videos, lectures and texts).

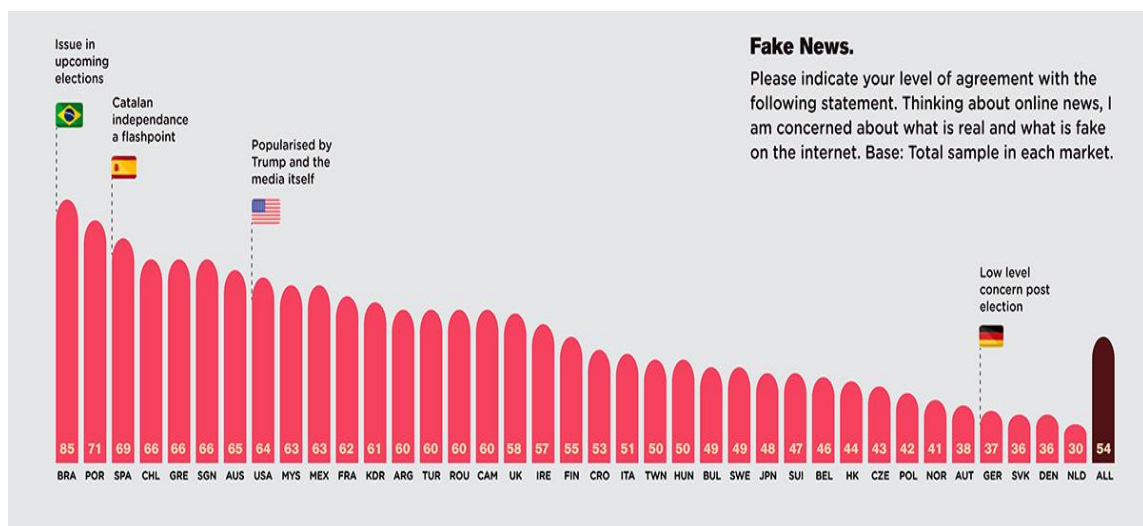
**Figure 1. Analysis of online behaviours of 17 terrorist organizations. (Gill, Corner, Thornton, & Conway, 2015)**



Therefore we can ensure that it exists a clear paper of new technologies on the process of attracting new members to terrorist organizations and providing the cults or ideologies that these organizations follow. Additionally this study shows how it is not easy to prevent concrete attacks following these spaces.

On a second category, one of the biggest crises that democratic systems have recently viewed has a strong relationship with the use of new technologies in the spread of fake news or testimonies. The assault on US capitol on January the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 had been fuelled by the former president Donald Trump's claim of election fraud. These narratives have been buoyed by a constant stream of emerging "evidence"—documents, testimonies, interviews—that is used to build and rebuild theories of what happened during the 2020 presidential election. Even when the underlying evidence is shown to be inauthentic or a theory is thoroughly disputed, a new claim or supposed piece of evidence has helped rebuild a theory or strengthen an enduring part of it (Aghekyan, 2022).

**Figure 2. Proportion of people who claim to be extremely concerned about what is real and what it is fake on the internet when it comes to news. (Peña, 2019)**



Fake news and testimonies have been rounding the European Union during the last decade, and have been able to create new communities of conspiracy theories followers and agnostics of our democratic freedom systems. Recent events such as the Ukrainian invasion or the COVID pandemic have fostered the spread of these communities.

New technologies have been key for the success of these media, causing the creation of fake news agencies (Russia Today, Sputnik), communities (Facebook

groups, blogs, etc.) or so called agencies (Internet Research Agency, Fifth Power). All of these items are based on a new communication method that is free, accessible and untraceable many times, additionally, they take part of our democratic systems and plead to freedom of speech and freedom of ideology to keep on with their strategy.

