

Democranot

A Satirical Political Board Game

From concept to Kickstarter to sold product

Word count: 3843

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Background

Western democracies are experiencing a period of political turmoil. The Hansard Society's Audit of Political Engagement (2019) found that satisfaction with the UK's democratic system is at its lowest recorded level, with 72% of respondents believing it requires fundamental improvement. Sectarian politics — the exploitation of demographic divisions for electoral advantage — has become a defining feature of political discourse across the UK, United States, and wider Western world.

Democratot is a satirical political board game that transforms the mechanics of a Western democracy into competitive entertainment. It would either be independently published or published by a small startup business I would create, called Lysander Games, launched via Kickstarter. It targets a clearly identified gap in the board game market, valued at £10.8 billion and growing (Statista, 2024).

1.2 Elevator Pitch

Democratot puts you inside a broken democracy. Play as one of four competing political parties in the fictional state of Harondar, drawing policy cards to win voter support across contested territories. But beware the temptation of the Fringe. Every sectarian card you play moves the Radicalisation Track a step closer to a Democratic Crisis, a scenario where nobody wins. A strategy game for two to four players that is as much a political commentary as it is a board game.

1.3 Market Opportunity



Figure 1: Market Size — Total Available, Serviceable, and Target (Statista, 2024)

1.4 Keys to Success

- Build a pre-launch email list of 1,000+ subscribers before Kickstarter campaign opens
 - Demonstrate rigorously playtested, balanced mechanics
 - Attempt to secure two educational or civic organisation endorsements before launch
 - Commission a distinctive visual art style that signals satire without partisan alignment
 - Time launch to coincide with a major electoral cycle to maximise cultural resonance
 - Foster participation and placemaking via online/offline communities
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2. The Organisation

2.1 Mission and Vision

Vision: A world in which democratic literacy is a form of entertainment, and where the board game table encourages political thought in non-partisan environments

Mission: To design and publish satirical games that engage players with the mechanics and failures of democratic politics, building critical civic awareness through carefully designed competitive play.

2.2 Values

Civic Engagement Games can foster democratic literacy in ways traditional media cannot.	Meaningful Satire Commentary embedded in mechanics, not flavour text.
Accessibility Political satire should not require political expertise. Learnable in under 15 minutes.	Independence No partisan affiliation. The critique is of systemic dysfunction, not any specific ideology.

Figure 2: Organisational Values

2.3 Objectives

- Launch a Kickstarter campaign, achieving a minimum of £20,000 target within 30 days
- Establish Democranot as the defining title in satirical political games within two years of launch
- Secure educational licensing with at least three institutions within 18 months
- Release a minimum of one expansion pack within 24 months of launch
- Digital adaptation talks with a mobile/PC publisher within 36 months

2.4 Intellectual Property

The name 'Democranot', the logo, and all associated art will be registered as trademarks with the UK Intellectual Property Office before launch. Copyright protection applies automatically to all original creative works, card text, artwork, and rulebook from creation (UK IPO, 2024). Game mechanics are not protected by copyright under UK law; commercial protection therefore relies on the specificity of their execution and strong brand identity.

The fictional state of Harondar is deliberately non-specific geographically and culturally, enabling international market entry and protecting against defamation claims. Licensing agreements for educational editions, digital adaptations, and international editions will retain the studio as the original rights holder.

2.5 Audience and Stakeholder Analysis

Primary Audience: Hobby Gamers (Ages 18–35):

The hobby gaming community is the essential first market. Without credibility here, educational and mainstream crossover is unlikely. This community does not respond to conventional advertising; it operates through what Bourdieu (1986) would recognise as cultural capital. Credibility is generated by trusted voices within the community, not purchased from outside it. A recommendation from a reviewer like Shut Up & Sit Down or No Pun Included carries more commercial weight than any paid promotion, because it signals that the product has passed the community's own quality threshold.

Secondary Audience: Politically Engaged Adults (Ages 25–45):

Another important audience for Democranot would be people who engage with political satire across multiple formats like podcasts, journalism and panel shows. They are less likely to self-identify as hobby gamers but are receptive to a product framed as cultural commentary rather than a game. Reaching them requires presence in non-gaming media: a pitch to The Guardian's culture section or New Statesman positions Democranot as a civic object with entertainment value, rather than an entertainment object with civic credentials.

