

8 reasons for Sortition*

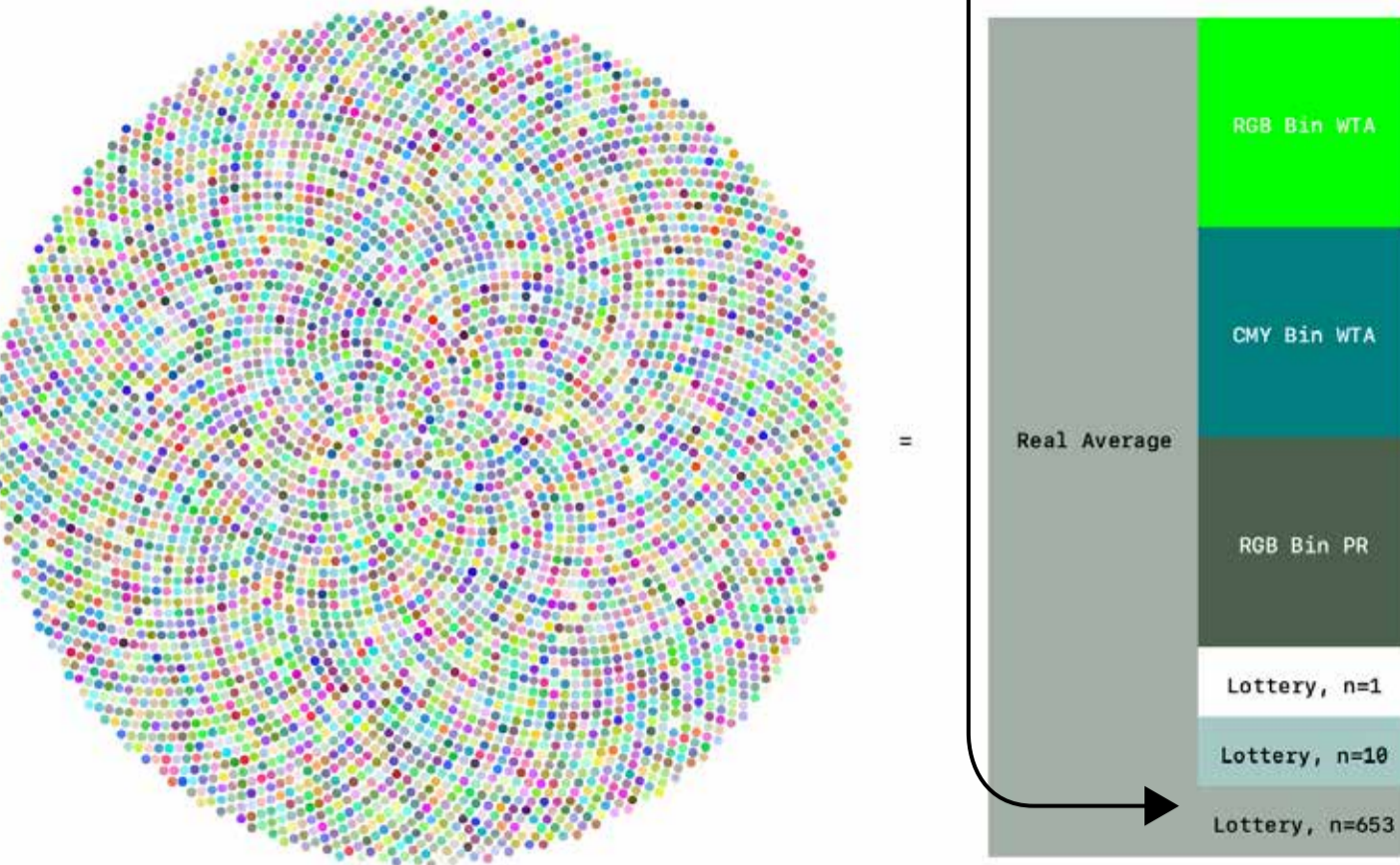
*in descending order of prevalence in the literature
information retrieved from *the lottery as democratic institution* by Delannoi, Dowlen and Stone
Graphics by Jorim Theuns

1) Descriptive representation

Sortition ensures that any property appearing in the general population will also appear in roughly the same proportions on a randomly-selected, decision-making body.