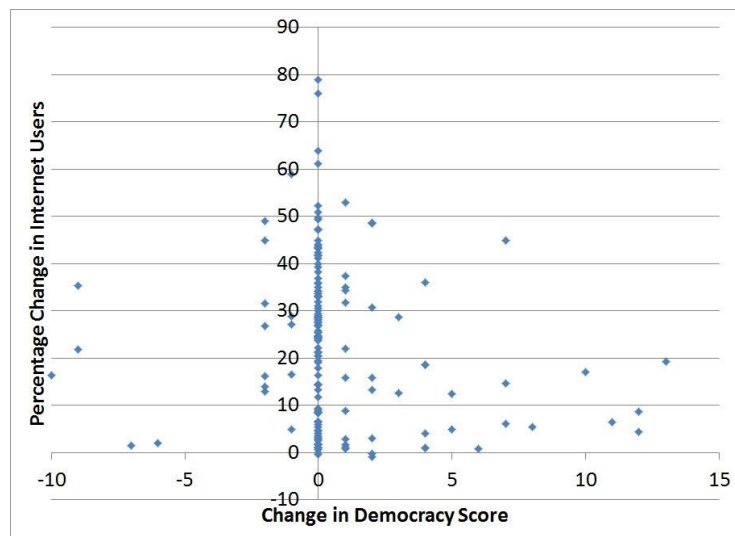
Finally, we can talk about the image washing of authoritarian regimes related to the use of new technologies.

Against the global thought that regimes can use the internet with the aim of controlling their population, no data for this idea has been shown in recent studies. Data shows that no

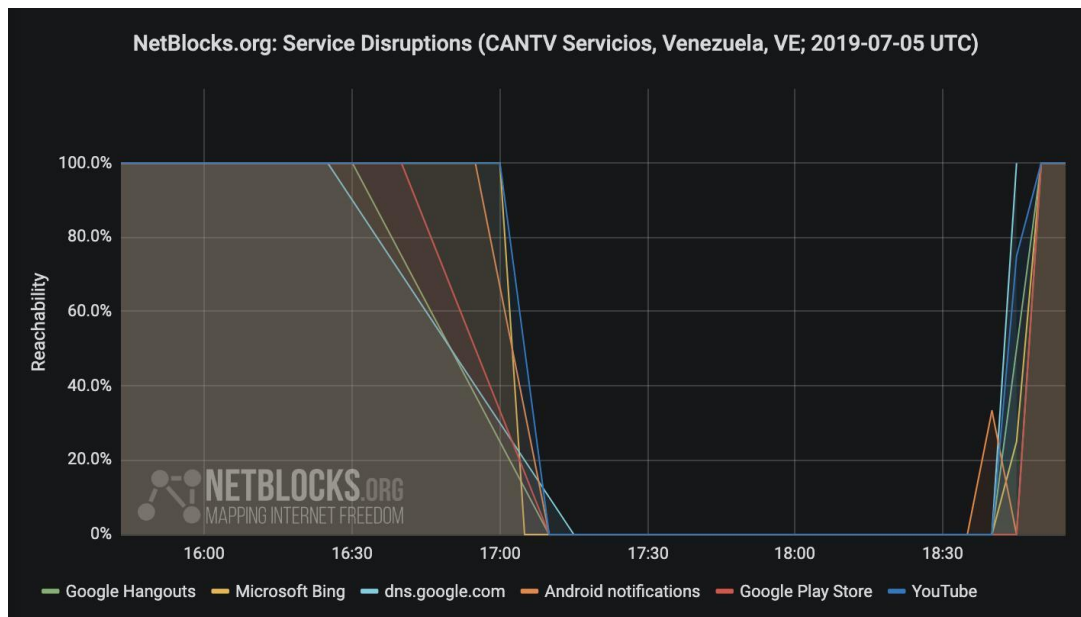
change is made in the score obtained in the Democratic Score related with the penetration of the internet on their population.

Nevertheless, authoritarian regimes do use new technologies for two main reasons in order to keep their power and legitimacy among their members, and also in the international scenario. On the one hand, censorship is to the order of the day in these regimes. As we can see on figure 4 Venezuela's regime cut off all communications when the opposition was broadcasting the discourse on the National Independence day, as we can observe in the following figure.

**Figure 3. Relation between internet users and change in Democracy Score. (Doctorow, 2013)**



**Figure 4. Internet connections on Venezuela's National day 2019. (Netblocks)**



Additionally, these regimes also use different services to wash their image on the international scenario. Two clear examples of this are the use of Tik-Tok account of Nayib Bukele in order to show his autocratic penal reform as something that offers bigger security and freedom in El Salvador, and the use of Russian twitter accounts to justify Ukraine's invasion as a anti-Nazi movement. The German Marshall Fund of the United States has noticed how authoritarian regimes are competing to create and control emerging technology to gain the upper hand in the global competition while democracies have the potential to harness emerging technology to strengthen democratic institutions and freedom (German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2022).

