

The Green Case for a Randomly Selected Chamber

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Contemporary Political Theory, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-021-00491-z>

1. Introduction

One of the greatest challenges facing current generations is the environmental and climate crisis¹. Climate change, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, domestic wastes, soil and water contaminations, exposure to endocrine disruptors: these environmental challenges are all caused by human activities and will – if unchecked – impose severe burdens on future people.

Democracies, so far, have not distinguished themselves by their capacity to bring about appropriate political responses to these challenges, which brings some people to think that authoritarian regimes might (sometimes) prove more capable of responding to the environmental crisis than democracies (Beeson, 2010). The inability of democracies to rise to this challenge is partly explainable in terms of lack of state capacity. The problem is global and democratic institutions remain essentially tied to states. This, however, is not the only explanation. *Election-centered* democracies, in particular, suffer from several flaws that make them inapt to deal with this challenge properly, as we shall argue: the youth is not appropriately represented; parliaments suffer from a lack of diversity; elected representatives' time horizon is too narrow; and anti-regulation lobbies have too much influence.

In 2017, the Irish Citizens' Assembly – in which participants were randomly selected – deliberated and made recommendations on the issue of climate change. In 2019-2020, the French and British governments decided to organize specific citizens' assemblies on climate. Part of this decision is probably explainable by a willingness to provide popular legitimacy to environmental measures that might not be popular². Yet we believe that there are also more fundamental reasons to see in sortition a promising way of dealing with environmental issues, which explains why sortition has often been advocated by ecologists (e.g. Smith, 2003, pp. 86-93; Bourg & Whiteside, 2010) and is one of the core demands of the *Extinction Rebellion* social movement. It is to the exploration of these reasons that this article is devoted.

¹ For their complete revision and useful comments, we warmly thank Andrés Cruz Labrín and Théophile Pénigaud. We also thank Claudia Chwalisz and Vincent Jacquet for useful suggestions.

² Before launching his Citizen convention for climate, French President Emmanuel Macron faced an important popular protest movement (the “yellow vests”) as a result of an increase of taxes on the consumption of energy products.

In order to make the discussion more palpable, we build our argument around a specific institutional proposal. The political reform we put forward shares the spirit of these Irish, French and British assemblies, but with a higher ambition. It aims at rejuvenating our democratic systems by introducing a randomly selected chamber (hereafter RSC), which would be permanently integrated to our political structures, either complementing existing chambers or possibly replacing the upper house in bicameral systems, whose usefulness is often questioned³. The next section introduces the concrete proposal and deals with two objections. The following sections explore four eco-political arguments in favor of such a RSC. We then discuss the limits of the proposal, before concluding.

2. A randomly selected chamber

The new chamber of Parliament, that we see as the most promising permanent institutionalization of sortition, would have the mission to select law projects for which a second reading seems required (thus delaying the law-making process and making it more deliberative), propose amendments and recommendations, and to initiate new law projects. In cases of persisting disagreement, the elected chamber(s) would keep the last word, for reasons of accountability⁴ and to avoid deadlock politics. This does not mean that the RSC would be powerless, as we shall argue in the last section. We expect it to provide legislative systems with an epistemically valuable deliberative input – in particular (but not exclusively) on long-term issues.

Members would be randomly selected among the adult population, possibly with the use of quotas (as discussed below), for mandates of 2 to 4 years – long enough to acquire legislating skills, but short enough to avoid professionalization and disconnection from ordinary citizens. Incentives such as a decent salary and protections regarding the recovery of a previous job after one's political mandate could foster participation. With time, acceptance rate among citizens drawn by lot would probably increase, as the chamber's relevance and impact would become publicly apparent. Indeed, feelings of powerlessness and political alienation are among the chief reasons for non-participation in citizen assemblies (Jacquet, 2017). The newly selected members would undergo a training phase, and some rotation principle would allow senior members to guide newcomers.

³ Thus, in contexts where the importance of having a second chamber at all is questioned (Belgium and Canada for example), our proposal could offer an alternative to mere abolishment. And in contexts, as the USA, where it is held to play an indispensable role (in representing federated states for example), or where the second chamber has been dismantled (as in Denmark or Ecuador), the proposal would be to add a new chamber.

⁴ An argument we have developed in previous work (Vandamme and Verret-Hamelin, 2017). See also more recently Landa & Pevnick, 2020.

