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The Epistemic Pathologies of Elections and the Epistemic Promise of Lottocracy

Alexander Guerrero

1. Introduction

There are many ways of evaluating legal and political institutions. We can ask about whether the institutions do well by norms of political legitimacy, political equality, individual autonomy (freedom, liberty), and non-domination. We can focus on outcomes, asking about what the institutions bring about in terms of welfare promotion, distributive justice, retributive justice, promotion of autonomy, and promotion of egalitarian values. We can ask about the stability and popularity and responsiveness of the political institutions, and the extent to which the people living under institutions consent to them, authorize them, and accept them.

In this chapter, I introduce a new way to evaluate legal and political institutions: in terms of their sensibility. I understand *sensibility* as the ability to appreciate and to respond to the world as it is. Thus, there are two distinct components of sensibility: (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 the epistemic capacities of institutions. The second concerns the agential capacities (rationality, morality, steadfastness) of institutions.

Epistemic capacities concern 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.

Agential capacities concern the ability and propensity of the institutions to make decisions in light of the evidence they possess; to make decisions in light of—and that are supported by—the best available evidence more generally; to make decisions that are coherent, rational, and morally appropriate in light of the evidence and the interests and values at stake; to act quickly and decisively when necessary; to change direction or respond to changed circumstances when necessary; to consider both short-term and long-term consequences of a decision; and so on.

Accordingly, sensibility can be imperiled through epistemic error or agential error or a combination of those two. In this chapter, I will focus on one dimension of the relative sensibility of two broad categories of political systems—electoral representative systems and what I call lottocratic systems. I focus on these two systems because

I think that (unlike many other systems) both arguably pass many of the plausible tests of political morality.[1]

This chapter will focus on just the *epistemic* dimension of sensibility. Discussion of different forms of political institutions rarely focus on epistemic considerations—although arguably the main justification for using elected representatives rather than direct democratic decision-making is an epistemic one. There has been some shift in this recently, with epistemic pressure on electoral representative democracy coming from technocratic, meritocratic, and epistocratic directions.[2] I will raise some worries in this vein, but most of my concerns are distinct from the familiar ones about the broadly ignorant general public and the need to move political decisions to the experts, the wisest among us, or those chosen through some sort of meritocratic selection. Whatever the epistemic merits of these responses, I think they run afoul of requirements of political morality. And I worry, too, about these responses on epistemic grounds—something I will say more about later.

I do not diagnose the central epistemic issue with electoral representative democracy to be one of the fundamental incompetence of ordinary people, nor do I suggest that we move away from democracy understood as egalitarian rule by the people. I do suggest, however, that we need to reconceptualize democracy so that it is not simply equated with electoral representative democracy, and that we should notice the ways in which elections introduce distortions, biases, and other epistemic problems—bringing out the epistemically worst in us, rather than putting us in a position to be our epistemic best.

It is worth stressing at the outset that epistemic capacities are related to other, more familiar political values: responsiveness, welfare promotion, justice, and so on. We should expect them to travel together. For example, if welfare promotion is a significant role for political institutions, then relevant evidence will include evidence about how some policy would affect the well-being of all citizens, and political institutions may do better or worse at gathering this evidence, weighing it, and ensuring that it is available to the relevant institutional actors when needed. Similarly, a policy to regulate the environmental harms of some industry—through coercion, if necessary—is only going to be justified or a good policy if those regulations actually succeed in addressing the environmental harms. And this requires having good evidence and true beliefs regarding that harm and what might address it. Indeed, it is plausible that we should care about epistemic capacities of institutions only derivatively. But I will not wade deeper into those waters here.

Ultimately, we will need some account of what the proper purpose or function of political and legal institutions is supposed to be, before we can determine what evidence is relevant to the decisions being made, so that we can assess whether those institutions are doing well or poorly in epistemic terms. For now, let me remain as

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[1] Sensibility as a political value is a scalar value. Other things being equal, it is better for a political system to be more rather than less sensible. But other things might not be equal, in which case the sensibility of a political system must be weighed against other political values. Perhaps the most sensible political system in some context would be an advanced technocratic system (although I doubt this, for epistemic reasons, which will become apparent later), but that system might fail other tests of political morality.

[2] See, for example, Bell (2015), Brennan (2016), and Somin (2013).

ecumenical as possible, maintaining only that some outcome-related purposes regarding justice, welfare promotion, and autonomy promotion are among the proper purposes of political and legal institutions, and that accomplishment of these purposes requires some substantial epistemic and agential quality at the level of legal and political institutions.

In this chapter, I will consider a comparison of two different institutional arrangements—(1) electoral representative government (roughly, as practiced in the U.S.), and (2) lottocratic government as introduced in this chapter—in terms of their epistemic quality or expected epistemic quality. I will begin by drawing attention to several concerns about the sensibility of electoral representative institutions, focusing particularly on epistemic pathologies of those institutions. The second part of the chapter discusses an alternative kind of political institution, which I call a lottocratic political institution, and argues that we might well expect these institutions to be more sensible alternatives, at least under some conditions, on epistemic grounds. It is difficult to compare a known and existing institutional form with a largely unknown and non-existent institutional form. The negative part of the chapter, then, can be seen as a series of concerns about or challenges to the epistemic merits of electoral representative institutions. The positive part of the chapter can be seen as a suggestion for future thinking, empirical study, and experimentation.

2. The Epistemic Pathologies of Electoral Representative Government

Institutions and practices—whether social, legal, political, etc.—can have a number of different kinds of epistemically significant effects. They might improve or fail to improve the general knowledge of a population of people, affecting how many true and false beliefs individuals have about various questions. They might do this directly, through education or miseducation. Or they might undermine or reinforce various biases that prevent people from acquiring true beliefs, weighing evidence appropriately, or relying on good epistemic sources. We can see these capacities veritistically, concerning the production and promulgation of important and relevant true beliefs, and the avoidance of error (false belief) and ignorance (the absence of true belief). We can ask, then, in a Goldmanian vein: which political institutions and practices "have a comparatively favorable impact on knowledge [understood in the weak sense of true belief] as contrasted with error and ignorance"?[3]

But institutions and practices can also affect whose beliefs—whether true or false—matter, and how much they matter, and this can lead institutions to have something like collective or "effective" epistemic capacities, even if they do not affect whether particular individuals in the community have true or false beliefs. For example, institutions can help minimize the significance of false belief by preventing those beliefs from influencing the decisions that are made and the actions that are taken, or by significantly reducing the weight of such beliefs. Or they might exacerbate the

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[3] Goldman (1999, p. 5).

significance of false belief by giving the most power to those with systematic false belief or entrenched ignorance.