Therefore, many authors ensure that in recent decades, dictatorships based on mass repression have largely given way to a new model based on the manipulation of information. Instead of terrorizing citizens into submission, "informational autocrats" artificially boost their popularity by convincing the public they are competent. To do so, they use propaganda and silence informed members of the elite by co-optation or censorship (Guriev & Treisman, 2018).

Additionally to these scheme, we can add that some regimes have achieved to use repression with direct targeting of certain groups or individuals (based, for example, on the likelihood of them opposing the government). In these terms, digital technologies give regimes the power not only to react to online actions, but

also to carry out online tracking and to prevent any possible actions against their rule in the very preliminary phases of organising dissent (Glowacka, Youngs, Pinteá, & Wolosik, 2021). This objective might be inducted by different techniques such as targeted censorship, intimidation or cyber-attacks.

Summarizing, we can ensure that three of the biggest threats exposed by new technologies to our democratic systems can be categorized as security, fake news and authoritarianism. Though these techniques are based on new technologies, neither the essence of the techniques nor the objective they follow is a new threat to our democratic system.

Observing European history we can see how terrorist organizations such as IRA or ETA used codified communication systems to engage new people and organize their attacks, and used cultural media in order to spread their messages.

Also, regarding the spread of fake testimonies and trigger internal revolutions, we can observe Goering's propaganda in the Nazi Germany against the Jude population, or the use of cinema with the object of sustaining Spanish Franco's Regime.

Finally, censorship has been one of the main tools used along all the European autocracies in recent history among which we can mention different censorship systems such as the URSS Goskomizdat or Greek Military Junta during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Therefore, we can see how these strategies are not new for our continent, and that we have already been able to tackle them in recent history. Whereas rudimentary systems have been simpler to end with, new technologies demand bigger and more sophisticated answers always under the respect of the principle of "freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers" (article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights) and the "freedom and pluralism of the media" (Article 11 of the EU charter of Human Rights). Therefore, the new technologies provide democratic systems with new tools that represent an opportunity to take more concrete actions and with a bigger accuracy on the security area.

The main solution to this security aspect would be the improvement of the European Union's capacity to detect and analyse disinformation. With that object in mind, Strategic Communication Groups should be created for each of the topics

that are relevant on this area (Islamic terrorism, Russia, China, etc.). These different groups should be inter alia and operate under the European External Action Service and the different Member State's diplomatic corpuses.

Working on with the existing tools, the Rapid Alert System implemented in the European Union has not shown to be really efficient. More cooperation is necessary on this System and the Member State systems, and more capability in order to take concrete actions such as judiciary investigations, preventive closes or concrete re-information of a topic. On this matter, a more federal structure of the European Union could enable the Strategic Communication Groups and the Rapid Alert System's Corpus to cooperate and to avoid some duplicities among member states agencies.

All this analysis brings us to a major conclusion that will lead to a new point. Security issues brought by new technologies do have a strong relation with the new communication methods; therefore, the next point to analyse will be the communication.

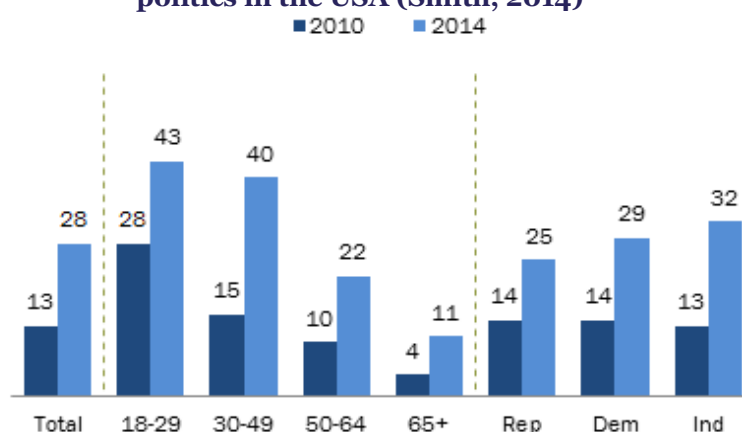
## Communication

Communication systems have become an essential part of democratic systems during the last decade. These systems have been claimed to change since the 2009 Barack Obama's presidential campaign and the use of social media on it.

