

## Democracy has to be about more than just casting a vote

Enhancing the electorate could be one way of improving the system to address the flaws in western democratic politics

*Letters*

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A woman holds her voting sticker in her hand after casting her ballot in the 2016 US presidential election. Photograph: Ty Wright/Getty Images

David Runciman (Should we put the experts in charge?, *The long read*, 1 May) is right to say that our democracy is fatally flawed and that handing over to experts is a bad idea. However, we do have to come up with an answer.

What is the democratic alternative to the current failed elitism or seductive populism? Democracy simply must put its own house in order, shed the democratic model built 100 years ago and consciously design an upgraded system appropriate for the next 100 years. Our crude definition of democracy as just voting denies us the sophistication necessary to run modern society. Everything is reduced to a yes or no, black or white reaction.

James S Fishkin has identified 108 examples internationally of deliberative democracy, where the soundbite and headline have been banished by establishing careful, sustained and informed consideration of issues by citizens' institutions established for that specific purpose, with the outcome of such patient and self-educated discussion often leading to legislative and social change.

From energy policy in Texas to pension provision in Japan and democratic renewal in Canada, assorted varieties of citizen engagement that complement not threaten representative democracy are enjoying success. It is in this development of an advanced adult democratic model - tooling up, not dumbing down - that our antidote to the threats of complacency, entitlement and populism lies.

**Graham Allen**

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