Tertiary Audience: Educational institutions:

Universities, sixth forms, and academic organisations represent a potentially valuable long-term audience. Institutional networking is slow, criteria-driven, and requires curriculum alignment evidence rather than community enthusiasm. The key stakeholders within this segment are not students, but educators and programme leaders, specifically those delivering A-Level Politics, Citizenship, or university-level democratic theory modules. An educational edition with an abbreviated ruleset and a teacher's guide addressing specific learning outcomes is a prerequisite for this segment.

Backers as Stakeholders:

Consistent with Jenkins' (2006) theory of convergence culture, Kickstarter backers can occupy two roles: they are both the product's first consumers and active participants. Early backers who contribute to playtesting and provide feedback develop a convergent relationship with the game that passive consumers do not. This participatory culture is commercially important, as it transforms users from audience members to authors, helping them take the game in the direction they would like to see.

3. Product Brief

3.1 Product Description and Market Gap

Democranot is a competitive strategy board game for two to four players, set in the fictional democracy of Harondar. Players act as competing political parties across a simulated four-year term of sixteen turns, playing policy cards to convert voter support across ten contested territories. Victory is determined under a First Past The Post system, a mechanical choice that embeds the game's underlying commentary within its own win condition.

The political satire games subgenre is underpopulated within the growing hobby market. Secret Hitler (2016) introduced political roles but used them as social deduction costumes rather than a meaningful commentary. Few existing published titles engage mechanically with electoral dynamics, party identity, or political radicalisation. Democranot fills this gap.

3.2 The Four Political Parties

Each party is asymmetric in design, and party identity is structurally reinforced through policy card bonuses that reward ideological consistency and penalise contradictory play.

POPULIST National Renewal Party	ESTABLISHMENT The Progressive Alliance	ENVIRONMENTAL The Green Warriors	LABOUR The Workers' Future
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Figure 4: Party Reference Cards

3.3 Territory and Demographic System

The electorate is divided into four demographic groups: the Heartland, Metro, Grafters, and Fringe, distributed across Harondar's territories. Each voter is represented by a base peg indicating which demographic they are part of, with a replaceable 'hat' on top that represents party affiliation. This two-component system allows demographic identity and party control to be read simultaneously at a glance throughout play.

The Fringe represents politically alienated voters who cannot be reached through mainstream policy play. Acquiring Fringe support requires Sectarian Policy cards, each of which advances the shared Radicalisation Track. This is the game's central satirical mechanic: the Fringe is always tempting and always dangerous to pursue. More Fringe pegs may be introduced through major events every 4 turns.

3.4 Core Mechanic: Policy Card Acquisition

Each turn, a player draws to a hand of five cards and plays one, declaring a target territory. Pegs converted are calculated using the following formula, with a hard cap of five pegs per turn, regardless of result:

$$\text{Pegs Gained} = \text{Base Value} + \text{Party Bonus} + \text{Demographic Bonus}$$

Figure 6: Peg Calculator

3.5 Demographic Support Matrix

Example policies

Green: High, Orange: Medium, Red: Low, Grey: None, (Fringe party is excluded as they only react to specific unlisted sectarian policies)

Policy Card	Heartland	Metro	Grafters
Closed Borders	Green	Red	Orange
Green New Deal	Orange	Green	Red
Wage Increase	Red	Orange	Green
Austerity Measures	Orange	Orange	Grey
Housing Crisis Bill	Orange	Green	Green
Dog Whistle	Orange	Grey	Red
Identity Politics	Green	Red	Red
Coalition Offer	Red	Green	Orange

Figure 7: Demographic Support Matrix

3.6 Policies That Cost You Voters

Several card categories carry negative voter consequences alongside gains, creating strategic trade-offs. For example, double-Edged policies gain from one demographic while losing from another. The Smear Campaign would remove three opponent pegs, but costs you one of your own.

3.7 The Radicalisation Track

The Radicalisation Track is a shared board element representing the health of Harondar's democracy. It advances each time a Sectarian Policy card is played, or a relevant Major Event occurs. At threshold ten, the Democratic Crisis ending triggers: all players lose immediately. This collective loss condition is the game's core satirical statement: unchecked sectarianism destroys democracy for everyone.

3.9 Playtesting and Mechanical Refinement

Board game mechanics must be extensively play-tested before commercial release; theoretical design alone cannot achieve balance. Play testing would include aspects like testing core mechanic balance, with critical focus on whether the Fringe is sufficiently tempting without being optimal: if avoiding Sectarian cards is consistently the rational strategy, the political commentary is lost and addressing party balance across all four asymmetric options and verifying that Major Events create meaningful disruption without overriding accumulated positions. External playtesting will be recruited through UK Games Expo, BoardGameGeek, and the University of Exeter games society. All findings will be documented as a public design diary.