These massive use and increase on the owners of smartphones represents a big opportunity for democratic systems.

It has not been so easy to interact with citizens around the European Union and to spread political information among them.

**Figure 5. % of registered voters who use their cell phone to keep up with news and related election or politics in the USA (Smith, 2014)**



Related to this idea of massive use of political campaigning and information, new campaigning law should be adopted. As public debates, campaigning system, propaganda etc. are regulated use of social media on the electoral campaigns and the use of messages, ads or whatever that can be sent to any voter should be regulated under European law.

One of the second fields to analyse on communication has to do with the influence that online communities can create among their members. Community relations and corporate social responsibility examples in India revealed two kinds of actors on new social communication tools. On the one hand, organizational activists, they acknowledged the existence of diverse voices in local communities, interjected these voices into management discourse, situated decision-making in local contexts, identified tensions in the relationship between the corporation and its publics, and negotiated new meanings through dissensus. Paradoxically, as organizational agents, they used these participatory, open processes of dialogic communication to shape public opinion in favour of the organization, feeding modern organizations' proclivity for consensus. (Public Relations Review, 2013).

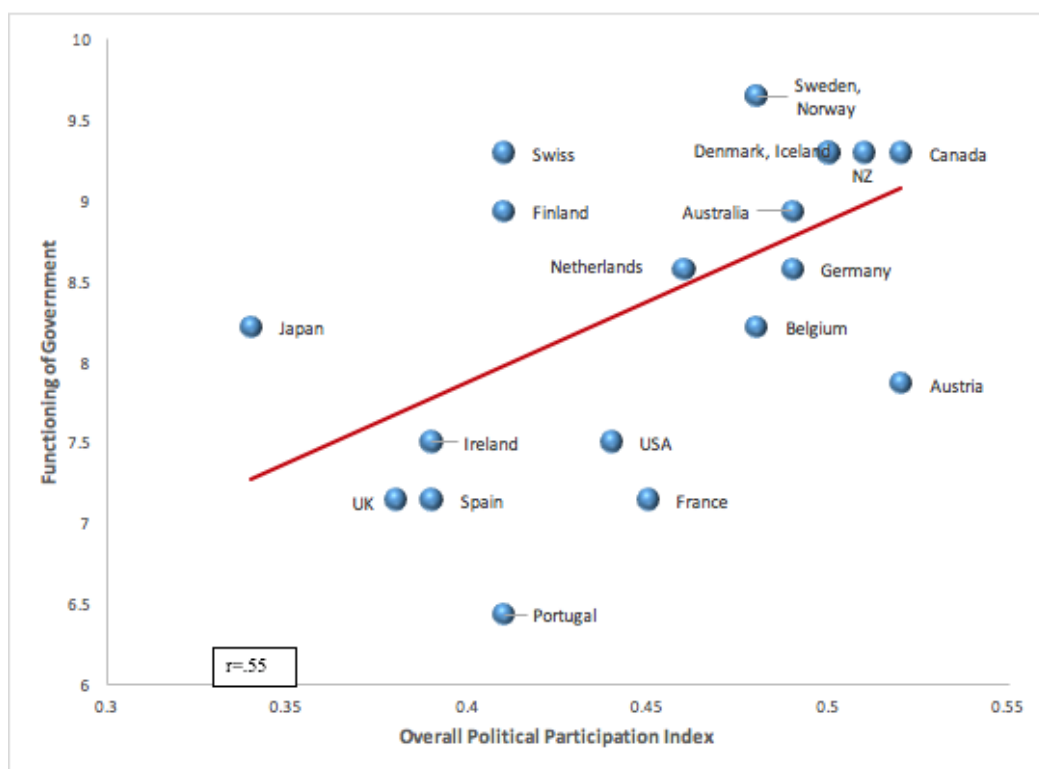
Therefore, this is another area among which regulation is needed. It does not make any sense that regulation exists for primary systems and for internal electoral processes of organizations such as union workers, political parties' and non-governmental organizations (NGO).

