

## WORKSHOP

# COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

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## Elections, Sortition, and the Danger of Oligarchy

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### Abstract

Calls for introducing a sortition legislature typically rest on two claims. On the one hand, sortitionists argue that elections suffer from inherent oligarchic biases which lead to the creation of parliaments that are responsive to the interests of the affluent. On the other hand, sortitionists predict that a sortition chamber would avoid this bias and be responsive to the interests of the many. This article argues that both claims are unconvincing. In response to the first claim, I begin by addressing the theory of elections which sees them as a mechanism for selecting candidates deemed superior by the electorate. I show that this implication, even if unavoidable, fails to substantiate the claim that elections are inherently oligarchic, first, because superiority is a context-dependent term, and second, because voters have self-motivated reasons to be critical of affluent candidates. I then offer some tools for repairing an electoral system that has turned oligarchic. In this context, I distinguish between internal and external obstacles to inclusion, both of which can cause the absence of legislators from less privileged backgrounds. I demonstrate how ideology critique and specific programs meant to assist less privileged candidates in their campaigning efforts offer solutions to these obstacles. Finally, and in response to the second claim, I argue that a sortition legislature cannot deliver on its promises because citizens are excluded from exercising control over it. It won't be responsive to the interests of the many, nor is it likely to avoid resulting in government for the affluent.