


**"Sortition is natural to
democracy, as elections
are to aristocracy"**

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Sortition

sor-ti-tion /sôr'tiSHən/ 

Noun: The action of selecting or determining something by the casting or drawing of lots.

Synonyms: toss-up - draw - ballot

More info » [Wikipedia](#) - [Dictionary.com](#) - [Answers.com](#) - [Merriam-Webster](#)

Sortition

Proposal: select one legislative chamber (Parliament, Congress) using a lottery among all citizens

Generate a parliament that mirrors the population along any conceivable axis:

- Gender
- Wealth and income
- Education
- Race and ethnicity
- Sexual orientation
- Ideology
- Religion
- Age
- Place of residence
- Health
- Family size
- And many, many more

Sortition

Democracy in small groups:

In a small group, where all-to-all communication is possible, the way to generate policy that is most beneficial to the group is to allow each person access to all relevant information, have an open discussion in which every person can put any item on the agenda, and finally to decide based on a majority vote.

Sortition

Democracy in large groups:


In a large group, where all-to-all communication is impossible, the way to generate policy that is most beneficial to the group is to select a small subset whose world-view and interests match those of the large group, and let the subset set policy in accordance with small-group democracy.

Sortition uses the law of large numbers to assure that the subset's world-view and interests match those of the population.







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1. Athens - Elections and sortition



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sortition

 Help us expand this topic. 

sortition, election by lot, a method of choosing public officials in some ancient Greek city-states. It was used especially in the [Athenian](#) democracy, from which most information about the practice is derived. With few exceptions, all magistrates were chosen by lot, beginning with the archons in 487–486 BC; likewise the Boule (council) of 500 and the juries of the law courts were chosen by lot. The practice of sortition obviated electoral races and provided for the regular turnover of officeholders. The operations of government were thus not in the hands of experts, but, through the system of sortition, the Athenian democracy provided at least some practical political education for its citizens.

The rationale of sortition was the equality of all citizens. Only those who had presented themselves as candidates were chosen by lot to fill public offices. Military officers (including the 10 *stratēgoi*) and some financial officials were selected by voting rather than by sortition. But for the most part executive functions were broken down into small tasks, of which each was entrusted to an annual board of 10 members chosen by lot.

Conventional wisdom in antiquity

- The rule of the people has the fairest name of all, equality (*isonomia*), and does none of the things that a monarch does. The lot determines offices, power is held accountable, and deliberation is conducted in public. --
Herodotus (~420 BC)
- Democracy arises after the poor are victorious over their adversaries, [...] then they share out equally with the rest of the population political offices and burdens; and in this regime public offices are usually allocated by lot. --*Plato* (~380 BC)
- It is accepted as democratic when public offices are allocated by lot; and as oligarchic when they are filled by election. --*Aristotle* (~350 BC)

And as late as mid 18th century:

- The suffrage by lot is natural to democracy, as that by choice is to aristocracy. --*Montesquieu* (1748)

Definition of democracy

1. A situation in which citizens have equal political power.

Or, equivalently,

2. A situation in which all citizens have equal influence on public policy.

Or, equivalently,

3. A situation in which the interests of all citizens (as they understand them) are equally represented in public policy decision making.

Definition of "Western Democracy"

1. Elective representatives
2. Free, fair and frequent elections
3. Freedom of expression
4. Alternative sources of information
5. Associational autonomy
6. Inclusion of all members of the demos

But,

How was this list created? How does an item get to be on the list?

Definition of "Western Democracy"

Each of the six patterns has two aspects: passive and active – the first applying to the masses, the other to a political elite.

	Mass	Elite
<i>Elective representatives</i>	Can vote	Can become a candidate
<i>Free, fair and frequent elections</i>	Have a selection of candidates from which they can choose as they wish	Can compete for votes on a reasonably level playing field
<i>Freedom of expression</i>	Can say anything they want to small audiences	Can influence public discourse freely
<i>Alternative sources of information</i>	Have a selection of information sources to consume	Can create and make available to the public a new source of information
<i>Associational autonomy</i>	Can join a selection of political organizations	Can create and control new political organizations
<i>Inclusion of all members of the demos</i>	All people have the above rights	No one is a-priori barred from joining the elite

Not meant to be democratic

- The ancient democracies in which the people themselves deliberated never possessed one good feature of government. Their very character was tyranny; their figure deformity. --*Hamilton*
- Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths. --*Madison*
- [T]here is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents. [...] May we not even say that that form of government is the best which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government? --*Jefferson*

Virtue-based theory

“Who are to be the objects of popular choice? Every citizen whose merit may recommend him to the esteem and confidence of his country.

