

THE PHYTODEMOCRACY INITIATIVE

An Interspecies Voting Platform To Survey The Political Perspectives Of Plants

By Jonathon Keats

<https://tumamoc.arizona.edu/people/jonathon-keats>

Humans make all the major decisions in the world today, but we're not very capable stewards, especially when it comes to deciding environmental policies that impact the whole planet. Adding insult to injury, we're but a small minority of the global population, and we're far less than one percent of the planetary biomass. In comparison, plants are ubiquitous, making up a full eighty percent of the biomass according to recent estimates. Moreover, plants support practically all human activity: The vast majority of the planetary energy budget derives from sunlight, and plants are the primary means by which sunlight is converted into energy used by humans metabolically and technologically. To top it all off, plants perform countless ecosystem services on humans' behalf.

Yet plants are completely disenfranchised, having no political clout. The Phytodemocracy Initiative is intended to change the global power dynamic by giving plants the vote. Balloting will be undertaken by scientifically measuring plants' stress as expressed by production of stress-induced phytohormones such as ethylene, and by systematically surveying phenological indicators of stress such as early flowering. Indicating dissatisfaction with the status quo, a rising stress level will count as a vote against incumbents and the policies they represent.

Since legal enfranchisement may require nothing less than a constitutional amendment, the Phytodemocracy Initiative will preemptively provide a way for plants to influence human legislators and voters by polling trees and bushes and making their opinions a matter of public record. The initiative will enlist a network of citizen-observers to make phenological observations of the plants in their communities. Phenological surveys will be taken on a regular basis, facilitating comparisons of stress level before and after the implementation of new legislation. Like Gallup or YouVote, the Phytodemocracy Initiative will interpret the results. Visualizations, animations, and commentary will inform voters about botanical wellbeing in their municipality and region, motivating them to support the interests of their wilderness at the ballot box by supporting the politicians whose views most closely align with the interests of the plants. Policy advice will also be provided directly to politicians, helping them to enact legislation likely to garner botanical support and endorsement by plants in future elections.

A real-world endeavor to recognize and communicate the political will of other species – which previously has gone unnoticed by humans – the Phytodemocracy Initiative will provide important data to ecologists and support public efforts to change the political system for the benefit of nature. The initiative will also serve as a philosophically-driven artistic proposition to provoke discourse about environmental policy, the rights of nature, and the future of democracy globally.