This regulation should follow some of the principles that had led us to the success of democratic systems, and should be used with the objective of fostering them. An appropriate regulation could ensure a bigger transparency and a fact check system that could ensure that the data used by the different candidates is real.

## Democratic participation

The last of the opportunities that new technologies represent to democracy is the participation mechanisms that they offer. First of all, Figure 6 shows a clear relation between democratic participation and the quality of a functioning government.

**Figure 6. Relation between democratic participation and functioning of government from the Economist Intelligence Unit. (Dalton, 2017)**

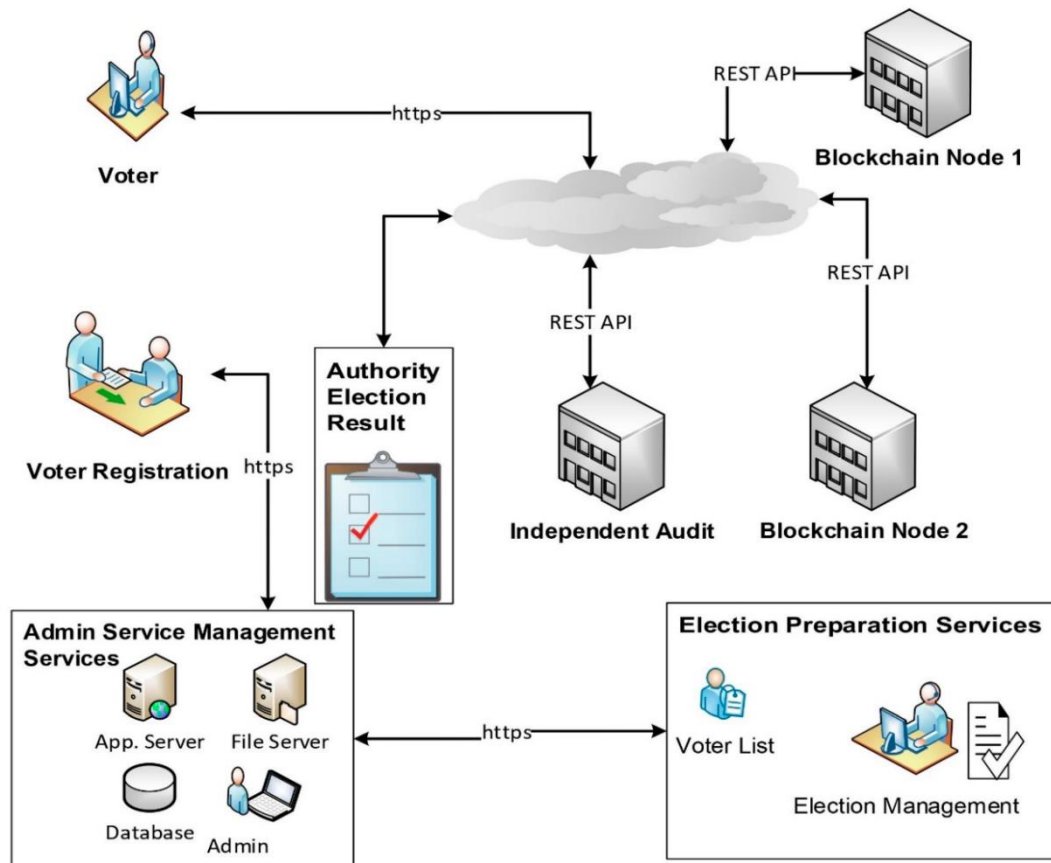


The chances offered by these new technologies can be easily divided into two different groups. On the one hand, electoral processes, and on the other hand, pure democratic participation.

Regarding electoral processes, block-chain technology has brought a revolution. End-to-end verifiable voting software is 100% secure and is based on a paradigm that could not give any result if those are manipulated. Therefore, this system could give citizens more trust in e-electoral processes. Once again, regulation is needed in this area and all rights and privacy need to be respected. Additionally, taking into account the need to celebrate European Elections at a concrete time frame, it is the

opinion of the author that a European e-election regulation could enable all of the member states to pull the trigger and transform to digital electoral processes.