Sortition is only descriptively representative if the sample is large enough, and if the pool from which the selection is made contains the entire population

the ball metaphor¹



(Right) Image typical of a (randomly selected) citizen's assembly. AmericaSpeaks: uses networked, facilitated small table deliberation to make decisions.



(Above) Image typical of the United States Congress. Not exactly descriptively representative



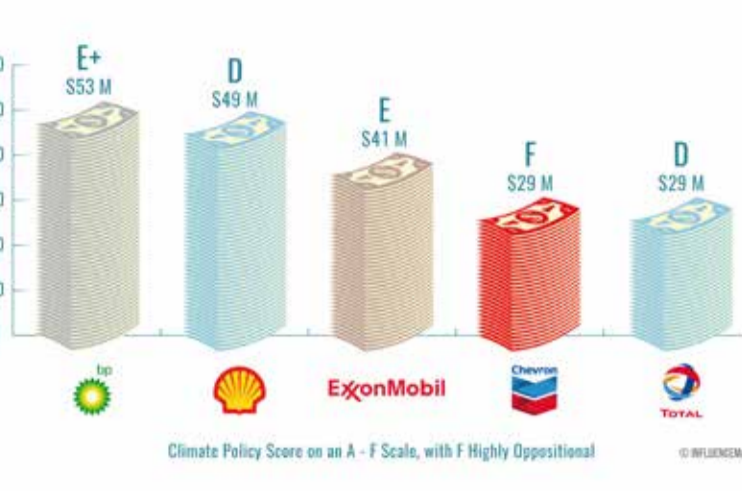
Citizen's assembly of the Parish of Chingford

2) Prevention of corruption and/or domination

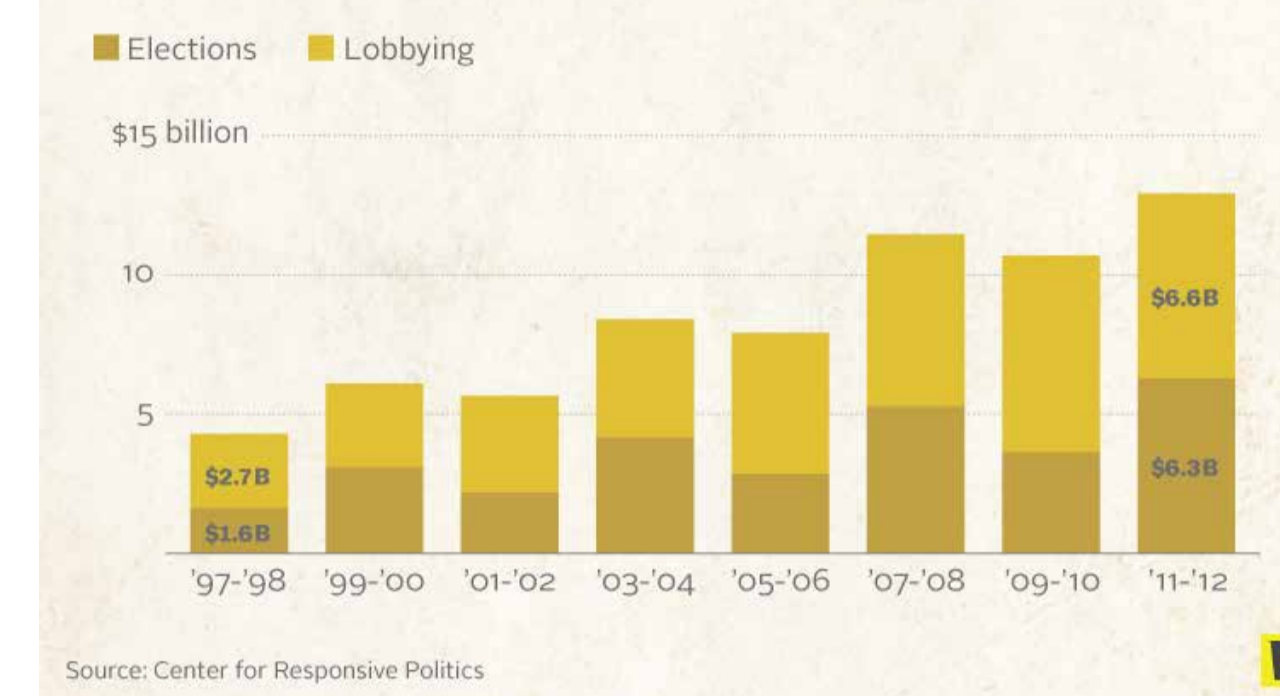
- Under sortition, those anxious to obtain office for [corrupt] purposes, cannot obtain it more reliably than anyone else.
- Limiting the power of special interests by:
 - preventing influence of the selection process by removing any mechanism by which to influence it.
 - insulating the selectees from bribes and threats.
- Limiting the effects of economic power on political power as there is no money needed to run expensive election campaigns.
- Excluding reasons from the selection of officials leads, ironically, to more reasoned behaviour on the part of those selected. (little to no special interest influence)



