

Random Voting and the Path to Gender Equality

Mariam Nasser

myn08@mail.aub.edu

Elections are in no way perfect. Everyone knows that. But what is truly shocking is the amount of money spent campaigning. Last year, US Presidential candidates smashed records by spending a total of \$14 billion dollars during the race (Schwartz, 2016). In the 2018 Lebanese elections, one minute of airtime on a private media outlet would have cost \$6,000. An entire talk show episode could reach \$240,000 ("Lebanon parliamentary candidates," 2018). Thus, it's no surprise that everyday people like carpenters, nurses, or teachers don't win elections. This is not limited to socioeconomic conditions, however, as not many women win either, neither do disabled people, nor people under 40. They claim that it is a representative democracy, but it's not really representative of the population at all.

The average parliamentarian is likely to be an old Caucasian male who is by far more affluent and powerful than the average citizen. It does not stop there either. Once they're in office, banks and large corporations rush to donate huge sums of money to various political parties. Surely these corporations are not charities, and they are under no democratic duty to "make it rain" on the parties. They expect compensation when the candidate wins the elections. When Trump made office in 2016, the oil companies that so generously donated over a million dollars to his campaign expected him to get on board with controversial policies. After being elected, he reversed Obama's decision and approved the construction of the Keystone XL oil

pipeline, a project that is highly controversial due to its negative environmental impact, especially on necessary and endangered wildlife (Denchak, 2021). Then there's the major media conglomerates. Politicians worldwide want to be on the media's good side because they know more than anyone how the smallest detail can turn the public opinion against them. It is a mechanism that keeps control in the hands of the political elite. Political parties, mass media outlets, large corporations, and associated entities are all tools for gaining and exerting influence. These groups work together and compete for power. It stopped being a democratic system a long time. It has turned into an oligarchy.

We often wonder how this complicated web of constraints interacts to shape the laws that are meant to ensure a representative, just democracy. The root of the problem is not with convictions or jurisdictions. Throughout history, minority groups have fought for the right to be included in the system of elections, to vote and to run. However, we have reached a point where we have won the struggle for legal equality but lost the political battle for control of our legislatures. The flaw is intrinsic within the system of elections itself. This claim has been expressed since Ancient history, with propensities to sortition, or selection by lottery, perpetuated by the likes of Aristotle and Montesquieu ("What if politicians," 2019). Surely, though, this does not translate into random selection being applicable in our real world? Isn't it crazy to let everyday people make the big decisions? Well, not really. Adopting sortition, or selection by lottery, is a lot more complicated than that. It also takes many forms. One of the most prominent forms is the idea of Citizen Assemblies. Citizen Assemblies are representative random samples of people brought together to decide on important public matters ensuring all parts of the

community are given a voice. These randomly selected microcosms of society are given the time and the resources to get to grips with an issue. After extensive deliberation and discussion, they come to an informed decision. Citizens' assemblies can be established alongside elected chambers so that politicians can engage meaningfully with the people they represent ("What is a citizens' assembly," 2018). This ensures politicians can benefit from the collective wisdom of the people and in turn gives the people more trust in political decisions.

Citizen Assemblies do not merely exist in theory. They are not something that we should fear. We should embrace new possibilities and new perspectives, despite how unusual they might seem at first. When in British Columbia in 2004 they wanted to change the electoral law, they used sortition to populate a convention and came up with a new proposal ("British Columbia," 2005). At the Irish Constitutional Convention a few years ago, two-thirds of the attendees were selected using sortition (Hennig, 2020). At the G1000 in Belgium and in policy juries, people's panels, modern citizens assemblies are all across the globe (Courant, 2021). In April of 2021, the previously established June 2019 citizen assembly on gender inequality in Ireland made numerous recommendations to the legislature of Ireland ("Citizens' Assembly," 2021). Citizen Assembly members get expert advice and deliberate together. This is what we need to tackle the big issues that our politicians can't because of the constraints mentioned before.

We need a real democracy; a democracy where half the lawmakers are women and half are men, where some are young and some are old, a parliament composed of people just like you and me. Such a representation is more likely to legislate in the interests of the people rather than

the interests of a political class and its allies. For women, the advantages of sortition are even clearer. Since women are not a minority, and hence do not depend on coalition with like-minded individuals to assert their power and make decisions, they simply need to be represented in legislative bodies to be able to make a change (Gat, 2013). Furthermore, in a random sample, formal services that are often required to hold different public offices become obsolete. Sortition may also help in stopping the perpetuation of highly sensitive potential social tensions. Campaigns often result in the polarization between different candidates depending on their agenda. The left and right wings in the United States are a clear example of this polarization, especially in the 2016 election with the demonization of Hillary Clinton by other candidates, over the mere fact that she is a woman. However, through an unbiased process such as sortition, external influences such as corporation-backed lobbying, for example, is completely eliminated. According to Iacob (2015), sortition encourages women to be part of political discourse and action, and to become more trusting of these institutions. When you show citizens that it is possible for them to be a part of the direct decision-making bodies, their support and belief in the political institutions will soar. Women will engage more in political settings if they witness their own inclusion, and we must accept the fact that there are legislative decisions relating to women that can only be made by women. There are certain concerns that men in power fail to bring up or understand. We desperately need women in politics. Through sortition, no candidate is at an unfair advantage that usually breeds sexism and/or different forms of discrimination. Women no longer have to fear a biased public opinion or the inability to procure campaigning funds due to lack of bank and corporation backing, with sexist political justifications, of course. The corporations need the candidate to push their agenda, and if the voters are not supporting the

female candidate, the corporations lose their money on a failed campaign. Women no longer have to fear misogynistic “she only got there because she slept around” remarks from others. They become free to exercise their political rights in a positive, engaging environment that fosters communication and wants what is best for society as a whole.

Everyday people can make intelligent and informed decisions. These decisions are decisions that everyone would make if we all had access to balanced information, the time to digest it, and the chance to deliberate about it with others in a fair and respectful environment. A truly representative democracy can make laws that are legitimate. It is time for a democracy of the people, by the people, for the people.

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