The RSC would thus control its own agenda, so it could dive into issues of public health, education, environmental protection and so on. Its members would consult experts, hold public hearings, and deliberate in plenary sessions and in sub-group sessions, with the guidance of trained moderators. It would not necessarily focus on technical or scientific issues pertaining to environmental protection, as was often the case in so-called consensus conferences (Joss and Durant 1995), but hopefully bring a deliberated long-term perspective on all sorts of policies.

Broadly similar proposals have already been defended for a diversity of reasons: protecting the selection of representatives from subversion (Dowlen, 2009), maximizing descriptive representativeness, deliberation and democratic power (Bouricius, 2013), reaping the epistemic benefits of cognitive diversity (Landemore, 2013), increasing responsiveness to relevant interests (Guerrero, 2014; Abizadeh, 2020), control over the political agenda (Gastil & Wright, 2019) or enhancing political equality and impartiality (Abizadeh, 2020), *inter alia*. Our purpose here is not to discuss these different proposals and arguments – something we did in separate work (Vandamme and Verret-Hamelin, 2017) and which is explored in depth in the collective book edited by Gastil and Wright (2019). The aim is rather to add a new set of arguments – based on the issue of environmental protection – to the dominant ones. We are not the first ones to highlight the “green” potential of random selection in politics (see Bourg & Whiteside, 2010; Bouricius, 2017; MacKenzie, 2017b), but it seems to us that more work can be done to understand this potential and its different sources, and this article aims precisely at contributing to this endeavor. We have identified four eco-political arguments in favor of a RSC. The generational rebalancing argument, which we shall examine first, has some plausibility but is not the strongest, as we shall argue. The other three arguments – its eco-epistemic promises; its wider time horizon; and the independence of its members from short-term corporate interests – however, appear to us as much more convincing⁵.

Before turning to these arguments, let us acknowledge from the start that the proposed reform faces serious objections⁶. First, it would in no way be sufficient to overcome the environmental and climate crisis ahead of us. Many other measures will certainly be

⁵ The RSC we put forward, and the green arguments we consider, partly overlap with those examined by Michael K. MacKenzie (2017a). He identifies three green arguments in favor of a RSC: its representativeness of people's short *and* long-term interests; its deliberative qualities; and its independence from the short-termism of electoral cycles. Our 'eco-epistemic' argument can be related to MacKenzie's 'deliberative' and 'representative' arguments, while our 'open temporality' argument has some similarity with his 'independence' argument. The originality of our paper is to flesh out those arguments in a different manner, and to explore in further detail two other arguments, regarding the generational rebalancing and the independence from corporate interests.

⁶ Beyond the two that we briefly address, one could mention the objection that mini-publics are better used on single issues than as full legislative chambers (J. S. Fishkin, 2018; Guerrero, 2014; Owen & Smith, 2019), or that the combination between elections and sortition might have deleterious effects (Bouricius, 2019). We do not have the space to explore these here.

necessary, such as strict regulations regarding certain forms of pollution, cutting off fossil fuels subsidies, incorporating environmental concerns in educational cursus, or even eco-labelling. Nonetheless, if the arguments we are about to lay down are correct, then these numerous measures might be easier to enact with a RSC. Still, problems of scale would persist: while the RSC could be put in place at different scales (provincial, national, or even macro-regional), it would be utopian to wish for a global RSC with significant powers and authority. However, the environmental and climate crises require global actions and solutions (Laslett, 2003, p. 217). Similarly, a RSC would not make all sources of dissatisfaction with democracy disappear. Thus, our proposal is modest, which does not mean useless. We conceive it as a tool, among many others, that could be an accelerator of change.

A second objection concerns the legitimacy of this particular form of representation. With sortition, in contrast with elections, the general population has no control over the selection of the appointees and no institutionalized avenue for sanctioning them if they do not feel adequately represented. Arash Abizadeh, defending a political reform similar to our own (but without exploring its “green” potential), states that “sortition is neither a mechanism for holding representatives accountable, nor for the public’s political agency” (Abizadeh 2020, p. 2). This is why the purpose of our proposal is not to replace elections with sortition. We simply believe that the legitimacy generated by elections is imperfect⁷ and can be usefully complemented by a distinct form of representation, carrying new sources of legitimacy: an increased descriptive representation (Pitkin, 1967) counterbalancing the aristocratic dimension of elections (Manin, 1997); an increased deliberative potential, compensating for the rigid partisan structure of debates in elected institutions; a distinct embodiment of political equality provided by the equal opportunity to access a representative position (Abizadeh, 2020); and an embodiment of some form of discursive accountability, through its public hearings and the general need for the members of the RSC to publicly explain and justify their decisions and recommendations in order to build their own legitimacy. Admittedly, the legitimacy generated by a RSC would also be imperfect. It would not secure full descriptive representation, both because the numbers will likely be insufficient if the chamber is to be genuinely deliberative, and because people are unevenly predisposed to accept their nomination as members of the RSC – with a strong bias in favor of people with a higher social and economic status, which can only be partly compensated for by using quotas. And its deliberations will also likely be affected by

⁷ Historical, social and educational factors allow elections to serve as a tool for the reproduction of the elite in power (Bovens & Wille, 2017). Citizens are equals as voters but not as decision-makers (Abizadeh 2020). Moreover, elections do not perfectly secure responsiveness: elected officials have significant room for manoeuvre during their mandate, since information asymmetries prevent the voters to assess, prospectively, what are the true intentions of a candidate or a party, and prevent them also to assess, retrospectively, the track record of a government (Abizadeh, 2020; Guerrero, 2014; Przeworski, 2018).

undesired distortions⁸. Nevertheless, we believe that, from a normative viewpoint, it can be seen as a useful complement to electoral institutions for the reasons highlighted above. Let us now turn to the “green” potential of such a RSC.

3. The generational argument

Why would a RSC, with its deliberative purpose, fare better than electoral democracy in the face of the environmental crisis? One source of electoral democracy's short-termism involves a generational divide. First, western societies are coping with ageing populations. Here is how the United Nations open their report on demographic trends around the world: “The world's population is ageing: virtually every country in the world is experiencing growth in the number and proportion of older persons in their population. Population ageing—the increasing share of older persons in the population—is poised to become one of the most significant social transformations of the twenty-first century [...]” (Population Division, 2015, p. 1). So, from a mere numerical point of view, older generations are gaining more and more political weight than younger generations. In 2005, the institute Ipsos MORI even “calculated that the voting power of those over 55 in the UK was worth over 4 times that of 18-34 year-olds” (Bidadanure, 2014, p. 173)..

The considerable political weight of the elderly is not solely explained by demographic trends. They also tend to be proportionally more engaged in formal politics than younger generations. Across European countries, older people are more often members of political parties, they make more donations to political parties, and they vote more regularly in parliamentary elections (Goerres, 2009, p. 7)⁹. What is more, as we shall see, political representatives tend to be older than the average of the population.

Why should the substantial political weight of older generations worry us about ecological sustainability? Because the elderly tend to have shorter-term interests (see MacKenzie, 2017b, pp. 28–29). They may be less enthusiastic about investing in the future – for instance by investing in education – since they might not be there anymore to appreciate the fruits of the investment. And they often defend social policies in their favor (such as pensions and costly health care coverage) which are burdening states' budgets and reducing

⁸ Whether or not citizens perceive *these* particular problems of legitimacy, a survey among a representative sample of the French population about the legitimacy of the French Convention for Climate shows that the perceived legitimacy of such assembly is not obvious: only 16% of respondents considered it as “entirely legitimate”. 29% saw it as “not really legitimate” and 10% as “not legitimate at all” (ELABE, 2020). Thus, there was a majority finding it legitimate (60%), but it is still a moderate support, especially considering the widespread popular support for the recommendations of this Convention. A similar assembly making less popular recommendations would probably have been perceived less favorably.

⁹ Achim Goerres makes a more nuanced assessment: although older people are more engaged in some (formal) political activities, they are less engaged than younger people in new kinds of participation, such as boycotts, protests, petitioning, etc. (Goerres, 2009, pp. 2; 6–7).

their capacity to make longer-term investments. Older generations' tendency to discount the future should not be exaggerated – and we should not see the elderly as a uniform social class –, but it is a tendency that has some support in the literature (Read & Read, 2004; Van Parijs, 1998, p. 298). Seniors are less prone to change their consumption habits for environmental reasons (Goerres, 2009, p. 7), even though consumption habits and voting habits are not necessarily correlated. Polls sometimes confirm that younger generations are more concerned about climate change and the energy transition (e.g. Hodges, 2016). Contingent factors peculiar to contemporary western societies aggravate this generational divide: “geographical and social mobility loosens the ties between generations, in part because both the proportion of households currently without dependent children and the proportion of people who are and will remain childless keeps increasing.” (Van Parijs, 1998, p. 298)

This certainly represents an impediment to environmental sustainability and intergenerational justice, since the costs of mitigating climate change and protecting the environment are incurred today and conspicuous, while the main benefits might be reaped in the further future.

Would things be different in this respect with a RSC? While older generations might still benefit from a greater representation numerically speaking, the effects of higher party affiliation and contributions would be cancelled, and the average age of representatives should at first sight not be superior to the average age in the population. The turnout bias would be cancelled as well.

What would be the effects of random selection on the representation of younger generations? First, considering only the probabilities of selection, there will likely be much more young representatives, as elections tend to bring mostly to power people between 45 and 65 years old, the global average age of members of parliaments being 53 years old when the median age, globally, is 26 years old (Bidadanure, 2014, p. 175)¹⁰. Yet there might also be a higher proportion of elder people (above 65), who are also less represented in elected chambers.

Second, as we envision a non-mandatory participation for those selected by lot, we must consider the probable acceptance rate of various age groups. Past experiments with mini-publics indicate that young people are less likely to accept the invitation than older people and are usually underrepresented as a consequence (Curato & Niemeyer, 2013, p. 361; Griffin et al., 2015, p. 10). This can be explained partly by the fact that younger people are

¹⁰ Note also that, for a variety of reasons linked to the conception of the second chamber as a kind of “council of the wise”, the average age tends to be higher in second chambers than in first chambers (Tsebelis & Money, 1997, p. 42). Replacing second chambers with a RSC would thus be even more welcomed in the aim of including younger people in the legislative system.

less easily contacted at their official residence, by their possible reluctance to quit a training or a job at an early stage of career advancement, and also by a weaker participatory ethos. Another possible explanation is a more important suspicion in younger generations, which could make them more reluctant to participate when they do not believe that their voice will matter. But if this is the case, they might already be more willing to participate to a RSC than to a powerless mini-public, an hypothesis receiving some confirmation from a poll asking people whether they would likely accept to participate in randomly selected citizen assemblies with different degrees of power (Chwalisz, 2015, pp. 31–60).

If work-related obligations¹¹ prove to be a strong obstacle to participation in a RSC, there might be more young people¹², but retired people are also likely to be overrepresented as is the case in many mini-publics. Yet the same poll conducted by Claudia Chwalisz shows that the over 65 years old were the least willing to participate to randomly selected assemblies, mainly for age-related reasons (Chwalisz, 2015, pp. 44–45). Hence it is difficult to make a firm prediction.

Two different conclusions can be drawn from this, based on two different empirical assumptions. 1) If one assumes that short-termism always increases with age, one could be in favor of increasing the “green” potential of the RSC by using an upper age limit¹³ and/or youth quotas (Bidadanure, 2014, Chapter 6). In this case, the generational argument loses some of its appeal, since it is no longer a specific feature of the RSC: the elected chamber could also use youth quotas and/or an age limit. Nevertheless, youth quotas are more natural in citizen assemblies than in elected Parliaments because in the former case, some degree of statistical representativity is an explicit goal, whereas elected parliaments are based on a different conception of representation (based on ideas and alleged competence). Thus, in the case of the French Citizen Convention for Climate, reflecting the age structure of the population was an explicit goal and was achieved through stratified sampling.

2) Another factual assumption is plausible: both the young *and the elderly* are more concerned with environmental issues than the middle-aged adults, as the latter are more infused with the consumerism and productivism of the labor market (see Van Parijs, 1998, p. 323). One possible illustration of this dynamics is a 1990 Swiss referendum on nuclear energy, where support for the abandonment of this energy “went down monotonously from 64 per cent for the 18 to 29-year-old category to 32 per cent for the 50 to 59-year-old

¹¹ This constraint would be much more important in the case of a RSC than in the case of a mini-public. Hence, the rates of participation to mini-publics will likely differ from those of participation to a RSC. One measure that might mitigate this work constraint is a guarantee to get one’s job back at the end of the mandate.

¹² To be more accurate, there might be more 18-25 than 25-30 years old.

¹³ If the elderly keep their voting rights for the elected chamber, this upper-limit would be no more discriminatory than the lower-limit existing in all democracies or the mandatory retirement age for public officials.

category, but went up again to 46 per cent for the over 60s" (Van Parijs 1998, 323). If this observation can be generalized, then the possible twofold effect of a RSC – more young people and more elderly – should be welcomed. The perspectives of older and younger generations would then fruitfully find a new balance, without any need of recurring to a politically sensitive disenfranchisement of the elderly.

Although some studies show a return of ecological concerns among people aged 50 and over (Mainieri et al., 1997, p. 191), most of them argue otherwise (see Jones and Dunlap 1992, 38). What is more, counterbalancing the hypothesis about the consumerism and productivism of the middle-aged, the latter are also sometimes presented as the least likely to discount the future (Read & Read, 2004). In short, the generational argument for a RSC has some plausibility, if one takes into account the chance of sortition being coupled with youth quotas. However, the available empirical evidence does not allow firm conclusions.

4. The eco-epistemic argument

As we see it, the RSC would have general epistemic qualities greater than elected chambers, despite the loss of political experience¹⁴ that it necessarily entails as professional politicians are replaced by lay citizens. With sortition, a greater social and cognitive diversity would be secured among representatives, which can be useful in the resolution of complex problems (Landemore, 2013)¹⁵, enriches deliberations, and helps reducing the risks of social biases.

Moreover, the RSC would offer a valuable context of slow-pace, informed deliberation¹⁶. Its members – not selected for their expertise, not tied by electoral considerations or party discipline – would be free to learn and build their opinion in deliberative interactions. They would thus have an important incentive to publicly audit experts and representatives of civil society. In comparison, elected representatives arrive in office with electoral promises and are bound by party discipline, which makes it difficult and costly for them to change their views (Leydet, 2015). A RSC would thus be a significant incarnation of deliberative democracy. And it would likely also improve the quality of deliberative interactions

¹⁴ Which is not equivalent to political *competence*, i.e. a greater capacity to make good decisions.

¹⁵ Landemore (2013) makes the stronger point that diversity is usually more important than ability, based on the Diversity Trumps Ability Theorem whose mathematical foundations (Houlou-Garcia, 2017) and generalizability (Girard, 2019, pp. 160–162) have been questioned. Our claim is more modest: cognitive and social diversity are epistemically beneficial, which is harder to deny.

¹⁶ Some might feel that environmental and climate actions need to be undertaken quickly. For instance, slowing the pace of politics might benefit the fossil fuel *status quo*. But as long as we resist the temptation of green despotism, we should bet on increasing the quality of public deliberation on ecological (and other) issues, which necessarily takes time. See also Bouricius, 2017, p. 129 on the need for “slow and deliberative thinking” for “wiser directions towards a more sustainable future”.

between elected officials and civil society (for the detailed epistemic argument, see Vandamme and Verret-Hamelin, 2017).

Thus, in contrast with defenses of sortition primarily based on the aim of increasing responsiveness to existing interests and opinions (e.g. Sutherland 2017), the aim of the RSC as we conceive it would be to create a more deliberative space in the representative system, with the hope that this would bring actors to consider the long-term and underrepresented interests. In this perspective, gathering a wider diversity of views is meant to enhance deliberations, to make sure no perspective is neglected, in the collective quest for optimal solutions. This, we acknowledge, comes in tension with the democratic ideal of responsiveness. However, given the insufficient environmental awareness in most populations, we believe that existing opinions should not be valued as such; only opinions enlightened through inclusive deliberations with input from experts should.

The eco-epistemic argument in favor of a RSC can be seen as a particular manifestation of this general epistemic argument. First, many conceptions of the natural world and environmentalists' beliefs are quite marginalized in the current state of affairs, and might be better considered in a deliberative chamber (see G. Smith 2003, especially chapter 3). One should only think of deep ecology, which is a conception of nature's value that fueled the literature in environmental ethics since the 1970s, but proved quite unable to break through the public realm, despite its being utterly intuitive for a significant portion of the population (Butler & Acott, 2007). In a RSC, a greater diversity of voices will be heard; hence marginalized perspectives will probably be better represented. It is not to insinuate that deep ecology is preferable to other environmental philosophies; simply, it is often preferable to consider a variety of perspectives and make them compete with each other (and, ideally, converse with each other) instead of anchoring oneself stubbornly in a singular viewpoint. Random selection is more likely to gather that variety of perspectives.

Concerning the role of expertise in modern democracies, it often seems that a minority of scientific experts – such as economists and lawyers – are predominant in the public debate at the expense, for instance, of natural sciences¹⁷. Many environmental activists and thinkers would make a similar claim regarding economics: neoclassical economics is seen as a hegemonic regime of truth (Barry 2012, chapter 4). A deliberative chamber would probably bring a greater diversity of expertise to the forefront of the public sphere since members of the RSC have a different mandate and different resources than elected officials¹⁸ : the former would try to solve or examine a problem, while the latter generally

¹⁷ Concerning the predominance of lawyers in politics, see McCormick and Tollison 1981, chapter 5.

¹⁸ The wording 'to the forefront' is important, since it is true that elected chambers solicit a great diversity of expertise in various committees and parliamentary commissions. Still, in the media and among cabinet ministers, certain groups of experts seem to predominate. Moreover, parliamentary commissions remain highly partisan.

try to sell a message or an image. In addition, members of a RSC, even though they will take some time to become familiar with the issue at hand, will be more incited than elected officials to examine different aspects and angles of a political issue. For instance, for lack of time and for marketing reasons, it might be perfectly rational for a green party to appeal to economic experts in order to highlight the economic upsides of investing in public transport. In the meantime, members of the RSC will have the time and the incentive to audit urbanists to get a better understanding of urban sprawl, leaders of the green tech industry about the prospects and limits of electric transportation, ecotoxicologists about the impact of air pollution on human health, etc.

Members of a RSC would also probably be more open and humble in front of experts than elected representatives, as they would not be able to believe that their nomination is due to their own competence. This is of great importance regarding climate change and environmental spoliation, since the environmental impacts of our societal and individual ways of life are no longer foreseeable to the naked eye. We greatly depend on expert knowledge to inform us about chemical contaminations, the lasting of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the ozone layer, and so on (Dryzek & Pickering, 2017, p. 355). In many participatory devices, lay citizens have proven quite able to grasp and judge highly technical issues following expert audits and deliberations, issues such as biotechnologies (Einsiedel et al., 2001), environmental economics (Blok, 2007), human genetics (Mayer et al., 1995) or electoral reform (Blais et al., 2008). Even more so if the range of experts audited is sufficiently diverse, in which case lay citizens have proven able to *critically evaluate* scientific testimonies, pointing to their shortcomings or even their larger context of production (Blok, 2007). A steering committee organizing hearings in the RSC could be composed of some of the randomly selected representatives and members of the first chamber, from different parties. If this committee is sufficiently diverse and transparent, the risks of biased or false expertise should not be too high¹⁹.

Another eco-friendly characteristic of a RSC might be the involvement of national and ethnic minorities in the general public debate. Consider the Canadian example. Aboriginal Canadians are frequently overlooked by mainstream media. However, as for the environmental issue, a better dialogue with the First Nations would strongly benefit the Canadian public debate since the 40 000 Inuit in the Canadian arctic are among the world's most affected by climate change (Ford et al., 2008). So, a better listening to their interests and preoccupations would probably raise the environmental awareness of other Canadian citizens. These minorities also tend to embrace different valuing systems regarding nature,

¹⁹ The *perception* by the general public that the expertise is balanced, however, will be crucial for the perceived legitimacy of the RSC, as indicated by reactions to the French Citizen Convention for Climate. This is especially the case if participants in the RSC tend to develop different views compared to non-participants and are accused of being manipulated by the experts. We do not have the space here, however, to dig deeper into this important issue.

seen as something intricate with (and hardly distinguishable from) human affairs, rather than as an alterity radically exterior to human beings.

To be sure, the probability of having Inuit people in a Canadian RSC as a result of pure chance would be low. Underrepresentation of minorities is a risk even under sortition (Parkinson, 2006, p. 79), but quotas could help offset this problem. The downside of using quotas is to interfere with the blindness of pure random selection, which can have a “sanitizing effect” where decisions are at risk of being based on bad reasons (Stone, 2009). Yet, if one believes in the epistemic virtues of social and cognitive diversity, there are good reasons for pairing random selection with some quotas, in order to ensure the presence of many fringes of a society, as we mentioned earlier about the youth. Still, quotas aiming at the proportional representation of some categories of citizens might not guarantee the presence of Inuit in the RSC since they make for less than 1% of the country's population. Clearly, there will always be some groups of people strongly affected by a political issue debated in the RSC while not being represented there. This risk can be minimized not only thanks to quotas or overrepresentation, but also through public audiences of stakeholders, which should be one of the most important activities of a RSC.

This greater diversity of *discourses*, *forms of expertise*, and *social groups* in the public realm bears crucial eco-epistemic value, of two kinds. First, it will help members of the RSC, elected officials and lay citizens to revise their preferences: they will be in better conditions to correct their prejudices, appreciate the interests and preoccupations of others, and develop new sensibilities regarding issues previously overlooked, all this in a way more compatible with environmental sustainability. Second, the diversity of perspectives has eco-epistemic value in a ‘factual’ or ‘scientific’ sense, i.e. for reasons regarding the collection of relevant information. The causes and effects of the environmental and climate crisis are extremely diffuse and diverse; hence, the actors having a unique input on these matters are also diffuse and diverse (Dryzek & Pickering, 2017, p. 355). A plurality of voices is necessary to assemble the pieces of the puzzle and elaborate well-informed environmental policy, even if some level of uncertainty is bound to remain concerning ecosystem interdependencies, climate policies and the like. In sum, giving the opportunity to be heard to a wider diversity of environmental discourses, experts and groups might tend to change peoples' preferences towards sustainability, and better-informed environmental policy. So even if the link between deliberative democracy and sustainability is not one of necessity, as famously argued by Robert Goodin (1992, p. 168), it is still one that seems robust.

Past experiments of deliberative mini-publics focusing on environmental issues corroborate these theoretical arguments. At the end of the *Hertfordshire Citizens' Jury* in 1996, focusing on waste management issues, participants “became much more concerned

over issues of waste management” (Kuper, 1997, p. 149). At the end of the deliberation, “a much higher priority was given to reducing the amount of waste produced in the first place; recycling was clearly the then preferred option with exporting to landfill least acceptable. The most controversial issue, incineration to produce energy, rose in priority as an acceptable strategy for three of the jurors, but fell for 10.” (Kuper, 1997, p. 149). The deliberative poll on Vermont’s energy future yielded similar results: at the end of the deliberative process, participants suggested an almost complete abandonment of oil and coal (Luskin et al., 2008, p. 1). Rather, “the importance attached to "getting electricity from resources that will never be used up" and "minimizing air pollution" did increase. The participants learned a great deal, improving their average score on a series of factual knowledge questions by a whopping 39.5%.” (Luskin et al., 2008, p. 4). Similar encouraging results were obtained in Texas, Nebraska and Nova Scotia (J. S. Fishkin, 2009, pp. 152–154).

5. The open temporality argument

The green argument for a RSC is more than an illustration of its general epistemic qualities. Another side of the green argument stems from one of the structural upsides of random selection: by not being subjected to periodical elections, the temporal horizon of deliberants is much more open. It is no longer restrained to the short-termism of electoral cycles, where the temporal horizon is no longer than a few years. With periodical elections, as Philippe Van Parijs puts it, “even the best democracy remains a dictatorship of the present” (2014, 49). To be sure, frequent elections are of great importance for electoral democracy: by submitting governments to periodical elections, citizens keep some degree of control over (part of) their representatives. But this mechanism has an unfortunate side-effect: elected officials have no incentive to put forward policies that will bear fruit in the long run, with no visible effects within a few years, because on election day a government is judged on its perceived accomplishments (Bourg et Whiteside 2010, 70). And this is not exclusive of officials who try to hold office as long as possible: even politicians who do not run for reelection but care about their political legacy are likely to favor short-term, clearly identifiable accomplishments, in order to get the credit for them (this could also be true of some members of the RSC, but to a lesser extent, considering the truly *collective* decision-making of the procedure). For these reasons, electoral democracy is profoundly “myopic”, which is an important obstacle regarding the fight against pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss, all problems that are forming slowly and that need long-term solutions (Bourg et Whiteside 2010, 70).

Moreover, the “media tempo”, always looking for new stories, exacerbates this difficulty to favor a long-term perspective (Sintomer, 2011, p. 26). Randomly selected deliberants, from their side, would not be as affected by this media tempo. They would not be stuck into the short-termism of electoral cycles. Their temporal horizon can be as far as their free

and inclusive deliberations bring them. The hope is that this long-term perspective will mitigate the short-termism of electoral democracy and bring officials and their constituents to be more sensitive to the issues that exceed the temporality of an electoral cycle. Once again, this change of perspective is an essential step toward sustainability. So it might be true that even the best *electoral* democracy remains a dictatorship of the present. Yet hybrid democracy offers much better incentives to take the future into account.

6. The independence argument

It is widely held that the corporate world also has a short-term horizon (e.g. Dallas 2012). Business stockholders are highly capricious and frightened by disappointing financial performances, even in a lapse of a single fiscal quarter. In particular, transient institutional investors have no concern for the long-term investments and strategies of firms. Consequently, business executives endure heavy pressure to reap quick economic gains. So risky behaviors, such as environmentally hazardous activities, seem reasonable if sizable short-term earnings are anticipated. The explanation might be more complicated than this²⁰, but the main lesson here is that private corporations tend to sacrifice the long-term view in favor of short-term earnings.

In addition, it is no secret that private enterprises regularly try to curve various legislatures at their advantage, sometimes even writing themselves bills to be carried by elected officials. How does electoral democracy cope with this external pressure? As argued by Alexander Guerrero, governments are responsive to their constituency's preferences and values – and there is adequate governance – inasmuch as there is 'meaningful accountability' (2014, 139). But this meaningful accountability is crippled by various factors, some contingent, others structural. Among the contingent factors, there is the fact that elections in many democracies are hindered by practices such as gerrymandering and private electoral funding (Guerrero, 2014, pp. 139–140). More importantly, structural barriers such as the complexity of issues at hand and the opacity of officials' daily activities weaken the meaningful accountability of the latter in front of their constituency. As a consequence, elected officials are akin to political loose cannons, in that they are no more bound to their constituents. They are then vulnerable to 'capture', i.e. being seized by private interest groups (Guerrero, 2014, pp. 139–150).

The corporate capture of politics should not be exaggerated, as governments seem also responsive to middle classes and occasionally to the poor's preferences (see Branham et al., 2017). The case of the United States is quite singular, due to the Constitutional Court's

²⁰ A study reviewing relevant research in economics, sociology of finance and organizational sociology concluded that corporate short-termism is much better explained by complex dynamics between investors, corporate managers and the media (Aspara et al., 2014, p. 684).

judgment on *Citizens United* in 2010, forbidding any ceiling to private donations to candidates in electoral campaigns. Yet the alignment of many policies with the preferences of the rich is to be found in many wealthy democracies (Cagé, 2020; Gilens & Page, 2014), and it is sufficiently prevailing to call for rectification. Moreover, the lobbying and political interference of corporations also spread to environmental issues at the national and international level (Wright & Nyberg, 2015). For instance, at the Paris conference on climate change in 2015, big oil companies such as BP, Shell and Exxon managed to influence the negotiations, under the cover of 'trade associations' having a seat at the table as 'observers' (Corporate Accountability International, 2016). As a result, flexible market measures were preferred to regulation or measures that could have been more ambitious. This example, albeit international, gives a glimpse of the pervasiveness of the corporate anti-environmental (i.e. short-termist) lobbying.

Members of a RSC would not be as vulnerable as elected officials to the risk of capture²¹. First, they do not need to raise any funds for an electoral campaign, so once in office they do not owe their position to anyone. In other words, they are not indebted to private donors. Second, they are not career politicians who, when elected in office, have already wove a few ties with influential figures and organizations.

This, however, may not be enough to secure their independence. Lobbyists may just change their strategy, and try to capture allotted representatives once in office (Landa & Pevnick, 2020). What is more, there is one aspect that would make a RSC *more* vulnerable to capture: the absence of electoral promises and party discipline. In highly corrupted political contexts, party discipline makes corruption easier, because lobbies can focus their influence on party leaders. Yet in less corrupted contexts, party discipline increases the chances that a party will commit to its promises after being elected and that its members will stick to the party line when lobbyists try to capture them. Hence, party discipline has been observed to result in more stringent environmental policies in low-corruption countries (Fredriksson & Wollscheid, 2010). In comparison, randomly selected deliberants would arrive in office without a fixed opinion on most issues, without electoral promises to honor and without having to care about their reelection. This is valuable from a deliberative viewpoint, because it creates incentives to listen to other people's arguments, but it also makes them particularly vulnerable to capture once in office.

There are nevertheless two reasons to expect members of a RSC to be better shielded from the short-term interests of private organizations than elected officials – at least in the configuration we envision. First, because randomly selected deliberants will have to build their judgment in deliberative interactions, more public attention will likely be paid to the

²¹ The argument is developed in more detail in Vandamme and Verret-Hamelin, 2017. See also Dowlen 2009 and Guerrero 2014. Landa and Pevnick (2020) defend the opposite view.

deliberative process in the RSC, including the exposition to balanced expertise and the protection of the deliberants from external pressures. This is a key issue regarding the public perception of the process. