The Metaverse: Gateway to Unanimous Consent and Panarchy?

It's official: The company that runs Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp has a new name, Meta Platforms, Inc. The company's focus, according to its introductory announcement, "will be to bring the metaverse to life and help people connect, find communities and grow businesses."

The metaverse is a decades-old concept. Neal Stephenson coined the term in his 1992 novel *Snow Crash*, but versions of it appear in much earlier speculative fiction. Think of it as virtual reality on steroids, a computer/Internet environment into which humanity could, and might, effectively move most of its social activities.

To some, this sounds utopian. Others (especially writers of fiction) treat it as at least potentially dystopian. Either way, it's coming, and the political possibilities are intriguing.

Throughout history, politics has enslaved, and found itself enslaved by, geography. Under feudalism, "borders" shifted with the claims of hereditary lords. These days, state "sovereignty" shifts borders through negotiation or war. Either way, those who don't dispose of hereditary, electoral, or militarily enforced lordships are considered bound to whichever political paradigm prevails within the geographical borders surrounding their homes.

For example, if one lives in Florida's 3rd US House District (as I do), one is "represented" in Congress by US Representative Kat Cammack (R-FL), even though she received votes from only 29.3% of the district's population, and even though 42.8% of those who bothered to vote preferred her Democratic opponent.

If our major social and commercial activities can be moved entirely online — and that's where we're headed, metaverse or not — there's no particular reason why our political activities should remain constrained by geography.

It's time to de-link representation in current institutions from physical location. I may have more in common with two friends who live a thousand miles from me, in opposite directions, than with the neighbors who live on either side of me. Why shouldn't I share a representative with the former rather than the latter?

Simply set a minimum representation number — for example, one million — and any candidate who gains the endorsement of that minimum goes to Congress, with a vote weighted by number of constituents (e.g. a US representative with two million supporters gets two votes).

One major advantage of electing representatives at large rather than by geographic district in this way is unanimous consent. Instead of the notional support of 29.3% of a district's population and 57.1% of its voters, each representative would enjoy the express support of 100% of his or her constituents.

It's also time to reconsider the institutions themselves. Amid much talk of a "national divorce" that lacks any clean geographic component (even the "bluest" states boast significant "red" populations and vice versa), any potential breakup of the United States would necessarily require localization and decentralization of power rather than trying to fit new wine into old borders.

The metaverse may ultimately prove itself a doorway to panarchy — competing governments chosen by, rather than imposed on, each person, without regard to geography. And from such a position, we might find our way to the end of political government entirely.