In this section, I will consider a number of different pathologies of electoral representative government, with these falling into both of these categories of institutional epistemic effects. In discussing the epistemic pathologies of electoral representative government, I will focus on the case of political officials who are elected through relatively inclusive, majoritarian elections, conducted freely and fairly, where the officials chosen are elected to be a representative for a geographically defined district. For example, one might think of the U.S. House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate, or most state legislatures within the governments of the states of the U.S.

2.1 Elections and Ignorance: Garbage In, Garbage Out

One theme of political science research over the past 50 years is the remarkable extent of the ignorance of citizens in modern democracies, particularly in the U.S., across almost every politically relevant domain.[4] This ignorance is both well-documented and, from a certain vantage point, unsurprising. As many have noted, it is not rational for individual voters to expend time and energy in becoming well informed about politics, given how unlikely it is that any one of their votes will be decisive. Furthermore, modern policymaking is incredibly technical and complex. This is important because although we might be generally ignorant, there may be some issues about which people are not ignorant, at least in a broad sense. So, for example, if there is a terrorist attack in a country, people in that country may not be ignorant of that fact. Or if there is a widespread famine in a country, people may not be ignorant of that fact. The difficulty comes in knowing more than these bare facts: what ought to be done? Is this a good idea? How should we respond? Will this be good for me, for our country, for the world? Is this the right thing to do? The fact of modern policymaking being technical and complex should also affect our views about the potential of mass education as a possible response.

Here is an initial dilemma, with a challenge to the epistemic quality of electoral representative institutions on either horn: either (a) the elected representative institutions are tightly responsive to the (very ignorant) views of the citizens or (b) they are not.

If (a), then mass ignorance is guiding our political institutions in a way that is straightforwardly troubling, epistemically speaking. This is a familiar story; the original fear regarding electoral democracy and expansion of the franchise. Even if citizens might have the mental capability (and some who offer this critique might even be skeptical of this) to gather evidence effectively, to think intelligently about policy questions, and to monitor their representatives, they do not have the time or the inclination to do this. They vote, instead, based on misinformation, simplified versions of the policy problems, and on the basis of epistemically irrelevant

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[4] See Bartels (1996), Somin (2013).

considerations. If this is our situation—and the above evidence suggests that it might be—then the epistemic peril is obvious. The familiar phrase from the world of computer programming—garbage in, garbage out—would be an apt description of our situation.

It has been suggested that even if people are ignorant of much that seems relevant in terms of policy detail and basic facts of politics, they can still make epistemically responsible decisions by using proxies, signals, and heuristics of various kinds to overcome their ignorance.[5] These strategies amount to a kind of deference to the monitoring and evaluation done by some other individual or group. For example, membership in a political party, endorsements from activist organizations or media institutions, and contributions and public endorsements from particular individuals might all seem to help individuals overcome personal ignorance to enable them to make decisions that are well supported by the evidence, even though they do not personally possess all the relevant evidence.

But there are problems with strategies of this sort. First, the proxies may either be too coarse-grained to help for particular issues or too fine-grained to save individuals any effort. Second, it can be difficult and time-consuming to determine which proxies are credible, particularly if one wants to find reliable but specific proxies for many different issues. This can take almost as much effort, and be as challenging, as doing the research oneself. Finally, for some issues, there may not be good proxies or signals. There may be issues that are low profile or do not attract well-funded individuals or groups to do the necessary investigative work, and there may be issues for which powerful interests have a lot at stake and do everything they can to shape the available information and to obscure the nature of their interests and efforts.

Ultimately, it is an empirical question of whether elected representatives do hew closely to what their constituents believe and prefer. The evidence is mixed but suggests that they pay attention to some of their constituents more than others.[6] The route to epistemic trouble is short and straightforward if the garbage in, garbage out story is correct. Perhaps it is not. For the sake of argument, and to explore the possible "best case" for electoral representative government under conditions of widespread voter ignorance, let us consider ways in which electoral democracy might manage to do tolerably well, epistemically, despite widespread voter ignorance.

2.2 Elections and Ignorance: The End of Accountability and the Epistemic Disaster of Capture

That brings us to the second horn of the dilemma: the possibility that elected representatives do not hew closely to what ordinary citizens believe or prefer in deciding what to believe or do. For those who favor electoral representative democracy over direct democracy, one of the central motivations for doing so is the expected improvement in epistemic quality—something one only achieves if elected

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[5] See, e.g., Ferejohn and Kuklinski (1990). Other work is more pessimistic about what can be accomplished by way of heuristics and signals. See Kuklinski and Quirk (2000).
[6] See Gilens (2012).

representatives do not just defer to the beliefs and preferences of the ignorant masses. Some worry about this from a perspective of democratic control or concerns about elite domination. I want to stress that epistemic peril lies this way, too.

The argument in this section goes against the standard justifications for systems of electoral representative government. The use of elected representatives is typically defended on epistemic and agential grounds. Elected representatives embody a kind of compromise: allowing for the "refining and enlarging" of constituent views and preferences, while having political institutions that are not completely untethered from what is in the interests of the citizens who are represented. Through the mechanism of electoral accountability, systems of elected representatives require political officials to pay attention to the interests and beliefs and preferences of those people on whose behalf they are supposed to be governing.

The problem is that for electoral representative systems of government these epistemic and agential capacities are only going to be present if there is what I call *meaningful* accountability. Responsiveness is tied to accountability—we expect electoral democratic systems of government to do relatively well by responsiveness because those systems have the particular mechanisms of accountability that they do. But responsiveness is tied only to meaningful accountability. Meaningful accountability is distinct from accountability simpliciter in that the former, but not the latter, is connected to *informed monitoring* and *evaluation* practices. Furthermore, without meaningful accountability, we should expect to see high levels of political capture, which will in turn imperil both epistemic and agential capacities. Let me fill in this story a bit more.[7]

Accountability through elections requires—at least—free, regular, competitive, and fair elections. Candidate A runs on a platform of doing X, Y, and Z, in opposition to some Candidate B, who runs on a platform that is at least somewhat different from A's. If A's platform is more popular, she will likely win the election. After being elected, she will have many decisions to make while in office. These decisions will be monitored and evaluated by her constituents, perhaps aided by news media of various kinds, and the candidate will be held accountable for decisions made while in office when she next comes up for re-election. If elections are not free, regular, competitive, and fair, these mechanisms of accountability will fail.

Even in well-established electoral democracies, there are familiar concerns about electoral systems on the grounds that they are not adequately free, competitive, or fair. But even if these concerns were addressed, serious problems would still arise.