**Figure 7. Blockchain voting system architectural overview. (Tas, 2020)**



The second area of this topic is the democratic participation at its purest form. This idea opens a whole new branch of possibilities to citizens so they can take part in the daily life of their administration. Initiatives of citizen participation, straight communication lines with institutions or political parties, agorae, etc. are many of the examples we can observe. As a matter of fact, the European Union used a web based agora in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

These spaces enable citizens to offer new ideas to their representatives and to feel heard among their institutions. Additionally, they can interact between them and cooperate, offering a civil social structure, such as the ones created to tackle COVID-19 pandemic.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK

All the previous analysis brings to a common need, which asks for a legal framework that can ensure the persistence of basic human rights and the protection of individuals, offering the advantages that new technologies bring to us at the same time.

One of the biggest legal aspects that need to be regulated is the creation of e-rights. Some of the basic rights such as intimacy, privacy, freedom and equality need to be adopted to the current virtual communities. Also the right to disappear and erase all of your data from the internet is essential for this system to work. These rights should be included in the European Union's rights *carta* and obtain a compulsory status for all of the technologies that interfere within the life of European citizens.

Another relevant change that could enable this transition is the consideration of "essential" to some of the new technologies sectors. Traditionally Member State's constitutions have considered sectors such as energy, water or finance strategic or essential and have reserved the chance to enforce some regulation over them when needed. Taking into account the relevance that new technologies have nowadays, and how they can influence our democratic systems the European Union needs to have the tools to influence and take action when needed over these areas.

E-campaign law is also something that the European Union needs to regulate. Trying to avoid external influences, and regulating the way on which each candidate can communicate, with common spaces and avoiding inequality is necessary. This aspect is already regulated in traditional campaigns, where mass media needs to offer proper information, equal to their representation and with some common criteria. Not regulating these aspects, could adulterate any campaign and could foster risky fraud claims in any electoral process.

Finally, electoral laws of the member states will need to adapt to new voting methods, and the European Union cannot allow to use such different processes in each of the Member States, even more, if transnational lists get approved by the next European elections, it would make no sense to use different voting methods for the same lists. Therefore, a common electoral law needs to be passed, and this law should already establish an e-voting system.

## CONCLUSION

The main conclusion of the paper is that new technologies represent a chance for democratic states to win the battle that we are currently suffering with authoritarian regimes.

Even if the threats exposed by new technologies are big, they open a new space for democracies to expand and to get engagement with their citizens. The study of history shows how all of the big technological changes have supposed a new threat to the democratic system, but if managed, they occur to expand this system and amplify the guarantees they offer.

All of these technologies grow fast and are still incipient, but we need to regulate them properly so they can grow in accordance with our values. Therefore, the European Union needs to create a complete plan regarding all of the aspects of new technologies that affect democracy and basic rights, and regulate them so they can just make these values expand.

Finally, and with the current international scenario, we need to take count of the relevance of these technologies. At the very beginning the battle between China and the USA for the 5G technology seemed far away from the European Union, but COVID-19 and Ukraine's invasion have created a shortage of microchips, a spread of fake news and constant cyberattacks, trying to hurt our democratic system. Therefore, the European Union needs to treat new technologies and everything around them as a strategic sector and a sector that can influence the future existence and persistence of the EU.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has analysed different policy recommendations that can be summarized in the following ideas.

First, European level regulation is compulsory so all of the member states of the European Union can get the same guarantees and protection in front of the challenges that new technologies bring.

Second, this regulation needs to be adopted listening to the civil demands and mobilizing the private sector. This sector needs to be constantly monitored by the European Commission (EC) and has to be forced to adopt the Code of Practice on disinformation. For this monitoring the creation of a Public-private agency could amplify the cooperation, with representatives of the EC and form the main private new technology companies.

At an educational level the European Union should elaborate a campaign raising awareness on disinformation, showing its negative effects and promoting the relevance of well-informed independent media.

Additionally, the European Union needs to act unified in this area and to show itself as a strategic actor in the geopolitical scenario. Therefore, the high representative of the European Union should be the one responsible for representing its interest at international forums.

Finally, the European Union should act as a venture investor for these companies. New technologies grow fast and experts point out that we are just seeing the tip of the iceberg. New sectors like quantum computation, 6G, or Blockchain will offer infinite opportunities. Therefore, the European Union and its Member States should invest on this sector and take part of the new companies that may become leading actors tomorrow.

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