Spend on Climate Lobbying, 2018



OVERALL, SPENDING ON FEDERAL ELECTIONS & LOBBYING HAS SOARED



(Top, right): Expensive elections. (Middle, right): Spend by big oil on climate change lobbying in 2018. (Bottom, right): Satirical comic on the influence of corporations on american politics. (Left): Spending on politics in the USA over time (VOX)



3) Mitigation of elite-level conflict:

Political competition, like economic competition, is desirable only when it serves the interest of the broader public. Sortition serves as a competition enhancer (see #2 and the right of this graph) and a diffuser (left of graph).

(un)Healthy Competition

Economic

Not enough competition
-Private interests
-Public risk

Just right
-Private risk
-Public interest

Too much competition
-Private risk
-Public risk

Political

Sortition prevents elites from controlling the selection process, meaning no anti-competitive practices can be established (oligarchy) and no one-party or person can hold on to power (dictatorship).

Sortition prevents factions of the elite from stacking political institutions with their supporters, so no elites need fear any faction they disagree with taking control of the entire political system: Preventing any dangerous partisanship.

4) Control of political outliers

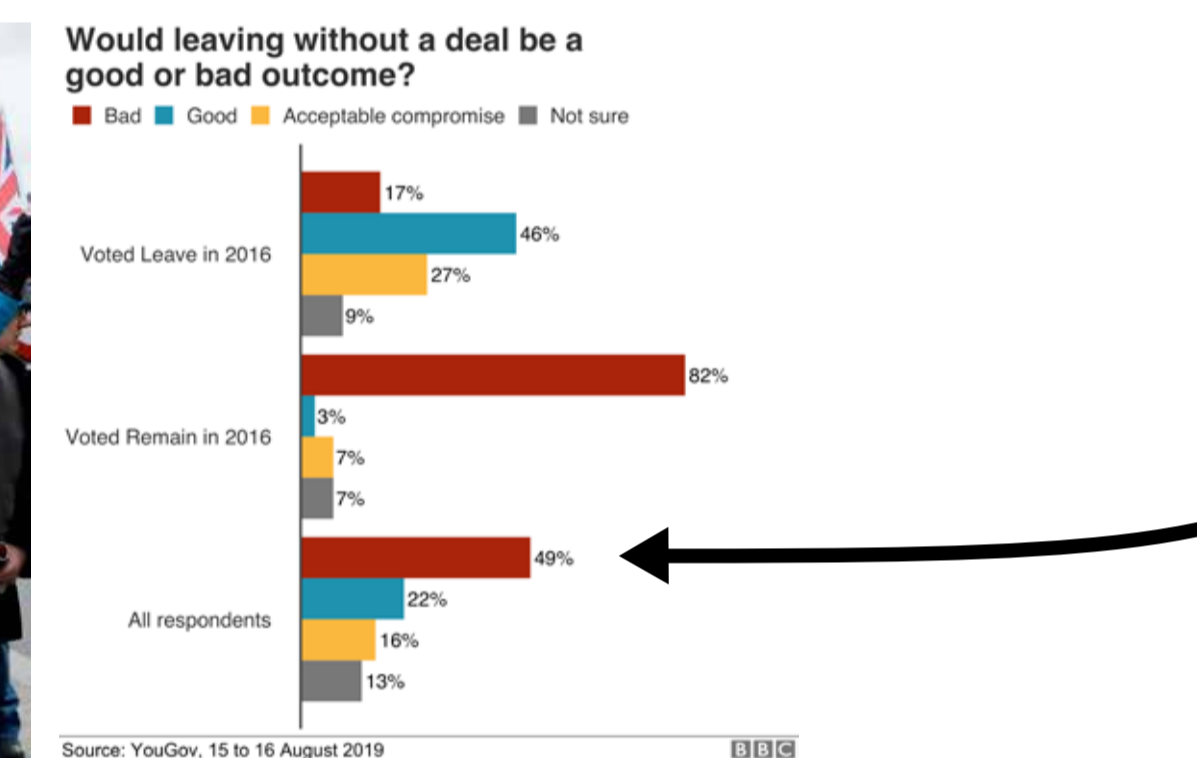
Small groups with outlier preferences are often highly motivated to interfere with the political process. If successful, as in the case of the israel lobby in the US, or the hard-leavers of the conservative party in the UK: they gain political influence totally disproportionate to their size.