Meaningful accountability requires not just the ability to "vote them out," but also the ability to do this based on good information, on actual evidence that bears on the quality of representation. This requires *informed* monitoring and evaluation. This monitoring of representatives can be thwarted by ignorance about what one's representative is doing or ignorance about a particular political issue. And even if one knows what one's representative is doing with respect to some issue, one may have no idea whether what one's representative is doing is a good thing in general or whether what she is doing will be good for oneself. Each of these kinds of ignorance

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[7] The argument in this section draws on Guerrero (2014).

can undermine the ability of ordinary citizens to engage in meaningful monitoring and evaluation of the decisions of their representatives. If I don't know what you've done, I can't hold you accountable for it. If I don't know anything about the issues or how to evaluate what you have done, I can't hold you accountable for voting yes, rather than no, or vice versa.

Here is the basic concern: elected political positions for which the elected officials are not meaningfully accountable to their constituents will be used to advance the interests of the socioeconomically powerful. Let us refer to this phenomenon as *capture*: an elected official is captured if he or she uses his or her position to advance the interests of the powerful, rather than to create policy that is responsive or good (when doing so would conflict with the interests of the powerful). The suggestion is that in the absence of meaningful accountability, we should expect to see high levels of political capture.

Political capture is bad from an epistemic and agential vantage point. The agential worries are clear enough and a familiar source of concern and disapproval: whatever elected officials believe about issues and policy options, they will be inclined to act so as to benefit the powerful interests who can keep them in power. On this view of capture, it is entirely possible that the politically powerful know exactly what they are doing, who it will harm, who it will benefit, and they are going ahead and acting anyway. Doubtlessly this does describe some captured elected officials.

But a different worry—one that is perhaps more pernicious and difficult to detect and address—is that captured elected representatives really do come to believe that the best policies are X, Y, and Z—where X, Y, and Z are also the ones preferred by the elite. One route to this result is through motivated reasoning of a kind that everyone is subject to—we are very good at coming to rationalize and justify the actions we take. But another route to this result, one that is not incompatible with the first, is through systematic epistemic distortion that results from capture.

Focusing just on the epistemic side of things, captured representatives and institutions will typically have a perverse set of priorities which lead them to fail to obtain or to generate relevant evidence; to seek out testimony only from certain groups of people; to engage in distorted and selective reliance on and attention to experts; to receive and disseminate misinformation if doing so is to the advantage of the capturing entities (as it often is); to discount or ignore relevant bodies of evidence and knowledge; to ignore evidence and knowledge when acting if doing so better suits the interests of the capturing entities; and to act with an unduly limited focus on the issues and problems that are most significant to the capturing entities, rather than to the broader political community. There will be powerful incentives to ignore or just not seek out relevant evidence and sources of possibly relevant evidence, to generate and disseminate misinformation that serves the interests of the capturing entities, to consult and invoke expertise only asymmetrically (when doing so serves the interests of the capturing entities) and to otherwise ignore or undermine expert knowledge, and to act to advance the interests of the powerful even in those cases in which relevant evidence inclines toward other decisions. And we should expect that technocratic and purportedly epistemically useful institutions within the broader system—legislative hearings with expert testimony, legislatively created administrative agencies or task forces—will also be effectively captured and turned into engines of

ignorance as a result. Rather than improving the epistemic functioning of these institutions, they will mostly serve the ends of justifying the policies and decisions favored by the capturing entities, providing a veneer of epistemic respectability or inevitability to the decisions being made.

The basic argument is simple. Voter ignorance undermines meaningful electoral accountability. An absence of meaningful electoral accountability results in capture. And capture results in what might well be described as epistemic disaster.

This argument might be contested. The hope, however, is that the argument articulates a familiar set of concerns about electoral representative systems, albeit in more explicitly epistemic guise. These concerns are brought to the fore when one thinks about how little one knows about most of what one's elected officials do, what they spend their time investigating, who they spend their time listening to, who drafts the legislation they end up supporting, who has their ear. Or when one thinks about how complex some issues are, how much of what one believes about those issues is a result of information provided by a few powerful media institutions, how much money powerful interests have at stake, and how hard it is to create rules to adequately monitor the influence of these powerful interests and the way in which their actions and the practices of elected representatives might be distorting the epistemic environment.

This is one central concern about the sensibility of electoral representative institutions, although it is not usually framed as an epistemic concern. We are ignorant, so there is no meaningful accountability, so we should expect high levels of capture, which imperils the sensibility of electoral representative institutions. They are perhaps sensible and rational if we focus only on the interests of the most powerful members of the political community (although I doubt even that). They are insensible and irrational if we include the interests of the rest of the political community and the rest of the world.

But there are also many other threats to the epistemic capacities of electoral representative systems of government. Many of these require mass ignorance as a background condition, but they connect in different and specific ways to other features of elections as well. Let me turn to these.

2.3 Electoral Incentives and Short-term Focus

Elections lead elected officials to focus on the near term—on those problems that they can get immediate credit for addressing, or which they will be blamed for not addressing before the next election. Given that the urgency of political problems is not simply a function of their near-term proximity, this fact about elections has significant consequences for the sensibility of electoral representative government. It affects which problems get attention and are the focus of political action. But it also leads to significant epistemic distortion in what voters and elected representatives come to believe about the problems that we face.

Begin by noticing an important background fact about the modern world: many of the most urgent problems we face in the contemporary world are ones that we face together, at least in the sense that there is a general acknowledgment that individual

action will be insufficient or is unlikely to occur without some effort at group or collective coordination through political and legal institutions, whether at the national or international level. Modern political problems are also complex and information intensive in a way that makes it difficult for members of the political community to have informed beliefs and preferences about those problems, given their limited time and knowledge. Political problems with long time horizons—problems the adverse consequences of which will not be apparent in the near future—will often have the following additional features:

1. it is opaque to most people whether actions taken now have solved or prevented the problem;
2. it is possible for people to deny the existence of the problem without flouting evidence that is readily available to all (including non-experts);
3. it is possible for people to suggest that some as-yet unidentified solution to the problem will emerge over time without anything different being done now;
4. present costs will be salient, but future benefits will not be.

If there is a problem with these features, then mechanisms of electoral accountability will fare poorly at producing good decisions with respect to addressing that problem. Electoral representative government will show very low levels of sensibility in their response to such problems.

Here is why: elections lead elected officials to focus on those problems for which they can get or claim credit for addressing (or for which they will be punished if they fail to address them), and to ignore or put on the back burner those problems with a longer horizon or those solutions for which it is harder to get credit.

