The Epistemic Case for Non-Electoral Forms of Democracy
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Abstract

Electoral representative government embodies a compromise, exchanging political equality and broader distribution of political power for the supposed epistemic benefit that comes through the use of elected representatives. Direct democracy would do better by considerations of political equality, inclusivity, responsiveness, self-government, and other aspects of political morality commonly brought under the heading of "democracy," but it also would almost certainly result in epistemically poorer decision-making. This chapter draws attention to the significant epistemic shortfalls of electoral representative democracy and suggests that this is a compromise that is not working out. Perhaps more surprisingly, the chapter suggests that there are non-electoral alternatives that do at least as well as electoral representative government on the democracy scorecard, and which would likely to better than electoral representative government on the epistemic scorecard. To do this, the chapter presents seven core questions of institutional epistemic competence and suggests that two non-electoral alternatives—lottocratic systems and systems of technocratic agencies coupled with extensive citizen oversight—would do better than electoral representative systems at answering those core questions, while doing no worse by the lights of other considerations of political morality.

Electoral representative government embodies a compromise, exchanging political equality and broad distribution of political power for supposed epistemic benefit from the use of elected representatives. Direct democracy would do better by considerations of political equality, inclusivity, self-government, and other aspects of political morality commonly brought under the heading of "democracy," but it also would almost certainly result in epistemically poorer decisionmaking. In this chapter, I draw attention to the significant epistemic shortfalls of electoral representative democracy and suggest that this is a compromise that is not working out. Perhaps more surprisingly, I will suggest that there are non-electoral alternatives that do at least as well as electoral representative government on the democracy scorecard, and which would likely to better than electoral representative government on the epistemic scorecard.

1. Against Electoral Representative Democracy: The Epistemic Case

As suggested above, the use of elected representatives embodies a compromise that is supposed to yield epistemic benefits. Here and elsewhere,[1] I argue that under the conditions present in many modern political communities, electoral representative government is failing to do well—even and perhaps especially in epistemic terms—and that this is in significant part *because* of elections.

In the background is a view that presupposes that political institutions are tools that can be used to help us solve problems of moral significance that arise in our political community. These problems differ depending on the particulars of the sociopolitical context, but, crucially, there are still some general claims we can make about what institutional capacities will be required for political institutions to do well at solving problems, regardless of the details of those problems. To

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[1] See, particularly, Alexander Guerrero, "The Epistemic Pathologies of Elections and the Epistemic Promise of Lottocracy," in Elizabeth Edenberg and Michael Hannon (eds.) <u>Politics and Truth: New Perspectives in Political Epistemology</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2021); Alexander Guerrero, <u>The Lottocratic Alternative</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2021).

consistently solve problems requires capacities of at least two distinct kinds: (1) appreciating (or understanding or knowing) the world as it is, and (2) responding to the world in light of this appreciation. The first of these concerns epistemic, diagnostic capacities of institutions. The second concerns agential capacities (responsiveness, morality, steadfastness) of institutions. Epistemic capacities, which will be our focus, include the ability and propensity of the institutions to gather and generate relevant evidence (evidence relevant to the decisions that need to be made); to engage with and draw from diverse sources of knowledge, including extant technical, esoteric, and expert knowledge; to accurately and appropriately assess, weigh, and evaluate evidence; and to organize and disseminate evidence and knowledge so that it is readily available and appropriately salient for decision-making purposes. In this part of the chapter, I will highlight some of the central epistemic concerns about the use of elections in modern political contexts.

1.1 The Conditions of Modern Politics

Let me begin my drawing attention to those conditions that make trouble for the epistemic capacities of electoral representative government and which strike me as indelible features of the modern political world. These conditions are not necessary features of the world, nor are they constitutive features of human existence or social organization. Instead, these are features of the specific sociopolitical communities that we often find ourselves in today, but we should treat them as fixed for the purposes of comparison with non-electoral systems.

The first condition is the *sheer size and scale* of modern political systems. Most modern country-level political systems operate over large political jurisdictions in terms of both geographic size and population. This size makes it so that the overwhelming majority of citizens do not know each other personally, and it creates problems in terms of mass communication, control of media and technological infrastructure, and economic and environmental regulation. Additionally, governing territories of this size that include this many people creates the need for multiple layers of government. Most political systems have a central federal government as well as (still large) sub-units—states, provinces, counties, cantons, townships, municipalities—that have their own distinctive political organization and political actors.