[... A]s they will have been distinguished by the preference of their fellow-citizens, we are to presume that in general they will be somewhat distinguished also by those qualities which entitle them to it, and which promise a sincere and scrupulous regard to the nature of their engagements.”

The Federalist Papers #57

Virtue-based theory

Weakness:

How would the electorate learn about the virtue of candidates?

A credible electoral candidate must be known to a large group of people.

Almost all the information that is available to almost all the electorate is transmitted through mass media, either as campaign advertising, or as news items.

Both of these sources are biased. They have no inherent tendency to reflect the true characteristics of the candidates.

Rewards-based theory

"[T]he House of Representatives is so constituted as to support in the members an habitual recollection of their dependence on the people. Before the sentiments impressed on their minds by the mode of their elevation can be effaced by the exercise of power, they will be compelled to anticipate the moment when their power is to cease, when their exercise of it is to be reviewed, and when they must descend to the level from which they were raised; there forever to remain unless a faithful discharge of their trust shall have established their title to a renewal of it.."

The Federalist Papers #57

Rewards-based theory

Weakness:

Corruption provides huge potential rewards for the unscrupulous.

To offset those potential rewards, re-election would have to provide rewards that are comparable with those of corruption.

Therefore, the cost to society of providing rewards which are large enough to motivate the self-interested to avoid corruption would be huge.

Therefore, the rewards-based theory not only doesn't provide a good reason to suppose that elections work at guaranteeing good governance, it actually provides good reason to suppose that an electoral system would provide poor governance.

Mass politics:

The situation in which political decisions are made by a symmetrical aggregation of the actions of a large number of individuals.

The modern electoral system is an example of a mass political system. In this case, the actions of the individuals are (1) whether to run for office, (2) advocacy, and (3) voting. The political decision made is the selection of the officials.

Another example is the “direct democracy” situation.

Mass politics and democracy

Mass politics is defined in terms of formal equality while democracy is defined in terms of equality of actual political power.

If political inequality is due primarily to inequality in the formal status of group members, mass political systems would be democratic.

Mass politics ≠ democracy

Political inequalities in large groups are not a secondary phenomenon, dependent on formal inequalities.

They are a spontaneously occurring, self-reinforcing phenomenon.

Paradoxically, formal symmetry in decision-making makes it highly unlikely that equality in political power will be achieved.

Economy of attention

As the group grows,

Rational ignorance

... it makes less sense for the average group member to become informed, and, *more importantly*,

Prohibitive costs of coordination

... it becomes more difficult to communicate with a large proportion of the group.

Emergence of an elite

The small subset that can communicate with a large subset of the group emerges as a political elite.

This group controls the agenda and can influence public opinion.

Formal Setup:

Each candidate delegation $d \in D$ is endowed with

- representativity - $r(d)$: the government is representative when its efforts are aimed at promoting the general interests (rather than personal or narrow interests), and
- competence - $c(d)$: the government is competent when it is able to enact effective policy in accordance with its aims.

The government value of any candidate delegation is a function of c and r , increasing in both, say:

$$g(d) = c(d) \cdot r(d).$$

Delegation as optimization:

The values of c and r are known, although possibly with some uncertainty. The task of the demos mechanism is to select the delegation n a way that maximizes the government, g , value over the set of possible delegations.

Delegation as a game:

The values of c are known (again, possibly with some uncertainty), but the values of r are set by an adversary that wishes to promote its own interests at the expense of the demos.

The adversary can set the r to be low for any set of delegations it chooses, but the size of the set is limited.

The task of the demos is to select the delegation in a way that assures a good government value.

Sortition is a maximin strategy for the delegation game

Sortition makes it unlikely that corrupting a small subset of potential delegations would be successful in subverting the public interest.