Arguably, the most urgent issue we face is climate change, and it is a problem that demands political solutions in order to address what appears to be a complex collective action problem. But many of the worst effects of climate change will not be realized for decades, and so elected politicians are unlikely to pay the short-term political cost (due to unpopular taxes on fossil fuels, limits on vehicles, etc.), given that they will not see the longer-term political benefits. So, even if there are clear steps that need to be taken, many elected officials will not take them.

This might be an instance of faring poorly by sensibility due to agential failings—the problem is known to the elected officials, they believe it is a problem, and yet they do nothing because of the short-term costs to their electoral chances of doing something. But, along with this possibility, there is the real possibility that motivated reasoning, efforts at misinformation and disinformation, and even just the investigative priorities of elected representatives lead to significant *epistemic* failings.

On the disinformation front, for example, it is important to note that for problems with long time horizons, it is comparatively easy to deny the existence of the problem, or to question its reality or etiology in other ways, even when the best evidence suggests otherwise. The best evidence may often be technical and complex, and—as bearing on a somewhat distant projection—far from certain in its implications. Furthermore, even if the whole population believes that the problem is a serious one, it will be possible to try to convince people that one is doing something to address the problem, or that other non-political action will be sufficient to address the

problem. If there are costs to actually addressing the problem, costs that will be salient to all, then elected officials will have electoral incentives to compete by avoiding incurring these costs, even if this will make everyone worse off in the long run.

One very 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. Elections generate powerful incentives for political representatives to focus on the short term, at great cost to the overall sensibility of our political institutions.

2.4 Electoral Dynamics and Emotional Distortion

Elections introduce distinctive ways of thinking and talking about political issues. As noted above, there are concerns about misinformation introduced by the most powerful in order to convince us of what is most useful for us to believe, given their interests. There are also distinctive problems of elections that are made possible by widespread voter ignorance. One such problem is that certain issues—crime, war, terrorism—are such that they easily and powerfully engage our emotions through our concerns about violence and safety. For these issues, it is relatively easy to manipulate the electorate by manipulating our emotions, our attention, and our corresponding beliefs—particularly using television advertising and television programming, charged memes, and various forms of social media. Furthermore, when a person does not have a lot of information about a political problem, it is easier to manipulate that person into believing something through a combination of misinformation and emotional manipulation. These policy problems—such as criminal justice policy and national defense policy—generate strong emotional reactions, claim to have a certain kind of urgent or emergency status, and have truly vivid and terrible worst-case outcomes. For these problems, emotional manipulation is both particularly easy and particularly effective. This manipulation can make us believe that something is a bigger concern than it really is, can make us focus on a few issues while ignoring many others, can shape and direct our investigative and research priorities, can lead us to rely and seek out the testimony of some while ignoring the testimony of others—all leading to epistemic distortion and error.

Of course, elections are not responsible for our vulnerability to emotional manipulation and the error and epistemic distortion that might result from that manipulation. But elections do provide a powerful incentive for candidates to exploit that vulnerability. Because candidates for elected office know that we are broadly ignorant of policy details and that we find detailed policy discussion boring, they aim to connect with readily graspable, emotionally resonant issues and claims. We have limited attention spans, and they want to capture our attention to maximum electoral advantage. Emotional responses, rather than dispassionate consideration of evidence, appear to drive much of our thinking about politics.[8] Thus, issue discussion

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[8] For a particularly provocative discussion, see Westen (2007).

is skewed and distorted in ways that are not justifiable epistemically, and which lead to skewed and distorted policy priorities once elected officials are in office. This results in bad, insensible policy choices, but it also results in a warped information environment, in which highly charged cases receive an undue proportion of political attention and discussion, leading to widespread false beliefs about the severity of various problems, the actual harm done from various causes, and so on.

It also encourages the creation and success of political information and news as entertainment and titillation. If there is a relatively free market in sources of information, and if some of them rely on emotional engagement, entertainment, and focus on stories that may be non-representative, but which are highly charged, then those sources will crowd out other, more epistemically responsible sources of information. This is true generally, a point made by Neil Postman (1985), among others, but it is plausibly exacerbated when a significant portion of the news is driven by electoral politics and the purported need for information relevant to electoral choice.

2.5 Electoral Dynamics and In-group/Out-group Thinking

As noted above, as voters, we are ignorant of the detailed policy issues and even of the detailed stances of various candidates on those issues. It is time-consuming, difficult, and tedious to pay attention to the details. On the other hand, we enjoy and easily comprehend the character drama, the horse race, the scandals, and the inspirational candidate. Those are entertaining, and we all can have a relatively informed opinion about at least some aspects of a *person*, just from paying a bit of attention. And we are highly susceptible to in-group and out-group thinking. So, we identify our candidate or our party, and they become our team. We root for them as we might a sports team and we adopt whatever positions are adopted by our team, rather than considering the evidence or making a decision about which position to support in light of the evidence. We antagonize the other side, reduce them to a caricature of their worst elements, and come to view them as the enemy—meaning it is much less likely that we will take them seriously as epistemic sources. We filter evidence, experts, and media consumption through this lens, letting in (mostly) only what we agree with. Group attachments and social identities drive our thinking about politics, rather than the other way around.[9]

This basic story is the one offered—and supported in empirical detail—by Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels (2016). If this account is correct, then the electoral process itself is contributing to distorting political discussion and the way in which individuals process what evidence they do encounter. Couple this with the fact that elected officials then will respond to these features of the electoral process, and there is a real concern about the sensibility of the attendant political discussion, processing of evidence, response to expertise, and political action based on this epistemic process.

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[9] For further discussion of these issues, see Michael Hannon and Jason Brennan's contributions to this volume in Chapters 16 and 8, respectively.

It is worth stressing the epistemic consequences of this kind of in-group/out-group sorting that is the direct result of elections. Political candidates competing for votes want to rally us to vote for them. They can do this by offering popular votes and by getting us excited enough to actually vote. Importantly, they need to make it clear why we should bother to vote, and why we should vote for *them*. To do this, it helps to promote the view not just that one has better policy ideas, but also that the other side is *fundamentally* misguided—morally and epistemically. One hypothesis is that, in response to this electoral incentive, candidates—and thus, indirectly, elections—encourage us to focus on "deep disagreements," disagreements that are clustered, not rationally resolvable, borne of underlying disagreement about normative principles and the epistemic quality of various sources, evidence, and methods.[10] Focus on these kinds of disagreements might plausibly lead to what Michael Lynch calls "tribal" or group-based intellectual arrogance: an implicit or even explicit commitment to the epistemic "unimprovability" of one's own worldview by the evidence or experience of those in the opposing group.[11] We see those on the other side as not just in disagreement with us, but also as fundamentally out-of-touch with reality, relying on bogus experts and unreliable testifiers, and equipped with a deeply-flawed moral compass that leads only to immorality and systematic moral error. If the other side is really like *that*, then we really must make sure that our side wins. But if we come to believe the story—that the other side is fundamentally misguided, both epistemically and morally—then half of the political community becomes almost epistemically useless to us, discounted as testifiers, potential sources of knowledge and evidence, along with anything they might be associated with. And this is not just a theoretical or anecdotal worry—there is empirical evidence of this kind of epistemic effect.[12]