Sortition can mitigate this by ensuring that no group can obtain political office in numbers larger than their presence in the general population. This only works if the selection method is representative of the entire population. If selections were made from a pool of volunteers, motivation would again play a large factor and outlier preferences may again be overrepresented.

It also only works with *outlier* preferences. If a majority or large minority has despicable preferences: sortition is helpless, just like every other democratic process.

John Burnheim, in his book *Is Democracy Possible?* (2006), defends sortition from a pool of volunteers as a way of ensuring that those who care the most about issues are the ones who make decisions regarding those issues. This might have the effects of increasing stability and ensuring that decision-makers are knowledgeable. But the mere fact that volunteers want something different from what the public as a whole wants poses a challenge to democratic theory, even if volunteers have no venal motivations.

Even though a majority oppose no-deal, the UK-government is now mostly composed of No-deal happy, Hard-Brexiters.



5) Distributive Justice

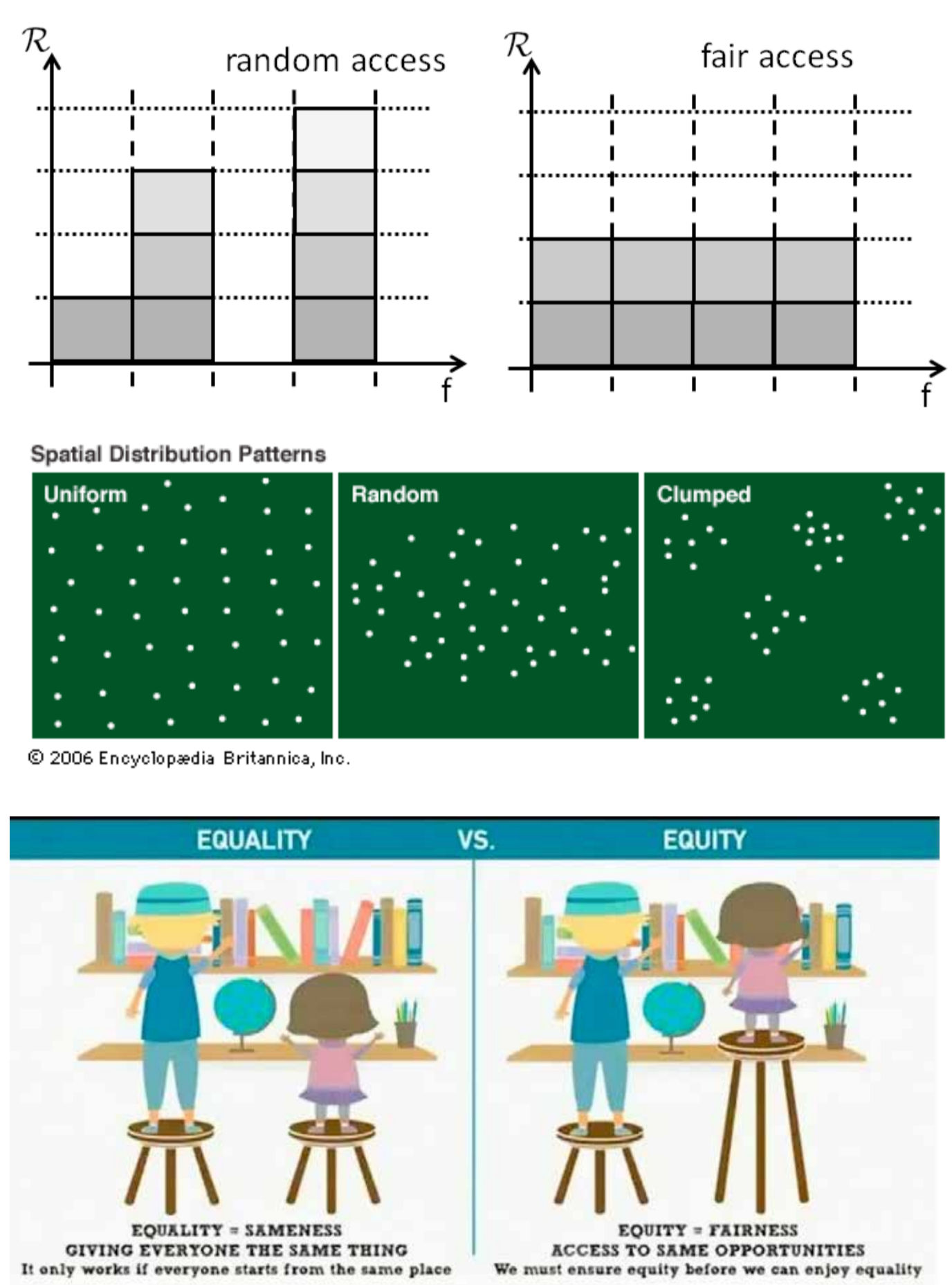
A more popular argument in ancient Athens was that sortition was the only method by which to allocate the benefits and burdens of society fairly.

