

**The Advisory Voting Initiative**  
***A Vote, a Voice and the Power of Participation***  
[www.AdvisoryVote.us](http://www.AdvisoryVote.us)

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**2022 Summer Internship**  
*Position Description*

**Advancing Digital Democracy in Eastern Europe:**  
***Participatory Democracy vs. Autocratic Authoritarianism***

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**The Advisory Voting Initiative** is a highly innovative, paradigm-shifting, internet technology enabled approach to advance voter engagement and participatory democracy at both mass-scale and the local level. The accompanying [Executive Summary](#) for this early-stage, nonprofit start-up describes how, if we are willing to *think innovatively*, we can broaden our conception of voting to include *voting on issues continuously*, not just for candidates every two years. The Advisory Voting Initiative proposes a way forward to align 21<sup>st</sup> century internet technology with the originating principles of democracy in America: self-governance, political equality and representative government.

**Digital Democracy:** Although there have been many noble attempts in the United States to improve government responsiveness and citizen engagement by utilizing internet technology – i.e., GovTech, e-government, etc. – the reality is the U.S. lags far behind a number of countries around the world, such as Estonia and Taiwan, in the effective deployment of digital democracy (ironic since the Internet was invented by our government!).

In any case, focus thus far has been on government efficiency; but the real opportunity for digital democracy lies in mass-scale participation.

**Participatory Democracy vs. Authoritarianism:** Putin’s invasion of Ukraine has galvanized the West finally to take seriously the threat authoritarianism poses to democracy. Unprecedented economic sanctions have been applied to stop the war in the short-term. But it is little recognized that the greatest (potential) advantage democratic countries have over authoritarian regimes is to become *an exemplar of democracy* – ideally at the level of “One Person, One Vote.” Leadership by example, so that populations around the world, especially in authoritarian countries, will look and see -- and then say: *We’ll have what they’re having!*<sup>1</sup>

**A New Line of Defense in Eastern Europe:** In the aftermath (hopefully soon) of the war in Ukraine, advancing *democracy by example* would be most powerful coming from former USSR, Eastern European countries. Many of these countries already have taken significant strides forward with digital democracy. What more can be done? We believe the introduction of Advisory Voting can be a next step.

**A Summer Internship:** This internship will be especially valuable for students interested in innovating democracy; global affairs/Eastern Europe and Russia; national security and neutralizing disinformation; internet technology and civic media; and social entrepreneurship. The internship is remote, full-time and unpaid. Interns will work closely with Lupton Abshire, co-founder of the Advisory Voting Initiative, via Zoom. Ideally, the internship will engage a small team of students from several universities. The internship will be arranged as a collaborative, learning community. Lupton will provide guidance and resources at every step of the internship. At the same time, interns will be encouraged to take initiative and contribute creative leadership.

**Areas of Responsibility:**

**1) Qualitative Research:** What are the greatest impediments and threats to democracy currently? Is the failing health of a democracy a national security concern? In both Europe and the U.S., what is the current state of digital democracy in terms of capabilities, security, usage, and levels of trust? Starting with Estonia, how advanced is the deployment of e-government and digital democracy in Eastern European countries? Identify organizations, experts and policy literature to address these questions. Produce a weekly summary document with findings.

**2) Interviews:** Develop an interview protocol to engage digital democracy advocates, policy experts and government officials. Identify and reach out to potential interviewees, inviting them to participate in short 20-25 minute interview via Zoom or phone – but start with individuals and organizations who are related to the Advisory Voting Initiative, such as [Garry Kasparov](#) and the [Renew Democracy Initiative](#). (Lupton can arrange these interviews for you.) Also, reach out to professors in related fields at your university for interviews. Ultimately, the internship would include interviews with individuals from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia – and Russia (e.g., journalists, who may be in exile).

**3) Ascertain Receptivity to Advisory Voting:** The interview process will include an opportunity to introduce the idea of Advisory Voting, with the objective of ascertaining interviewee’s receptivity, and if they think Advisory Voting would accelerate citizen participation in their country’s current digital democracy. The interview also will raise the question of the effect of exemplifying fact-based, democratic participation at mass-scale as a deterrent to autocratic authoritarianism in Russia.

**4) Policy Recommendations:** The internship will culminate with interns producing a policy document. This will include, but not be limited to:

- > Strategies for advancing digital democracy in Eastern European countries.
- > Establishing trust with citizens, politicians and government officials.
- > Promoting fact-based, civic media and journalism; specifically, to encourage citizen engagement.
- > How to effectively communicate benefits of Eastern European participatory, digital democracy to Russians.

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For more information, please contact [Lupton Abshire](#), Advisory Voting Initiative co-founder: [lupton.abshire@gmail.com](mailto:lupton.abshire@gmail.com)

### **Preliminary Resources**

[“Digital Democracy,” Internet Policy Review, 12/20/21](#)

[“Garry Kasparov on the Need to Improve our Politics with Technology,” The Economist, 10/12/20](#)

[“How Estonia Built a Digital First Government,” PBS NewsHour](#)

[“Election Technology and Trust,” \(excerpt\) Lord Mark Malloch-Brown speaks at Atlantic Council, 2016](#)

### **Background Reading**

[Virtual Country: Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Democracy](#) by [Richard Lang](#) (founder of the Advisory Voting Initiative)

[Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges](#) by C. Otto Scharmer

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. “Make no mistake, this is **a war on** Ukraine’s **democracy** and has nothing to do with Russian fears of it one day joining NATO. For Putin, **the example** of a free, independent Ukraine on Russia’s border is **too inspiring a model for his own people who might eventually demand something similar at home**, and that would mean his ouster.” [emphasis added] --Kathryn Stoner, Director, Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law, Stanford University <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/02/25/putin-russia-ukraine-invasion-endgame-experts-00011652>.