2.6 Elections, Epistemic Diversity, and Standpoint Theory

Aristotle said that elections were oligarchic, not democratic. Here is something that he did not explicitly say, but which is true: to succeed in electoral contests, a person will generally need to be some combination of famous, of high social status, and/or wealthy. Elected representative institutions will not be a microcosm of the general population. They will be much closer to a microcosm of the elite. We should not be surprised, then, to see that 53 of the 535 members of Congress have a net worth of over $7 million (as of 2015); 130 of the 535 members of Congress have a net worth of over $2 million; 80 per cent are male; 84 per cent are white, and more than half are lawyers or businesspeople.[13] This has significant epistemic implications.

The epistemic implications are due both to (a) the investigative interests and priorities of the elite and (b) the limitations of the epistemic position of the elite. Members of the elite will have little personal interest in or experience with many of

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[10] See Jeroen de Ridder's discussion of these issues in his Chapter 12 "Deep Disagreement and Political Polarization" in this volume.

[11] See his "Political Disagreement, Arrogance, and the Pursuit of Truth," Chapter 13 in this volume.

[12] See, e.g., Marks and Sharot (2019).   [13] See Petersen (2012).

the urgent problems faced by the non-elite. They will not know about these issues, they will be less inclined to learn more about these issues, and they may not know where to begin to learn about them (whose opinions should be sought, to whom they should listen, and so on). They may also be overconfident in thinking that they do understand these political issues, even when they do not.

Drawing on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Nancy Hartsock (1987), Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Sandra Harding (1993), Charles Mills (2007), and others, we might invoke forms of standpoint theory to note that what one is able to notice and explain may be partly a function of one's social position. For example, those who are oppressed often have to learn in much greater detail about their oppressors than the reverse—at least in terms. It is worth stressing that the knowledge possessed need not be exhaustive social scientific knowledge regarding the full complex structural causes of oppression and social inequality. The knowledge may be much more microscale, situational, social, and emotional, concerning how people do or are likely to behave under various circumstances, how certain actions make people feel, what subtle obstacles might exist to limit a policy's effectiveness, and so on. Furthermore, the better epistemic position of the relatively oppressed and marginalized might be merely comparative. Mills, for example, discusses ways in which whiteness in America can be associated with systematic misperception, due to cultivated "white ignorance" about all manner of things, including historical facts about race and discrimination and injustice and oppression. Harding, Hartsock, and others make similar points with respect to understanding gender-based oppression.

If there is merit in the standpoint theory argument, and if elections lead to routine selection of the elite and against the selection of the relatively disempowered, then we should expect significant epistemic distortion in the views of those elected. If we combine those epistemic errors with a general lack of concern or regard for the interests of the disempowered—either because they just do not identify with those interests or share them, or because the disempowered offer less electoral payoff— then we should expect to see insufficient investigation and bias in whose testimony is sought and heeded.

Even leaving aside standpoint theory, it is clear that there is something epistemically limited about a legislature composed of people who, disproportionately when compared to the population as a whole, have no firsthand knowledge of being an engineer, police officer, nurse, construction worker, waitress, cashier, plumber, social worker, scientist, single-parent, non-native English speaker, disabled person, openly gay person, community college student, welfare recipient, woman, African-American, Hispanic-American, Muslim-American, first-generation immigrant, and so on. This is simply a point about the knowledge one is likely to have come by based on one's life experiences, the evidence one is likely to have encountered. By using elections that disproportionately select for a white, male, wealthy, lawyer/businessperson elite, we are losing out on much of the available knowledge about the world.

2.7 Summary

Above, I suggested that sensibility was a significant political value, and that there were two distinct components of sensibility: (1) appreciating (or understanding or

knowing) the world as it is, and (2) responding to the world in light of this appreciation. In this section, I have raised a number of distinct but interrelated (and arguably, compounding) concerns about the sensibility of electoral representative systems, particularly focused on epistemic concerns.

It is also worth stressing that although there is reason to be worried about the sensibility of electoral political institutions in the U.S., this does not mean that everything is awful. It is not. Modern electoral democratic governments do many things well, even if imperfectly. It is also true that modern electoral representative governments collect an extraordinary amount of money in taxes, so it should be no surprise that some things get done. Still, it would be a mistake to think that electoral representative democracy is a disaster from a perspective of sensibility.

That concession made, I think we can do better. In the next part of the chapter, I will introduce and discuss what I call a "lottocratic" system of representative government. In discussing that system, I will focus in particular on potential epistemic advantages of lottocracy.

3. Considering the Sensibility of Lottocratic Representative Government

3.1 The Basics of the Lottocratic System

The kind of institution that I am interested in is unusual in that it uses selection of political officials by lottery, rather than by election. There is some historical precedent for this kind of method, referred to commonly as "sortition." For example, in ancient Athens, three of the four major governmental institutions were populated by people chosen by lottery. More recently, Citizens' Assemblies (in which citizens were chosen at random to serve on the assembly, and in which citizens heard from experts prior to coming up with their own proposals) have been involved in formal structures of legislative and constitutional decision-making in Canada, Iceland, Ireland, Mongolia, and California.

The kind of institution that I want to consider as a possible improvement is an instance of what I call a "lottocratic" legislative institution.[14] The key features of lottocratic legislative institutions are these:

1. *Single Issue*: there are many single-issue legislative bodies, with each legislative institution focussing just on one policy area or sub-area. Each could have a standing role in addressing an issue (perhaps as one node in a network, of, say, 20 such single-issue legislatures, covering each of, say, agriculture, immigration, health care, trade, education, energy, etc.), or it could be a one-off institution, brought into existence to make a specific policy decision.

2. *Lottery Selection*: the members of each single-issue legislature are chosen by *lottery* from the relevant political jurisdiction.

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[14] This part of the chapter draws on Guerrero (2014) and Guerrero (2021).

3. *Learning Phase*: the members of the single-issue legislature hear from a variety of *experts* and *stakeholders* on the relevant topic at the beginning of (and perhaps at various stages throughout) each decision-making session.

4. *Community Engagement*: 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 (a) have the capacity to directly enact policy or (b) have the capacity to enact policy if it is co-authorized jointly with other single-issue legislatures.