Holding office was seen as a good, one that all citizens had a right to. Modern citizens are not so inclined to see officeholding as a public good, and many actively avoid the responsibility (many desperately avoid jury duty, for example). The point still stands however, that whether one sees office as a good or a burden, lotteries are a fair method of distribution.

This viewpoint is held less widely today. With the advent of societal-wide division of labor, many see the ability for some to pursue politics vocationally as a good thing. Nowadays, political equality is seen as an equal right to pursue office, and the ability to vote, but not necessarily as the equal right to hold office.

Most modern sortition advocates do hold that political amateurism to some extent is a good thing (#2). Those most motivated to obtain political expertise are often those who stand to gain from corrupting the political process. Most modern sortition advocates don't defend holding public office as a good in itself, however.

Our current system, giving everyone the right to stand on the same stool (run for election), isn't fair, as some people have to overcome other challenges to have access to the same opportunities. Sortition overcomes this by separating opportunity from outcome.



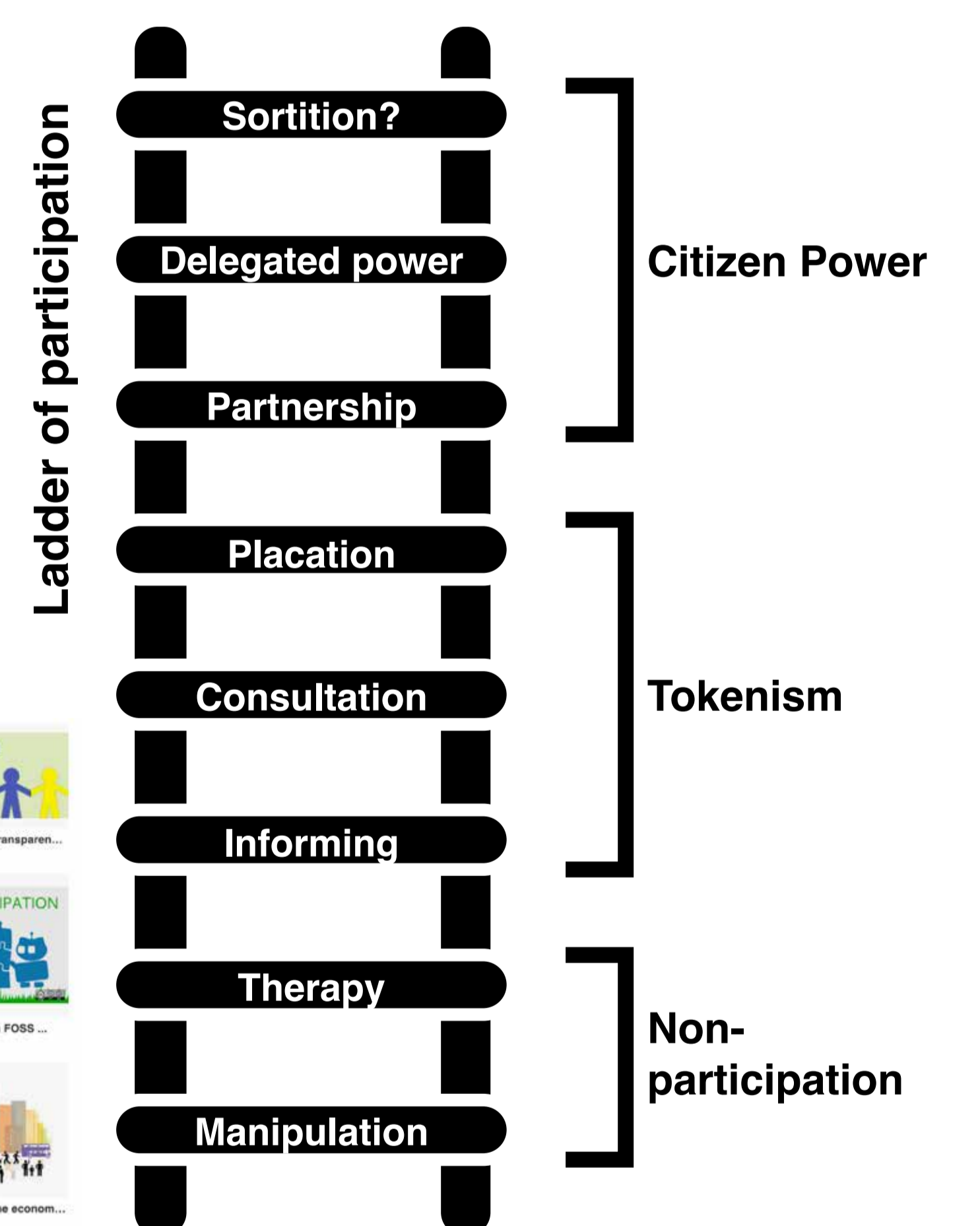
6) Participation

Many advocates of sortition share in the now widespread concern that citizens are becoming apathetic towards politics. They believe it is important that the political system allows for genuine participation, and that it is the political system's duty to ensure such participation actually occurs.

However, sortition advocates rarely state why they believe such participation to be desirable. Some endorse John Stuart Mill's case for the educational benefits of participation, that increase participation in politics allows for a more holistic understanding of society, but the counter argument here is the same as in #5: Why is it bad for politics to be seen as a profession?

Political outcomes may improve if not left to professionals, but this point is more clearly given by #2. One argument is that increased participation allows for a greater cognitive diversity in leadership: People who are normally excluded from the political process due to poverty, race, education etc: may provide valuable insights leading to better political outcomes than if the political process had been kept "closed" as opposed to "participatory", but this is aptly described by #1.

Participation visual language



7) Rotation

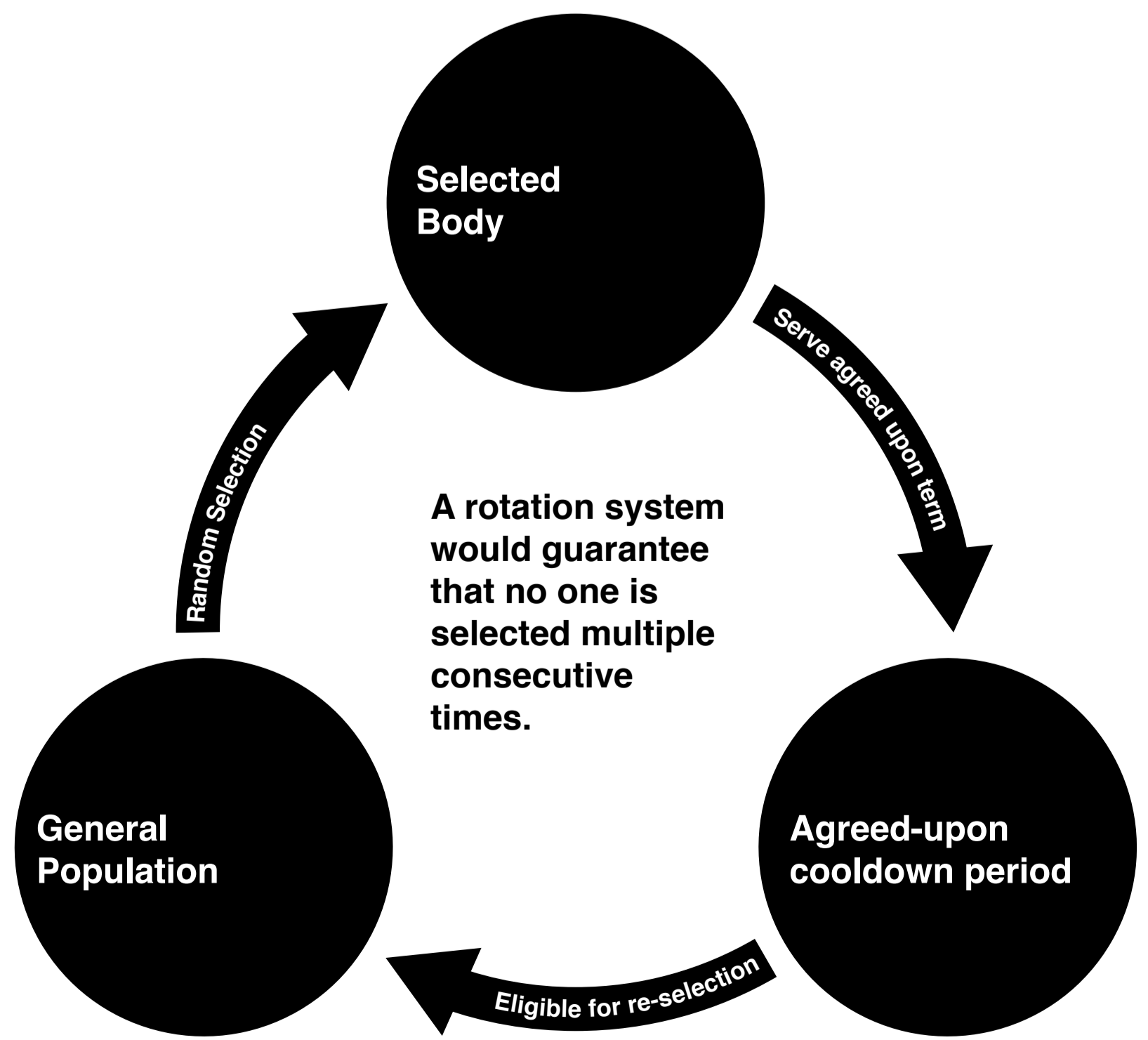
Often confused with participation, rotation of political office simply means that the people in power today will not be the people in power tomorrow. It is unclear why advocates for sortition tout this as a distinctly desirable feature in itself: Often argued is that it lets more people participate (#6), or that it allows the benefits and burdens of office to be shared more equally (#5) or that it prevents domination by groups of political elites (#2).

It is said that when Apple released its new "shuffle" feature in its early iPods, people complained that the music was "not random", and that some tracks would repeat, or repeat after only a few tracks. To combat these complaints, Apple made their randomness algorithm less random, to ensure that there were no or very little "repeats". Less random mathematically, but it felt more random.

If there is a unique desirability to rotation, it may lie here. Those not selected may feel the system is rigged (not really random) if one person is selected twice in a row, or if they never get a change to participate while someone else, from pure fortune, is selected quite often. Including a system of rotation, where those selected cannot be eligible for reselection until a certain time has elapsed, while less random, may help alleviate this.



If your shuffle really chose music completely randomly, it would actually feel like there were more coincidences.