The second condition follows from this size and scale: the problems confronted by political institutions are *highly complex*. There are people, institutions, and other actors, with distinct kinds of beliefs, motivations, and preferences, engaging in conduct that has many different possible, hard to disentangle effects. The correct diagnosis of political problems is complicated. The institutions, laws, and policies that might be proposed to address the problems themselves will be complicated (with many moving parts and interrelated components), and it will be difficult to discern whether the proposed solution will actually work—or even whether it is working or has worked after having been implemented.

The third condition follows from the fact of complexity: to do well at identifying and solving the problems that actually exist, political systems will be significantly epistemically *dependent on expert input*. Complexity results in the need for division of labor—epistemic and otherwise—which results in the development of subsets of people who are experts, technocrats, policy wonks. Even basic problem-solving presents technical problems that require expert input.

The fourth condition might be seen as a corollary of these others (bolstered by a familiar story about rational incentives): we should expect high levels of *citizen ignorance* regarding almost all aspects of politics and political problems. The size, scale, complexity, and technical nature of political problems confronted in modern politics means that ordinary knowledge or common sense will be insufficient for policymaking and understanding and addressing most political problems.

A fifth condition, not present to the same extent everywhere but significantly present in most modern political communities, is a *significant level of inequality* in terms of wealth, income, and

socioeconomic power. Income and wealth inequality often generate further inequalities in education, employment opportunities, media influence and control, and social capital and influence, particularly as the effects compound over time and across generations.

A final common condition is that of *significant social division* along lines of race, ethnicity, linguistic background, political ideology, and/or religion, often resulting in entrenched majority/minority political dynamics. Given the worldwide history of colonialism and the common problem in many political communities of historical racial injustice, many political communities have not just social division but a particular kind of social division as a background condition, giving rise to a similar set of political problems.

1.2 Epistemic Challenges for Electoral Representative Institutions

Competent problem solving under these political conditions will require institutions and mechanisms that can function well despite the size and scale, complexity, dependence on expertise, extensive citizen ignorance, high levels of inequality, and significant social division that characterize these political communities. Electoral representative systems encounter a number of significant epistemic challenges.

As noted above, making good political decisions requires a wide variety of specific, esoteric knowledge. One must know facts about the world that relate to politics; one must know political facts of various kinds about how various political institutions work and about their history and past actions; one must know about the political problems that exist or are on the horizon, as well as about various proposals to address those problems; and one must know what members of the political community think about those problems and purported solutions, including which they see as most important, most threatening, and so on. This motivates the use of elected representatives, who will have political decisionmaking as their full-time job, as well as funding and support to engage in the relevant investigation. The theory is that elected representatives will have incentives to acquire and to act on the relevant knowledge, as they face electoral consequences if they do not.

But there's a hole in the theory. Selecting political officials and monitoring and holding them accountable requires that voters know enough to provide an effective political check through elections: disciplining elected officials who are not working to address the extant problems, alerting candidates as to what the issues that matter most to them are, and having a well-enough informed view about the world so that their judgment about what problems matter corresponds tolerably well to the problems that actually exist. This requires knowing about what elected representatives are doing, knowing about the extant problems, knowing whether what is being done is working, and knowing enough to be able to spot and alert others to new problems on the horizon, or the need to reprioritize problems, and so on. Citizens don't need to know everything that representatives need to know for the system to work well. But they do need to know something pretty substantial, and they don't currently know what they need to know.

This is not surprising. Members of the political community do not have enough time or incentive to become adequately well informed about the problems that exist, nor about the possible solutions to those problems, resulting in systemic, widespread ignorance. This voter ignorance may result in direct uninformed influence on policymaking and problem solving, which would be bad, epistemically. Alternatively, voter ignorance might lead to an erosion of meaningful electoral accountability, resulting in powerful special interests capturing political representatives.

Efforts to address the citizen ignorance problem might focus either on general education or on news media and news media consumption choices. But although improving mass public education (and things like statistical literacy) might be a necessary condition of addressing the ignorance problem, it is not a sufficient condition of doing so. Mass public education is not sufficient because the information needed to serve the necessary electoral accountability function is too small scale, micro

level, of the moment—concerning particular people, their actions, and present problems—for it to be supplied by general mass public education. An additional reason for this: in most countries, people under 18 cannot vote. So, for many people, they have left formal educational settings behind by the time they become politically active. We need the news.

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press reports that the average American spends 70 minutes per day taking in the news through TV, radio, newspapers, or through other online (non-social media) content.[2] That is a lot of time. And yet we remain almost entirely ignorant of everything about politics and economics that we might need to know. Why? The short answer is that we choose what news we consume for the same reason most of us watch or read anything: it's fun, enraging, entertaining, exciting. It makes us feel connected or like a part of something bigger than ourselves. We have a side, a team, and we watch our heroes and their opponents every night on TV. That, by itself, might not be bad. But it shapes our search function—what news we seek out and how we seek it out—and that, through the market, affects what news exists. The news media is supported by the for-profit market and so its form and content are driven by entertainment incentives, not informational or educational ones.[3]

In a world of even higher levels of media choice—cable news and internet sources, in particular—these entertainment incentives have led us into echo chambers, highly partisan pathways, and the dissipation of common epistemic sources. This, in turn, has resulted in reinforced prejudices and biases, false views about the problems we face, heightened attention on issues that divide us and enrage us, and a generally impoverished level of political knowledge and discussion. Higher quality news and relatively non-partisan local news has struggled to survive, and many cities and counties now exist in news deserts.[4]

The picture of the world that we get through these lenses is deeply distorted, highly partisan, rarely challenged, and makes it very difficult to pay attention to the problems that actually exist, let alone to devise solutions to them, and it makes it nearly impossible to imagine working together, all of us, toward implementing those solutions. When we add regular elections on top of this, particularly given the use of single-member districts and plurality voting rules that ensure two dominant political parties as described in what has come to be known as Duverger's Law,[5] we get a deeply divided, us vs. them dynamic in ordinary political life. Elections both create and exacerbate these conditions, as we don't know enough to pay attention to the issues, but it is easy to have opinions about individuals, particularly once we know what team's uniform they wear. And elections tap into familiar ingroup/outgroup psychological dynamics—dynamics whose strength increase as we become convinced that more and more is at stake in each election (as we become convinced by the news we consume that the other side is even more threatening than before).

A number of powerful epistemic pathologies result from our political teams regularly squaring off over and over again through elections with this mass information environment as our epistemic background. Distrust in citizens who are on the other side, segregation by party affiliation in all realms of life, vilification of those who disagree with us politically—all are now commonplace. We have divided our political communities in deep ways that affect who we listen to, who we trust, how we try to find out about the world, what we believe, who we care about, and what we value. Liliana Mason, a political scientist who documents these trends, says that our partisan identities have become "mega-identities" and paints "a picture of a nation whose partisan teams are raring to fight, despite an

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[2] See https://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc-report/INoC-20-News-Consumption.pdf
[3] For discussion, see Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business (Penguin Books, 1985).
[4] Penelope Muse Abernathy, The Expanding News Desert (2018).
[5] Maurice Duverger, Political parties: their organization and activity in the modern state (North, B. and
North R., translation, New York: Wiley, 1963, originally published in 1954).

almost total lack of any substantive policy reasons to do so."[6] That makes it very hard for any kind of political institution to work effectively to address the problems that afflict our communities. For-profit, entertainment-focused news media and regular elections together drive this pretty hate machine. It serves to distract us. It makes it hard to work together. And it dramatically distorts the background epistemic landscape in which we attempt to do so.

Even leaving aside hyper-partisanship, elections introduce yet further problems. As noted earlier, general ignorance and complexity makes it hard for members of the political community to know whether an elected representative has actually acted or tried to act to address a political problem—particularly in the short term, such as the time between election cycles. For problems with a long-time horizon, such as climate change, things are even worse. It is comparatively easy to deny the existence of the problem, even when the best evidence suggests otherwise. The evidence may be technical and complex, and—as bearing on a somewhat distant projection—far from certain in its implications. If there are salient costs to actually addressing the problem, then elected officials will have electoral incentives to compete by avoiding incurring these costs, even if this will make everyone worse off. One effective way to compete on this front is through disinformation and epistemic pollution: spreading false information, undermining reliance on actual experts, propping up pseudo-experts and junk science, manufacturing controversy where none should exist, and so on. And, of course, all of this is easier when there is a background context of broad ignorance and intense political division.

Finally, elections select the socioeconomic elite as our political representatives. In 2015, for example, 130 of the 535 members of Congress had a net worth of over $2 million; 80% were male; 84% were white, and more than half were lawyers or businesspeople. The epistemic implications of this distorted selection are significant. Members of the elite will have little personal interest in or experience with many of the urgent problems faced by the non-elite. They may also be overconfident in thinking that they do understand these issues, even when they do not. Diversity in terms of life experience—including occupational experience, religious experience, cultural experience, experience occupying different social positions, educational experience—is important for epistemic reasons. By using elections, we are losing out on much of the available knowledge about the world, and we are choosing people with their own sense of what is most urgent and important to address. This affects the ability of elected representative political institutions to identify and effectively respond to the actual problems the political community faces.

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Some of these problems are caused by the use of elections—the hyper-partisanship, short-term bias, focus on individuals rather than issues, and selection of unrepresentative representatives all stem from the central role that elections play in our system. Other problems are not endemic to electoral representation, but result instead from the poor fit of elections on top of the background conditions that have come to characterize modern political life: extensive size and scale of the political community, issue complexity, dependence on expertise, extensive citizen ignorance, and high levels of inequality. All should make us concerned about the viability of electoral representative democracy on epistemic grounds.

2. Considering Non-Electoral Democracy: The Epistemic Case

The idea of "non-electoral democracy" might sound like an oxymoron. Of course, we are already familiar with something that would count as "democracy" but which does not involve elections: direct democracy, in which all adult citizens are allowed to vote or otherwise directly decide on policy matters, without electing anyone to govern in their stead. Here, I want to offer two more alternatives

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[6] Liliana Mason, Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity (University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 88.

to electoral representative government that do not employ elections but which arguably do satisfy the extant constraints of political morality and which might be comparatively attractive in terms of their epistemic performance under conditions like those that exist in the modern political world.

2.1 Constraints of Political Morality

There are important values—apart from epistemic and instrumental values—that limit which kinds of political institutions are morally permissible (politically legitimate, all things considered normatively attractive, and so on). Although the purpose of political institutions may be to help us solve various problems we encounter, there are constraints on how those solutions can be pursued. Here are three such constraints: the right to popular sovereignty, the right of individuals to be treated as morally equal under the law, and respect for individual rights of freedom of body and mind (rights of life, bodily integrity, physical liberty and movement, speech, thought, and association). Political institutions must respect these rights, which are rights of individuals in their capacities as members of political communities. It is plausible that "democracy" has come to be reserved for political systems that observe and respect these constraints. The last two constraints are intuitive and familiar, and I won't say more about them here. But let me say something about the first, as it is in need of elaboration.

Some have a view on which democracy requires popular sovereignty, in that "the people" have political control; it is government "by the people." On a certain understanding of that requirement, electoral representative democracy would be straightforwardly incompatible with it. Let us assume that electoral representative democracy is compatible with this right to popular sovereignty, so that the right must be able to be respected by something far less than equal distribution of political power. Consider a different conception of popular sovereignty:

> **Consistent Responsiveness**: There is popular sovereignty in some political jurisdiction only if and only because there is consistently responsive government in that political jurisdiction, government that generates responsive outcomes. Political outcomes are responsive to the extent that they track what the people living in the political jurisdiction believe, prefer, or value, so that if those beliefs, preferences, or values were different, the political outcomes would also be different, would be different in a similar direction, and would be different because the beliefs, preferences, and values were different. Government is consistently responsive if and only if there are institutional mechanisms in place to ensure that, over the long run, political outcomes will be responsive.

Responsiveness is a multifaceted, complicated idea. For example, the people living in a jurisdiction will not have uniform beliefs, preferences, or values—so there is a question of whether and how these are to be aggregated or measured in order to assess responsiveness. For the purposes of this discussion, these complexities need not detain us. I will assume that this is a constraint on political systems, and that it is a construal of a right to popular sovereignty. Note that this is a "tracking" conception of popular sovereignty, rather than a "power" conception. I take it some such conception of popular sovereignty is required if electoral representative government is to satisfy that requirement.

2.2 The Epistemic Promise of Non-Electoral Democratic Institutions

In thinking about institutional alternatives, we should start by thinking about what institutional mechanisms are needed to ensure or at least make it likely that political institutions will be up to the task of identify, diagnosing, and responding to the problems that political communities are facing. Let's start with some basic questions that should be at the forefront of our minds when thinking about the epistemic issues modern political systems face. We can see these as raising questions about requirements or conditions of epistemic success. Call these *core questions of institutional epistemic competence*:

<u>Citizen Knowledge</u>: Does high quality epistemic performance depend on a highly informed citizenry? Does it require broad citizen education in order to function? How is this to be accomplished?

<u>Broad Input</u>: Are there mechanisms by which the entirety of the broadly dispersed local knowledge and evidence possessed in the political community can be used and drawn on to identify problems and inform responses to them?

<u>Community Trust</u>: Are there mechanisms to enhance community cooperation, collaboration, and trust? Does the system do anything to exacerbate political division and distrust, resulting in echo chambers, discrediting significant portions of the community as testifiers, and the dissolution of common sources of evidence?

<u>Managing Expertise</u>: Are there mechanisms by which expertise can be drawn on in an epistemically responsible way to address the complex, technically sophisticated problems we face? Are there mechanisms that enable the use of expertise but in a way that is ultimately monitored and regulated by the broader political community and filtered through the community's values and expert-informed preferences?

<u>Appropriate Attention</u>: Are there mechanisms that ensure or incentivize focus on the most pressing actual political problems and issues, rather than those issues that are most divisive or most entertaining or otherwise interesting? Are there mechanisms that improve the system's ability to focus in a long-term way, looking out for big but perhaps more temporally distant problems?

<u>Countering Disinformation</u>: Are there mechanisms to counter broad popular attempts at disinformation through highly partisan "infotainment" news media, bots, manipulation of social media, and so on, so that these don't substantially influence political decisionmaking and problem-solving efforts?

<u>Issue Coverage</u>: What mechanisms are in place to ensure that issues and problems in all politically relevant domains are attended to, so as to avoid distorted or captured policymaking and policymaking done in darkness?

This list is intended as a starting point for thinking about how political systems might be designed to do well epistemically under modern political conditions. As suggested in the first section, electoral representative democracy does poorly by many of these. One thing to notice is that simply by moving away from elections, one eliminates some of the sources of epistemic difficulty, including the drive toward hyper-partisan conflict and distrust, the easy distraction away from issues to focus on individuals and personalities and sites of disagreement, the focus on the short-term, and the epistemic demand for something close to a pristine mass information environment.

2.3 Lottocratic Institutions

In other work, I introduce and defend a non-electoral form of democracy that I call "lottocracy,"[7] and which I argue does well by these considerations. The basics of that system are these:

(1) Single Issue: rather than a single generalist legislature, in a lottocratic system there would be, say, 20 standing, single-issue legislative bodies, with each legislative

[7] Guerrero (2014), (2021).

institution focusing on one policy area or sub-area (e.g. agriculture, immigration, health care, trade, education, energy, etc.).

(2) Lottery Selection: the 300 members of each single-issue legislature are chosen by lottery from the relevant political jurisdiction, selected to serve three-year terms, with the terms staggered so that 100 new people start every year.

(3) Learning Phases: the members of the single-issue legislatures hear from a variety of experts, advocates, and stakeholders on the relevant topic at the beginning of and at various stages throughout each decision-making session.

(4) Community Consultation: beyond the learning phases, the members of the single-issue legislature spend some structured time talking to, interacting with, and hearing from members of the public, including activists and stakeholders affected by proposed action.

(5) Direct Enactment: the members of the single-issue legislature either have the capacity to directly enact policy or, in some cases, to do so jointly with other single-issue legislatures.

I don't want to defend the full merits of this system here. Instead, let me briefly draw attention to some of the institutional mechanisms it uses and how they address the questions above.

First, lottocratic institutions don't require an antecedently highly informed citizenry. Instead, citizens who are selected come to learn about the particular issue over a period of time post-selection. This learning phase is also a means by which expertise can be managed and integrated into the decisionmaking process, and a way in which to counter broad popular attempts at disinformation. Randomly chosen citizens might have encountered some disinformation prior to being selected, but there will be an extended period of time during which that can be addressed and engaged—albeit perhaps imperfectly. There are important issues about how experts would be identified as qualified and selected to speak, something which I discuss at length in the book and in other work.[8] Using random selection to pick representatives ensures broad input along many dimensions, as people from all backgrounds will be brought into the decisionmaking process and given an opportunity to share their knowledge and perspectives. Bringing a group of people together—from all different backgrounds—and having them work in a focused way on one set of issues helps to build a collaborative, cooperative spirit and a sense of trust in each other, even in the face of disagreement.[9] The single-issue focus creates a more manageable epistemic burden for those selected, but more importantly it also makes appropriate attention to all politically important issues, rather than just a few, much more likely. By eliminating electoral incentives, those who are randomly chosen can focus on the long-term when it seems appropriate to do so.

There are, of course, concerns about whether randomly chosen individuals will be up to the task, whether the experts and stakeholders they hear from can be adequately vetted and appropriately selected so that they represent the actual best state of information on the topic (rather than the views of those who have been captured or cherry-picked by industry), whether deliberations amongst randomly chosen citizens will problematically replicate background social dynamics and hierarchies,

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[8] Guerrero (2021); Alexander Guerrero, "Living with Ignorance in a World of Experts," in Perspectives on Ignorance from Moral and Social Philosophy (Rik Peels, ed., Routledge, 2017): pp. 156-185.

[9] For examples of how this has worked in practice, see Mark Warren and Hilary Pearse, eds., Designing Deliberative Democracy: The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Patrick Chalmers, "How 99 Strangers in a Dublin hotel broke Ireland's abortion deadlock," The Guardian (March 8, 2018).

and whether single-issue focus in policymaking will lead to problematically inconsistent results—to name just a few concerns. I spend chapters on each of these issues in the book; I only mention them here. Furthermore, if embedded in the right kind of constitutional framework, alongside a constitutional court, it could certainly respect the rights to popular sovereignty, the right of individuals to be treated as morally equal under the law, and individual rights of freedom of body and mind. Indeed, one might see much more responsive lawmaking with a lottocratic system, as the representatives would be a genuine microcosm of the political community, rather than an elite subset of that community.

2.4 Technocratic Agencies with Citizen Oversight and Incentive Alignment

In most modern political systems, administrative agencies and other technocratic bodies already play a significant role in terms of creating regulations and addressing problems that arise in the political community. These are often created by the legislature or the executive and are often overseen (at some remove) by courts and/or the legislative and executive institutions that created them. In some cases, they are relatively political, with their leadership appointed by elected politicians. In other cases, the aim is for them to be above (or at least outside of) the normal political fray, so that they are insulated from political pressures. They are not comprised of elected officials, the people who serve in them are appointed to these roles for their expertise or are selected through at least nominally competitive, meritocratic processes for their qualifications and expertise. They typically have a topical, single-issue focus, addressing, say, environmental protection, regulation of markets in financial instruments, the setting of interest rates and monetary policy more broadly, food and drug safety, and so on.

There are two frequently voiced sources of concerns with these institutions. The first is that they are easily captured by the industries that they are supposed to be regulating. The second is that they are inadequately "democratic" as they make decisions of great consequence, often with little real political oversight. This second concern might connect to concerns about popular sovereignty and political legitimacy. One of the largest problems—related to both of these—is that most voters are ignorant of what these agencies do (except those who are trying to avoid their regulation), and elected officials who are themselves captured by industry have straightforward incentives to allow industries to effectively capture these administrative agencies. It might thus seem a bad idea to expand their role. There are many responses one might have to these worries.

A response I want to urge is worth considering is to use citizens' assemblies—randomly chosen citizens—to serve as oversight bodies, so that each technocratic agency would have an accompanying citizens' oversight assembly. Doing this might combine the epistemic merits of technocratic decisionmaking while having general public oversight to ensure these bodies were acting in a responsive, public-regarding way, rather than as agents of industry. Imagine that there were a large number of standing administrative agencies with oversight assemblies, and that these replaced the elected representative legislature as the engine of lawmaking and regulatory policy. The suggestion here is that these technocratic bodies could be expanded to take on the bulk of the political problem-solving role, if combined with the right kinds of additional mechanisms.

Combining administrative agencies with citizens' assembly oversight could take a number of distinct forms. The structure of citizens' assemblies is fairly consistent across the 120-plus examples around the world since 2000.[10] Those who participate spend some time learning about an issue, usually through a combination of educational reading and discussion, as well as in-person presentations from various experts and policy advocates. In this context, one possibility would be to involve the

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[10] For a detailed spreadsheet of all of these, see "Sortition in the world, 2000-present" https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1kwgOpxMX4pwR3Myu4pXku4gjcnOS53bPOKwOGjZNxyI/edit#gid=0

randomly chosen citizens as both the group who would oversee a meritocratic hiring process of high-level bureaucrats to run the technocratic agencies and serve a final check on regulatory and policy decisions of a particular agency. This oversight process would have the administrative agency officials explain the proposed regulation or policy and the problem it addresses, and the randomly chosen citizens would also hear from experts and stakeholders from outside of the agency about the claims made by the agency. This could replace or supplement "notice and comment" rulemaking that already requires broad public consultation regarding proposed regulations.

If randomly chosen citizens served for terms of 3 years (for example), focused on a particular agency, they would have time to develop competence so as to be able to follow the discussion and gauge the plausibility of what was being suggested. Voting power within the oversight assembly could even be staggered so those with more seniority would have more voting power. This basic combination of expert policymaking and broad public oversight seems worth considering, at least in the comparative assessment with electoral representative decisionmaking on these issues that are often relegated to the shadows. Technocratic decisionmaking often seems to run afoul of popular sovereignty, but if the vetting process by the citizens' oversight assemblies were effective, this might be a way of addressing that concern so as to result in highly responsive, epistemically effective political problem solving over time.

A central issue is the issue of attention: which issues would get a devoted agency, what issues should be given attention, how much money should be spent to address which problems, and so on. One possibility here would be to give the citizens' oversight assemblies a partial agenda-setting role. An alternative would be to use mechanisms of popular budgeting and priority-setting, as in the well-known case of "participatory budgeting" in Porto Alegre, where broad community input influences the general distribution of public resources and attention toward political problems.[11] The details of these mechanisms vary, but typically have some large group of unelected citizens who come together to express their views about what proportion of the budget should be spent on which political problems. Similar mechanisms could be used to determine which particular issues the standing agencies should focus on.

This kind of largely technocratic system would do well by integration of expertise, perhaps, but there are concerns about whether ordinary citizens would be able to hold the technocrats adequately accountable over time. An additional mechanism here would be to implement various kinds of incentive alignment strategies to condition the technocrats' compensation and promotion and so forth on successfully addressing various problems. For example, if the issue is how to remove dangerously high levels of lead from drinking water, payment could be conditioned on the extent to which that aim is actually achieved over a five-year period.

As with the lottocratic system, the technocratic agencies + citizen oversight system would avoid extensive political division, the need to have all citizens become well informed about all issues, and would draw on available relevant expertise. One source of concerns—that value questions are not properly settled by issue-specific technocrats—could be ameliorated by the combination of randomly chosen citizens in an oversight role, along with a broad participatory agenda setting mechanism. This might help expand coverage of issues, and disinformation at early stages in the process might be effectively countered by expertise and the learning of the oversight bodies over time. With a strong veto held by randomly chosen citizens and a significant and widespread use of broad participatory agenda-setting mechanisms, this kind of system would also count as a kind of democracy—at least if electoral representative systems do.

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[11] For discussion of the more than 1000 municipalities in Latin America and the 100 municipalities in Europe that have used participatory budgeting mechanisms, and regarding participatory budgeting more generally, see Yves Sintomer, Carsten Herzberg, and Anja Rocke, "Participatory Budgeting in Europe: Potentials and Challenges," International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Vol. 32(1), (2008), pp. 164-178.

3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I hope to have highlighted some core questions of institutional epistemic competence that we should be asking when thinking about political systems. More tentatively and speculatively, I hope to have piqued interest in actual institutional alternatives to electoral representative democracy, and to have suggested ways in which they might be both epistemically attractive and capable of satisfying relevant demands of political morality.