There are many ways in which one might implement a political system that had institutions with these features. For shorthand, I refer to these *s*ingle-*i*ssue, *l*ottery-selected *le*gislatures as "SILLs."

There are many questions regarding the details of these systems, their scale, scope, size, and the way in which they will operate in the details. These are very important; indeed, I get into them at much greater length in a forthcoming book.[15]

In what follows, let us consider one version of a lottocratic system, imagining it in one particularly vivid and relatively simple instantiation in the U.S. government, so as to help us consider the comparative question looking at the epistemic merits of standard electoral representative systems in the U.S. So, here are some of the additional basic features of the lottocratic system I will consider.

Imagine that there will be 20 different SILLs, divided by issue area (agriculture and nutrition, education, energy, health, transportation, military and defense, environmental protection, communication, regulation of markets, trade, immigration, science and technology, workplace safety, etc.). This SILL network replaces the U.S. Congress in the functional role of creating most law and policy, but with the possibility of delegation and supplemental regulation and enforcement through legislatively created administrative agencies that are overseen by a combination of courts and SILLs themselves.

Each SILL consists of 450 people, chosen at random, to serve 3-year terms, with 150 new people starting each year and 150 people finishing their term each year. All adult citizens in the political jurisdiction would be eligible to be selected.

For most issues, a truly random lottery would be conducted. For a select few issues, efforts would be made to ensure a demographically representative selection, using stratified sampling along various dimensions if necessary.

People would not be legally required to serve if selected, but the financial incentives would be considerable (perhaps something like 120 per cent of a person's normal yearly income, with a floor of $100,000), efforts would be made to accommodate family and work schedules (including providing relocation expenses and legal protections so that individuals or their families are not penalized professionally for serving). This significant salary would be contingent upon a SILL member not having prohibited contact with potentially interested people or entities while serving on the SILL, not receiving money or other forms of influence or benefit

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[15] Guerrero (2021).

before or after SILL service (as well as agreeing to be monitored for continued compliance).

There would be some mechanism of removing people for bad behavior—failing to attend meetings, speaking out of turn, showing up intoxicated or otherwise incapable of participating fully—but this mechanism should be structured so as to protect those who simply are unlikable or who have divergent views.

SILL members would be instructed to do what they think is best with regard to the particular policy question, after having heard from experts, stakeholders, members of the community, and other SILL members. They would not be required to see themselves as "representatives" of any particular community or group.

Each SILL would meet for two legislative sessions each calendar year, and the structure for each session would be something like this: agenda setting, learning phase with expert presentations, community consultation, deliberation/discussion, drafting, revising, and voting.

3.1.1 Agenda Setting

The SILLs will decide the agenda for the next session by a process of agenda setting. This process should have some balance of input from those already involved with the issue (experts, stakeholders, activists) in addition to the general public, perhaps through sophisticated deliberative-polling and political party organization. The members of the SILL will take this combination of in-person proposals and polling information and vote for those items to be put on the agenda for the next legislative session.

3.1.2 Learning Phase

For each item on the agenda, the SILL will hear from experts, providing general background and specific information relevant to the issue. Accordingly, there will be a process by which a person is allowed to speak to a SILL as an expert. This requires both a process to determine whether a person counts as an expert (the *qualification assessment* process) and a process to determine which qualified experts are given an opportunity to speak (the *expert selection* process). Expertise might be recognized based on advanced degrees; years of professional experience; formal professional credentials from institutions with national or international accreditation; publication of research in independent, peer-reviewed journals; and so on. A different, but also important kind of expertise is the expertise that comes from experience, including occupational experience or lived experience, such as the experience of being a disabled person (particularly in the context of making policy that primarily affects disabled people). Whatever specific process is used, experts will need to explain the basis of their expertise, describe their credentials (if relevant), and disclose any actual or possible conflicts of interest due to sources of funding or employment. There are significant concerns and complications here. I discuss these issues at length elsewhere.[16]

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[16] Guerrero (2017), Guerrero (2021).

3.1.3 Community Consultation, Deliberation, Drafting, Voting

After hearing from experts, SILL members will begin the process of developing and deciding upon legislative proposals, and possibly eventually enacting a proposal. For most issues, this process should include consultation with non-members, either virtually (online) or through having the members return to the geographic area from which they came, and to hold town-hall style meetings, in which individual members or multi-member panels talk through the items on the agenda, talk about what the experts told them, and solicit questions and comments from those in attendance. There are two main purposes to this: (1) to inform non-members about the issues and proposals under discussion, and (2) to gather information from members of the community.

The details of the deliberation and consultation phases will matter a great deal. There is good evidence that group deliberation can go awry in a number of ways. Deliberation in the full-group and sub-groups would take place at various stages, but in a carefully structured way to ensure equal levels of participation, to avoid groupthink (through the use of red-teaming and other counter-advocacy measures), and to prevent pressure toward consensus. There is a considerable amount of empirical work on how to structure deliberation so as to avoid group polarization and to encourage the maximal epistemic contribution from all of the members of the group.[17] A full discussion of the epistemic capacities of lottocratic institutions would require a detailed discussion of the structure of the deliberation and consultation phases, but I will not go further into those issues here.

SILL members will then work together to draft proposals. Some of this might be modeled on how the drafting of legislation happens in other legislative bodies, with initial drafts or competing drafts written by different committees within the SILL. As with other legislatures, there might be drafting aides and consultants on hand who have expertise in drafting legislation, and who can help spot concerns of the formal, rather than substantive, variety. There could also be a period during which drafts are made public and comments are solicited from the broader community.

There would then be a process by which proposals were put to a vote. In most cases, the votes would be aggregated to determine the result. In some cases, the votes would be put into a hat and ten would be chosen at random, with the winning result being determined by seeing which option was most supported by the ten randomly chosen ballots. There is no executive veto of SILL supported legislation.

3.2 Reasons to Expect Comparative Epistemic Merit of Lottocratic Institutions

With these admittedly sketchy details of the lottocratic system in view, we can consider some of the reasons why this kind of institution might do comparatively well in epistemic terms.

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[17] For discussion, see Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014), Myers (2017).

3.2.1 Addressing the Problem of Mass Ignorance

Perhaps the central problem for systems of electoral political representation is that voters do not know enough about political issues and about what their political representatives are doing. As noted above, one set of responses simply gives up on robust, egalitarian democratic norms, and suggests moving in an epistocratic or technocratic direction. The lottocratic system attempts to retain the core democratic elements, but also to address the problem of mass ignorance. This is done both through the single-issue focus, lowering the epistemic burden, and by having certain randomly selected citizens go through a learning phase where they become comparatively better informed about the relevant topic. This would substantially improve the epistemic position of those ordinary citizens involved in political decision-making, while not giving up on core egalitarian political values (everyone would have a literally equal chance of having political power). Indeed, the learning phase by itself, focussing on a single-issue domain, would be a huge improvement over the way in which expertise currently enters democratic politics.