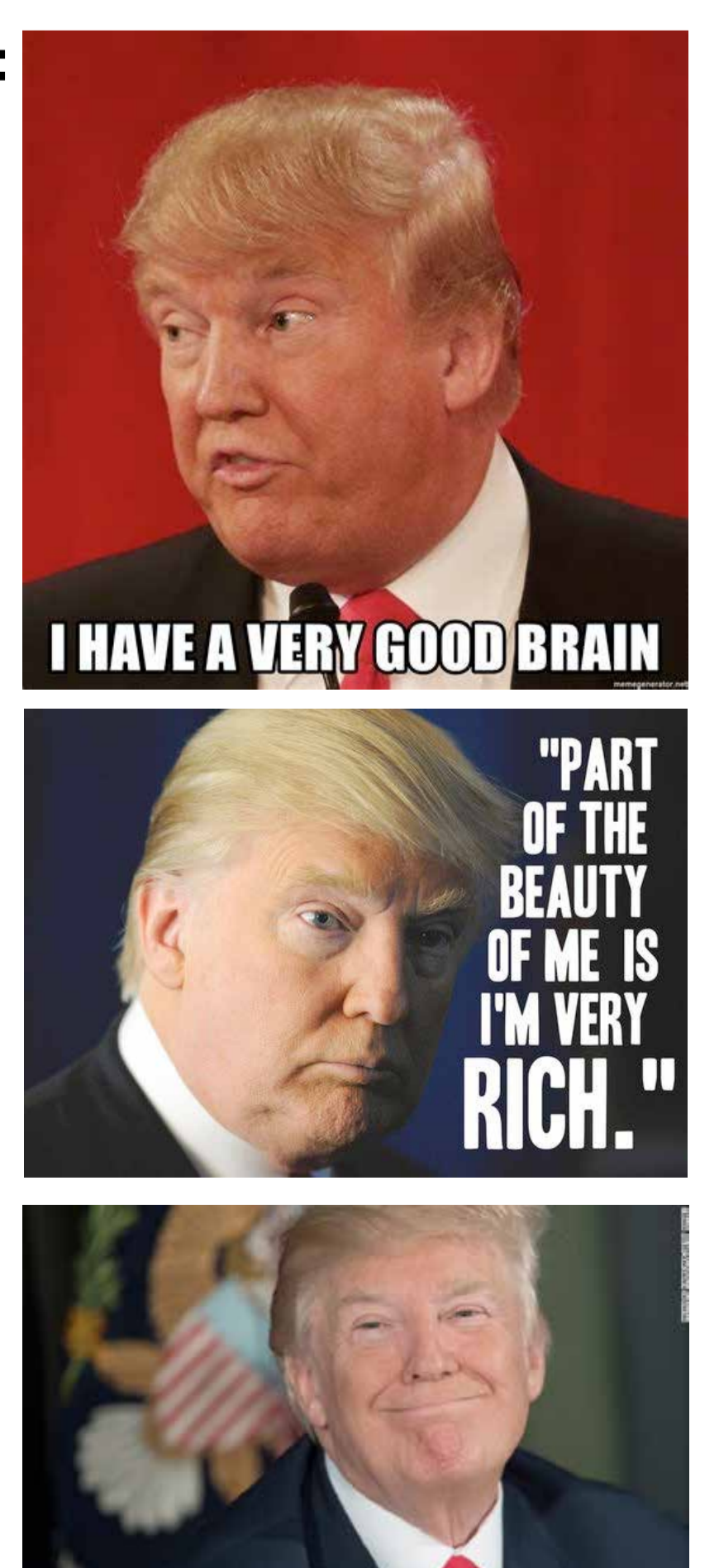


8) Psychological benefits

Those selected for office by sortition are not done so on the basis of any special personal quality, and that, likewise, those not selected are not done so for any specific failing. It is therefore, hard for those who are selected to feel any of the grandiose feelings one might have when winning something (seemingly) meritocratically, and also hard for those who lose to feel like it was in any way their fault that they weren't selected.

Participation may also engender a sense of reciprocity, personal autonomy, responsibility and confidence, especially to those normally excluded by the political process. But it is hard to say how sortition in particular, as opposed to another method of increasing participation by the marginalised, would do this.

Elected official:



Participatory panel:

