

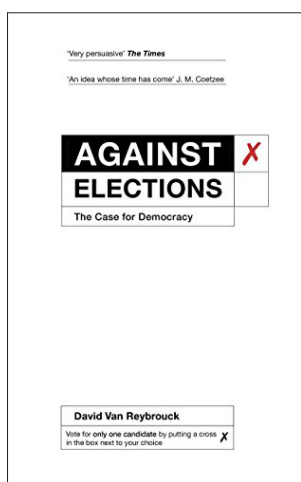
Beyond common knowledge “Against elections: the case for democracy”

Para além do senso comum: “Contra as eleições: o caso da democracia”

Más allá del sentido común: “Contra las elecciones: el caso de la democracia”

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David Van Reybrouck¹, a Belgian author and an acclaimed playwright, reads archaeology in the universities of Leuven and Cambridge. Van Reybrouck has written several other, for example “Congo: an epic history for a people” (Van Reybruck, 2014); in this book “Against Elections: The Case for Democracy”, Van Reybrouck (2016), developed the argument that “our democracy is being wrecked by being limited to elections, even though elections were not formally invented as a democratic instrument.” He later went on to examine the case for the reintroduction of a historically far more democratic instrument known as **sortition**.

In the beginning, the author presented two symptoms throughout the entire book to support his main idea and theme. These two symptoms are described as the crisis of legitimacy and the crisis of efficiency. Efficiency incorporates decisive action, while legitimacy constitutes support. The author maintained that every political system must attain equilibrium between the two fundamental criteria: efficiency and legitimacy.

Van Reybrouck argued that democratic fatigue syndrome is a disorder that causes numerous western cultures to suffer. The writer thereafter identified four diagnoses categories of democratic fatigues syndrome. The first syndrome was the term the diagnosis of populism (it is the fault of the politicians), the second, the diagnosis of technocracy (it is the fault of democracy), third, the diagnosis of direct democracy (the fault of representative democracy) and the fourth, a new diagnosis (it is the fault of electoral- representative democracy).

In chapter three, the author articulated three pathogenesis starting with the representations of the people which was brought about by a democratic procedure of drawing of lots (antiquity and renaissance). The second started in the eighteen

¹ More information about author: <https://www.davidvanreybrouck.be/?q=en/content/biography>

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centuries, from that time sortition completely disappeared from the radar with the introduction of the aristocratic procedure of elections. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the ballot box was described as the “Holy Grail” of democracy with the democratization of elections: A bogus process. However, the electoral democracy remained more ‘government for the people’ than ‘government by the people’.

The author then discussed four remedies in chapter four, beginning with the revival of sortition: deliberative democracy (late twentieth century), followed by democratic innovation in the future: allotted assemblies, then a blueprint for a democracy based on sortition and lastly, the timely appeal for a bi-representative system. These four remedies are different in their composition, for example, deliberative democracy is a form of participative democracy, whereas, allotted assemblies are randomly composed parliament, and the third, blueprint for democracy is based on sortition, in other words, it is a system based purely on drawing lots. The fourth remedy is called timely appeal for a bi-representative system; this remedy is a system of representation that is brought about both through voting and by drawing of lots.

The writer confirmed that the bi-representative system is the best remedy for democratic fatigue syndrome. He asserted that in this system, both legitimacy and efficiency increase and are balanced, mutual distrust between rulers and ruled expands, training is present in democracy together with rational, constructive decision-making. The author is firmly convinced that the bi-representative model will drive democracy into calmer waters.

At all, the author strongly believes in the reintroduction of sortition, of which he described as a far more historic democratic method. The author considered that the systematic crisis of democracy can be remedied by giving sortition a new opportunity and that the drawing of lots can correct several shortcomings in the current systems. Van Reybrouck indicated that the drawing of lots is a logical and consciously neutral technique whereby political opportunities can be allocated fairly, and discord avoided. He went on to provide various strengths in its implementation, such as the reduction in the risk of corruption, election fever lessens, freedom and attention to the common good increases.

In summary, the book presented four chapters, in the first three chapters, the writer acknowledges the current state of democracy using elections. In the fourth chapter, he analysed the reestablishment of sortition as being more democratic than elections only. And finally, he recommended a system of bi-representation that is brought about both through voting and by drawing of lots as the best solution of the democratic syndrome.

To draw his conclusions, the author provided many examples to support the arguments. Nevertheless, the author founded the entire book on only two symptoms (legitimacy and efficiency). These two symptoms deliver the book’s support, the theme and the main idea. Legitimacy and efficiency are the central development of the author’s point of view on democracy.

After reading the author’s arguments and the development of his points, we also agree that elections alone are not the best option for democracy as the implementation of sortition provides a more equitable representation for the people. Plus, in the long run, the application of both techniques would positively affect and strengthen the system of elections and, ultimately, democracy.

We are in favour of the fact that the author did not completely disapprove or eliminate elections entirely, but advocated an enhancement to a more democratic, sustainable, transparent and honest approach. However, we believe that the approach of legitimacy and efficiency as the only two symptoms in the development of this idea of democracy is inadequate. In our opinion, the term “Democracy” in the manner described by the author is more comprehensive and should comprise and encompass more than two symptoms.

Today, many citizens are uninterested in elections and politics. Over the years, voter turnout has become fewer and fewer, causing the voting rules in many countries to change over time. One of the main changes is the implementation of mandatory voting in federal elections. Although there are many arguments for and against mandatory voting, its primary purpose was developed to increase voter turnout. Moreover, customarily, political parties would propose incentives in their political campaigns, as a means of gaining popularity and favour amongst the population, while indirectly increasing voter turnout. Hence, based on the symptoms presented by the author, our political system is not in equilibrium and is in a crisis of legitimacy.

In addition to legitimacy, efficiency is also challenged. Currently, decisive actions by governments to fight the current pandemic and its impact on the economy, businesses, communities and human tragedy such loss of lives, health and well-being of families are seen as uncertain. For this reason, our representative democracy is in a desperate situation.

A political system, according to the author, needs legitimacy and efficiency to attain equilibrium. Nevertheless, based on the strengths of drawing of lots presented by the author, this situation or equilibrium attainment may improve through its application.

The idea of sortition may be frightening at first; it has not been part of democracy for centuries. However, someone who is open to “old-new” ideas must agree that corruption and lobbies are an intrinsic part of elections; this is primarily due to the financing of the elections. Both declared and undeclared donations (Box 2, to use a term enshrined in Brazil) notably direct elections, even in established and “mature” democracies. We must think about other possibilities, and this seems like a proposal to consider.

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