A worry some have is that randomly chosen citizens would simply be of inadequate intellectual capacity to make epistemically responsible policy. There is a concern—felt more powerfully by some than by others—that entrusting significant policy decisions to a randomly selected body of citizens would be a disaster, much worse than delegation to elected representatives, and a disaster because of the epistemic limitations of ordinary citizens. Perhaps electoral politics has its problems, but at least those selected have to be at least somewhat intelligent, well-educated, diligent, competent, hard-working—or so the thought goes.

There are different possible responses to this concern. The extent to which one is worried about citizen competence may well depend on one's life experiences and background. Here's a conjecture: people who have spent all of their time in "elite" institutions tend to think that elites are capable and competent and that others are not; not just that non-elites have not had the education and training, but that even if they had, they would not be capable or competent.

I don't share this worry, but I think that is a result of my personal history. I grew up attending unexceptional public schools in Washington State. Two-thirds of the people in my high school did not go on to any kind of college or university; almost no one left the state for college. But I feel confident that the vast majority of my classmates would do just fine serving on a SILL. Indeed, having then attended Harvard for college, I would say that the top third of the students in my unexceptional high school—around 200 people, many of whom did not go on to college—could have been swapped in for the bottom fifth of the students in my class at Harvard, without any significant difference in general competence or aptitude, perhaps after a semester or a year of adjustment and training to make up some of the difference in previous preparation. But one might be skeptical of this.

For those who remain concerned about competence, one kind of response is to present the many institutional solutions that might increase competence:

- creating *incentives* for the full range of citizens to participate (so that one does not get a skewed sample as with juries)

- setting *reasonable minimum thresholds* for the particular policymaking context (e.g. requiring a high school diploma or the equivalent, or even much more education for certain technical domains)
- *improving public education* so that the "worst off" from a competence perspective are relatively more competent.

If we have done these things and the competence question remains, there are a few other responses.

First, one can treat the question as a quality threshold question and argue that most citizens who might be selected actually would be competent. Second, one can focus on the question as a comparative question, and attempt to highlight the incompetence of elected officials. Third, one can argue that elected officials are perhaps more competent in some sense, but that this is outweighed or undermined by the ways in which they are otherwise epistemically undermined as a result of the various considerations enumerated above. Fourth, one can argue that randomly chosen citizens might actually do better than elected representatives, even if they are of lower average competence, because the randomly chosen members of SILLs are likely to include individuals with a greater range of life experiences and vocational skills than an electoral representative system, which may improve the quality of decision-making due to improvements in the evidential and intellectual diversity of the group. Fifth, a possible side-benefit of the lottery-selection is what we might call the "humility of the randomly chosen." As Barbara Goodwin (1992) puts the idea: "those allotted high office would comport themselves more humbly…no one could boast of his/her elevation or advancement as being personally merited." This might provide a reason to think that those randomly selected feel some responsibility to demonstrate epistemic humility, to pay more attention to the issue at hand (and to leave political posturing to the side), and to engage more fully with the questions of what would be best and what people really care about. In the comparative assessment with elected officials, all of these might suggest greater relative quality in terms of the competence of the randomly chosen citizens.

All these strategies have promise, and they do not compete; indeed, the five together may be more plausible than any one in isolation. A full effort to develop these responses requires empirical investigation, but it is worth noting that it is not obvious, for example, that the average member of Congress is better able to understand technical policy issues.[18]

Finally, a salutary side effect of using lottocratic institutions is that it makes evident the need for good public education for all citizens, not just for the wealthy or politically connected members of the citizenry. It may be true that, at the moment, a U.S. public high school education does not prepare one to be a helpful and engaged citizen in the creation of law and policy. But this is something that should itself be the object of reform, not a reason to reject a proposed reform to the political system.

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[18] See Griffin (2013).

3.2.2 The Relative Difficulty of Capture

A second thing to stress is that the lottocratic system makes capture considerably more difficult. If one of the significant problems regarding the epistemic quality of electoral representative systems is that they are consistently captured, leading them to behave in epistemically unjustifiable ways, then preventing or reducing capture may lead to a considerable epistemic improvement. There are several reasons to expect that capture will be more difficult.

First, random selection, rather than election, makes a huge difference to preventing capture, by eliminating a central point of potential influence. In general, lotteries, if conducted fairly, excel at preventing undue influence in the selection of representatives. SILL members are chosen at random and do not need to run for office, so there will be no straightforward way for powerful interests to influence who becomes a SILL member or to ensure that the only viable candidates are those whose interests are congenial to their own.

Second, because there is no need to raise funds for re-election, it would be easier to monitor and restrict members of the SILL to ensure that they are not having contact with or receiving funds from powerful interests either during or after their service. At least, if this is possible with juries in high profile cases, it should be possible in the case of SILLs.

Third, by paying SILL members a high salary but conditioning that salary on their not being bought off, this makes the price that would be required to buy off a SILL member much higher (*much* more than $1 million per year, for example), and should dramatically limit the people who might be interested in taking a bribe (since they have to be willing to risk not receiving a definite $500,000 a year for a chance at receiving some larger amount).

Fourth, since SILL membership rotates regularly, the cost of "buying off" particular SILL members would be higher, even if it could somehow be accomplished. It would not be possible to capture politicians who were virtually unbeatable (from partisan districts with incumbency advantages) and count on them being an ally for 30 or more years.

A concern about lottocratic institutions and capture is that powerful interests might try to influence who is identified as a qualified expert and who is selected as an expert to speak. This is a concern. There are a few possible responses. First, if there are non-political hurdles to becoming an expert in a particular field (advanced degrees from nationally and internationally accredited educational institutions, peer-reviewed publication, and so on) and if there are disclosure requirements mandating that experts disclose sources of funding, employment, and so on, this concern might be lessened. Second, there can be institutional mechanisms that make capture of experts more challenging—such as having the expert identification and selection processes happen in part by the accredited community of experts nominating or certifying some individuals as candidate experts for the SILL process. To achieve capture, then, would require not just buying off an individual, but an entire field. Third, there could be institutional mechanisms, that would lead to the creation of an expert database, with the experts who speak at any particular SILL learning phase being chosen at random from this pool of experts. Of course, there is a worry about

the politicization of expertise under a system that uses experts in this way, or in any way. This is a battle that is important for any political system, whether lottocratic, electoral representative, or technocratic. With this kind of system, there is at least some hope that the process will be *relatively* transparent and non-partisan, although it is important that those are just comparative claims.

3.2.3 The Elimination of Electoral Incentives that Result in a Short-term Bias

A third reason we might expect to see comparative epistemic virtue from lottocratic institutions comes from removing electoral incentives and the short-term thinking they encourage. Since lottery-selected individuals do not have to worry about re-election or being able to claim credit, they can take a longer view and research and implement good ideas that might not bear fruit until much further down the road. Of course, they still might not do so, since we can all be prone to near-term biases. But at least they would not have an additional incentive in the wrong direction, leading to incentives to cultivate false beliefs and misinformation.

3.2.4 Deeper and More Extended Engagement with the Issues Undermines the Efficacy of Purely Emotional Appeals and Rhetoric

One of the concerns about the epistemic quality of electoral representative systems was that elections, conducted against a background of inevitably high levels of voter ignorance, tend to focus on simple appeals attempting to resonate with powerful emotions and attitudes: anger, fear, disgust, distrust, hope, pride, and so on. Emotions can, of course, be epistemically very useful—they can be important guides and indicators regarding crucial features of the world, including the moral world. That said, they can also be overpowering and are subject to manipulation.

One advantage of the lottocratic institutions is that the individuals chosen at random will have a chance to engage with the relevant issues at considerable length. This engagement may include powerful emotions and emotional discussions, but it will also include significant stretches of less "hot" engagement, allowing for more extended thinking and processing alongside whatever emotional engagement takes place. This kind of engagement will be fundamentally different than what one gets from television advertisements and three-minute news segments, all of which are intended to excite, enrage, and entertain, rather than to inform or to result in deeper, more nuanced, and more sophisticated understanding of the issues. The epistemic benefits of this engagement should be clear. And SILL members do not have to worry about looking "soft" on crime or national defense or military policy, nor do they have to worry about doing something—even if that something makes no sense—in response to high salience events.

3.2.5 Focus on Single-issues and Extended Engagement Might Reduce In-group/Out-group Dynamics

The structure of modern politics in the U.S. is framed around the candidates of two dominant political parties. As Achen and Bartels (2016) demonstrate, partisan loyalty and in-group/out-group thinking deeply affect almost every aspect of the electoral process and the political participation of citizens. In particular, it dramatically

affects how we evaluate evidence, what we believe about politicians and political issues, and what issues we take to be most important and in need of urgent response.

There are a number of reasons to think that the lottocratic system would result in an epistemic improvement due to the reduction in in-group/out-group dynamics. First, without elections, we lose the horse-race element, the explicit confrontation of us versus them, the sense that "our team" will either be stably dominated or dominantly in power for four or however many years. We would not have clearly defined teams, at least not in the same way.

Second, the focus would shift away from candidate personalities and toward policy issues and policymaking. We would no longer have to respond to our policy ignorance by trying to pick our favorite person of the bunch. This is arguably a rational response to electoral politics in the face of almost complete ignorance of the issues, but it is made unnecessary once the focus is not on deciding which candidate to entrust with power and is instead on deciding which policy would be a good one to enact.

Third, moving from a generalist legislative process to a single-issue legislative process opens up places for us to identify issues on which we agree, moving us out of the situation where all political and electoral attention is concentrated on those few issues which most deeply divide us. This also will help reduce the introduction of misinformation relating to these issues, as there will be no incentive to maintain and reinforce our political divisions.

Fourth, if lottocratic institutions make it possible for us to move beyond elite capture and control of political institutions, then we may see other benefits in terms of in-group/out-group dynamics. If part of the story of our apparent division is a story of manufactured conflict, where the most powerful members of society keep us from working together by creating this sense of two teams (and handing each team a set of policy positions and political candidates that are basically agreeable to the most powerful), then lottery-selection might be a way of breaking down these divisions. This is good for political community, certainly, but it also is good for repairing our epistemic community, allowing us to relearn how to trust and rely on each other, removing the incentives to denigrate the rationality and evidential sources of others in our community, and helping us work together to build the investigative and research institutions that can help us understand and address the most urgent problems we face.

3.2.6 Random-sampling Leads to Better Descriptive Representativeness which Leads to Improved Epistemic Quality of Decision-making

In this chapter I argued that there were significant concerns about the epistemic capacities of electoral representative institutions due to the elected representatives being a highly non-representative sample of the whole. This meant both that knowledge from diversity of experience and background would be more limited, and that the set of interests of the group would align poorly with the set of interests of the whole political community.

In the lottocratic system, things are exactly the reverse. Because individuals are chosen at random from the jurisdiction, they are more likely to be an ideologically,

demographically, and socioeconomically representative sample of the people in the jurisdiction than those individuals who are capable of successfully running for office. Unlike with electoral representative systems, a descriptively proportional number of people in the room really will have firsthand knowledge of being an engineer, police officer, primary caretaker of children, nurse, construction worker, waitress, cashier, plumber, social worker, truck driver, scientist, single-parent, non-native English speaker, disabled person, working-class person, openly gay person, community college student, welfare recipient, woman, African-American, Hispanic-American, Muslim-American, first-generation immigrant, and so on.

Better descriptive representativeness does not ensure that SILLs will create policy that is on better epistemic foundations, but it does mean that the range of perspectives involved in making policy will be more similar to the range of perspectives of the polity as a whole, which makes an improved epistemic vantage point likely. It also makes it more likely that those in the room will be thinking about the likely outcomes in terms of their full effects on well-being, distributive justice, and autonomy—not just for the elite, but for the whole of the political community. Even if each individual SILL member is thinking just of the likely effects of policy on people like them, they are a much more representative sample of all the people, and so this is a comparatively better method.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified several potential epistemic pathologies of systems of elected political representation, and I have suggested some reasons to think that an alternative kind of democratic political arrangement—a lottocratic system—might be comparatively better in epistemic terms. Of course, what I have said here is at most suggestive of some reasons to consider using lottocratic institutions, or at least to consider reforming electoral representative institutions. There are other considerations beyond epistemic ones that I have not considered, and even those epistemic concerns I have discussed are potentially contentious. Perhaps some of the same worries I raised regarding electoral representative institutions would emerge within lottocratic institutions. Doubtlessly there would be epistemic worries about lottocratic institutions that I have not considered. My hope here is simply to have drawn attention to some unnoticed or inadequately attended to epistemic problems introduced by the use of elections, and to have suggested that perhaps—with some imagination and ingenuity—we might be able to design epistemically better political institutions, while retaining our foundational commitments to egalitarian democratic values.

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