4. Competition Analysis

Title	Founded	Description	Revenue/Sales	Type
Secret Hitler	2016	Social deduction, political roles. Hidden-role mechanic.	Kickstarter \$1.5M	Direct
Twilight Struggle	2005	Cold War strategy. High complexity.	~500,000 copies	Indirect
Bloc by Bloc	2016	Cooperative insurrection. Radical political theme.	Crowdfunded	Direct
Wingspan	2019	Environmental theme embedded in mechanics.	2M+ copies	Indirect
Democranot	2026	Satirical democratic dysfunction. FPTP mechanic.	TBD Kickstarter	

Figure 9: Competitive Landscape

4.1 Case Study 1 — Secret Hitler (Temkin et al., 2016)

Secret Hitler raised \$1.5 million on Kickstarter in 2016 and has since sold hundreds of thousands of copies globally, making it the most commercially significant comparison for Democranot. Its success confirms that a market exists for politically themed games. However, its design reveals a limitation: political content is entirely cosmetic. The hidden-role mechanic it uses would function identically with different labels. It generates demand for political games without providing political substance. Democranot would be a substantive answer to the question Secret Hitler posed: where Secret Hitler uses political identity as a costume, Democranot uses it as a mechanic.

4.2 Case Study 2 — Wingspan (Stonemaier Games, 2019)

Wingspan is the most commercially successful thematic board game of the past decade, with over two million copies sold. It is analytically relevant not as a political comparator but as a masterclass in embedding social commentary mechanically without alienating audiences, precisely the type of challenge Democranot must navigate. Wingspan's environmentalist message is never stated explicitly; it is expressed through the game's reward structure. Players absorb a values-laden perspective through play rather than exposition. This is the design philosophy Democranot directly adopts. The Radicalisation Track does not tell players that sectarian politics is dangerous; it makes it dangerous, through a shared loss condition experienced directly.

4.3 Case Study 3 — iCivics

iCivics is a US nonprofit founded by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, delivering free browser-based civic education games to over ten million students annually across more than 100,000 classrooms. It is the most scaled existing example of game-based democratic

education, and it helps back up the claim that players can develop genuine civic literacy through mechanics rather than direct instruction, consistent with Jenkins' (2006) argument that participatory culture produces deeper investment than passive consumption.

iCivics reveals the opportunity DemocraNot has through its own limitations. Its products are browser-based, free, and designed for supervised classroom delivery. They are civic education tools that happen to use game mechanics, rather than games that happen to carry civic value. As a result, iCivics has no presence in hobby retail and no reach into the adult consumer market.

This produces two strategic conclusions. First, iCivics confirms that institutional demand for game-based civic education is real, and the educational licensing revenue stream DemocraNot projects is feasible. Second, it identifies a genuine market gap: no existing title occupies both the hobby consumer market and the educational sector simultaneously. Where Secret Hitler demonstrated that political games can sell well, and iCivics demonstrated that game-based civic education works, DemocraNot is designed to be the product that does both at once.

5. SWOT Analysis

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political commentary structural, not cosmetic• Asymmetric party design drives replayability• Topical subject matter with broad cultural resonance• Dual audience: hobby gamers and civic institutions• Expansion-ready long-term revenue	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No established brand or publisher• Risk of perceived partisan bias• Tone balance between satire and accessibility requires iteration• Balance dependent on extensive playtesting
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Board game market growing annually (Statista, 2024)• Political satire subgenre underpopulated• Kickstarter proven for indie games• Educational licensing and digital adaptation revenue streams	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political climate may attract reputational controversy• Larger publishers could imitate post-launch• Niche ceiling if marketing fails to reach mainstream hobby market• Iterative playtesting costs if balance issues emerge

Figure 10: SWOT Analysis

5.1 Strategic Implications

The most significant interaction in the SWOT matrix is between the product's main strength, mechanically embedded political commentary, and its main vulnerability, risk of perceived partisan bias. The mitigation is design-level: the fictional state of Harondar, four archetypal parties rather than real-world ones, and a structural critique of democratic dysfunction in general rather than any specific political position. Marketing must reinforce this non-partisan message consistently. The current political climate creates a potential time-sensitive commercial opportunity. The development timeline is oriented toward UK and US electoral cycles where possible, maximising cultural resonance when democratic dysfunction is a live public conversation.

6. Policy and Place-Based Considerations

6.1 Geography, Community, and Digital Space

Democranot is developed in the UK and will launch into the UK and North American hobby games markets. The fictional state of Harondar references Westminster-style parliamentary democracy while remaining non-specific, allowing international market entry without localisation of core content. The UK board games community is centred around conventions like: UK Games Expo (Birmingham), Airecon (Harrogate), and Dragonmeet (London). These are the primary physical spaces for showcase, press engagement, and community building.

The long-term commercial model integrates physical and digital channels. In its initial phase, digital presence consists of a campaign website, social media, and potentially a simple companion app. In its secondary phase (Year 3+), a full digital adaptation with asynchronous multiplayer and daily real-headline event cards represents the product's highest-value opportunity, and a version of the game impossible in a static physical product.

6.2 Cultural Considerations

Market	Cultural Implications	Commercial Implications
United Kingdom	F2P, Westminster dysfunction, and post-Brexit fragmentation are immediately legible. Fringe mechanic resonates with contemporary UK political polarisation.	Primary market. Potential A-level Politics and Citizenship curriculum alignment for educational licensing.
United States	F2P mechanics translate; demographic archetypes require recontextualisation.	Strong secondary market. Potential US Edition with adapted party archetypes and event deck.
Germany/Europe	PR systems mean F2P requires contextual framing. However, rise of far-right populism provides cultural resonance across the continent.	Educational licensing via European civic programmes. Coalition mechanic more culturally familiar.
Global South	Democratic fragility is a reality for many. Risk of trivialisation.	Not a primary market initially. NGO and academic partnerships more appropriate in this area

Figure 11: Cultural Implications by Market

6.3 Heritage and Environment

The board game medium carries cultural heritage: Lizzie Magie's The Landlord's Game (1903) was explicitly designed as a critique of land monopolism, but its satirical argument was lost when Parker Brothers commercialised it as Monopoly (Pilon, 2015). Democranot's design addresses this precedent directly by ensuring the political argument cannot be as easily removed, being embedded in the loss condition itself. Production will prioritise FSC-certified card, water-based inks, and minimal packaging waste, consistent with the sustainability of leading independent publishers, including Stonemaier Games and Osprey Games.

7. Timeframe

7.1 Development Pipeline

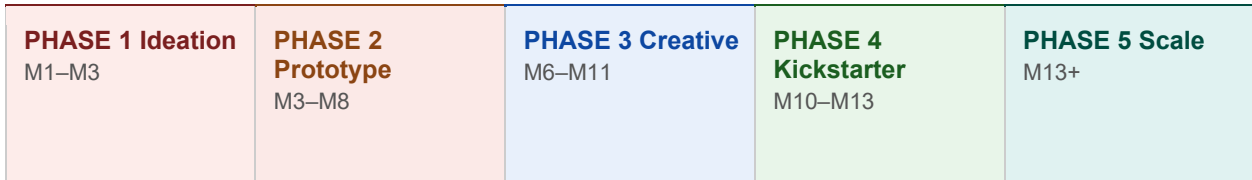


Figure 12: Five-Phase Development Pipeline

7.2 Milestone Gantt Chart

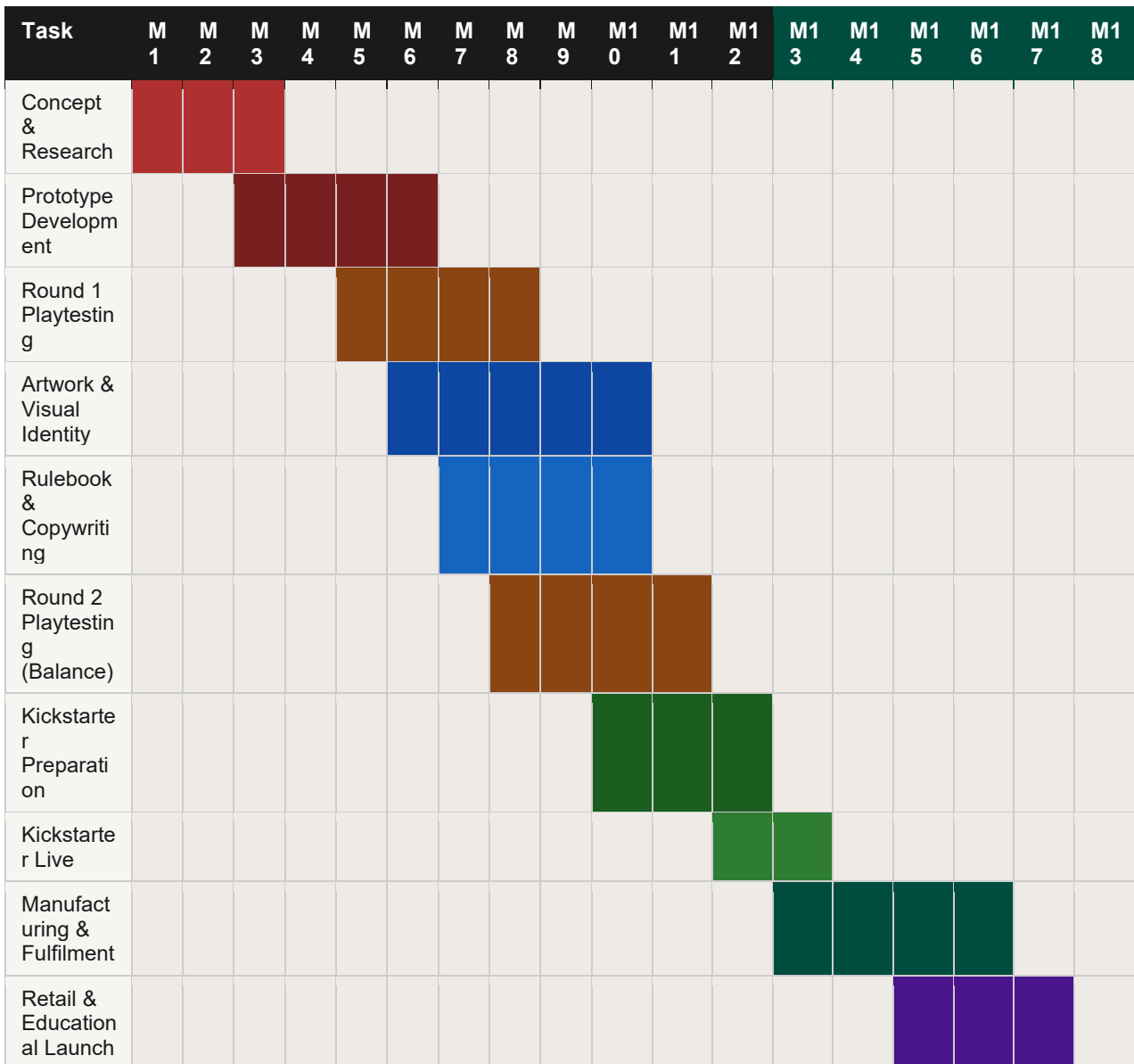




Figure 13: 18-Month Development Gantt Chart

7.3 Key Milestones

The 18-month timeline runs from concept finalisation to retail and educational distribution, modelled on comparable independent board game launches including Wingspan (approximately 18 months, prototype to Kickstarter) and Root (approximately 16 months). The Kickstarter campaign in Months 11–13 is the main commercial event. Two playtesting rounds are built in explicitly — Round 1 (Months 5–8) for core mechanic checking, Round 2 (Months 8–11) for party balance and event deck checking, because credible playtesting is among the most persuasive content a board game Kickstarter campaign can present. Artwork commission begins in Month 5, and Kickstarter preparation in Month 9 (before mechanical lock) to maximise production time for the campaign itself.

8. Financial Considerations

The following data is sourced from comparable board game launches:

8.1 Funding Streams and Cost Structure

Kickstarter (Year 0): Target of £20,000 based on a campaign goal to meet manufacturing costs for an initial production run of 500–800 units at £8–£12 per unit (£4,000–£9,600), artwork commission (£3,000–£5,000), rulebook design (£500–£800), and shipping (£3,000–£4,500). This target is conservative relative to comparable campaigns: Secret Hitler raised \$1.5 million, though that was an established design team with an existing audience. A £20,000 target is achievable with a pre-launch email list of 1,000+ subscribers.

Retail Distribution (Years 1–3): assuming unit sales of approximately 375 (Year 1), 750 (Year 2), and 1,125 (Year 3) at RRP £32 with a 40% profit margin (£12.80 per unit), distributed through independent hobby retail and direct online channels. Year 1 volume is modest and assumes post-Kickstarter basic growth rather than a major retail partnership, which would require a distributor.

Educational Licensing (Years 1–3): Year 1 assumes two to three pilot institutional agreements at approximately £1,500–£2,000 per licence. Year 2 and Year 3 projections assume licence uptake scales with positive outcomes from previous partnerships, reaching eight to twelve active agreements by Year 3.

Expansion Pack and Digital Licensing: Expansion revenue from Year 2 assumes a single release at RRP £18 with margins consistent with the base game. Digital licensing in Year 3 is not certain and is based on how successful the base game performs; the figure of £15,000 represents a conservative licensing agreement from a mobile or PC publisher rather than royalty income.

9. Content Marketing and Brand Strategy

9.1 Brand Identity

Democranot's brand proposition is political propaganda aesthetics deployed in the service of political satire. The visual identity draws from the 20th-century political poster tradition: boldness, stark contrast, declarative text. Tone of voice is dry, intelligent, and politically self-aware without requiring expertise. Reference points include art from Disco Elysium and the Fallout games. The brand should feel designed by people who find democratic dysfunction simultaneously outrageous and darkly comic.

9.2 Marketing Channels and Pre-Launch Strategy

Board game marketing operates almost entirely through community channels. The key pre-launch target is an email list of 1,000+ opted-in subscribers before the campaign opens. This provides the launch-day audience required to achieve early funding momentum and trigger visibility on the platform.

The launch strategy is designed around the accumulation of social and cultural capital within the hobby gaming community before any commercial transaction takes place (Bourdieu, 1986). In the board game market, credibility is generated by peers rather than advertisers; it is built through convention presence, trusted review partnerships, and transparent community engagement. The public design diary and open playtesting model serve this function directly, establishing Democranot as a product worthy of the community's attention before the Kickstarter campaign opens.

- BoardGameGeek: Project page from Month 3, updated throughout development, with early preview content three months before campaign launch
- Review partnerships: Preview copies to creators like No Pun Included, Shut Up & Sit Down, and The Dice Tower network
- Political and civic media: potential pitches to The Guardian and The New Statesman framing Democranot as a civic education product rather than just a game

9.3 Future Expansions and Economic Longevity

Democranot has been designed with an expansion-ready architecture from the beginning. New demographic groups, territory types, party archetypes, and event decks can be introduced without redesigning the base system. Depending on the political climate at the time, they could also be designed to resonate with global affairs.

Product	Timeline	Description
Expansion 1	Year 2	Harondar Divided: two new demographics, new policy cards focusing on immigration and wealth inequality.
Expansion 2	Year 2–3	The Media Cycle: Media Influence mechanic, news event cards

Digital Port	Year 3–4	Mobile/PC adaptation licensed to digital publisher. Asynchronous multiplayer, daily real-headline event cards.
Educational Ed.	Year 2+	Classroom edition with abbreviated ruleset, teacher guide, and A-level Politics curriculum alignment.

Figure 15: Expansion and Adaptation Roadmap

The digital adaptation is the most significant long-term commercial opportunity. Similar titles demonstrate this: Wingspan Digital achieved over 500,000 Steam sales within 18 months of launch. Democranot's satirical premise is particularly well-suited to digital adaptation because its most powerful theoretical feature is event cards drawn from real political headlines. The product also possesses an unusual commercial advantage: it becomes more culturally relevant at predictable intervals, as major democratic elections create sustained periods of heightened public engagement with the game's subject matter.

10. Conclusion

Democranot is proposed as a commercially viable, culturally unique, and intellectually substantive board game that addresses a clearly identified gap in a growing market. Its core design innovation: embedding political commentary in mechanics rather than applying it as a theme, distinguishes it from all existing comparators and provides the foundation for a long-term creative enterprise.

The game arrives at the right cultural moment. Democratic institutions across Western democracies are under the same sectarian pressures that Democranot places at the centre of its mechanics. The product does not simply comment on this; it delivers a playable and entertaining commentary about it.

The impact of Democranot is intended to reach across three dimensions. Commercially, success will be measured not only by Kickstarter performance and licensing agreements, but by whether this independent debut title can establish a new subgenre within hobby retail, the benchmark being sustained sales beyond the campaign window. In civic terms, impact means something more specific than institutional partnerships: it means documented evidence that players demonstrate measurably improved understanding of electoral mechanics and democratic dysfunction after play, the standard iCivics has established in the educational gaming space and that Democranot's educational edition would be designed to meet. Culturally, the most meaningful measure is whether the satirical argument survives commercial success intact, whether the Radicalisation Track remains the game's central mechanic, avoiding the fate of Lizzie Magie's *Landlord's Game*, whose political argument was stripped out entirely (Pilon, 2015).

Harondar is going to the polls. The question is whether its democracy will survive the campaign.

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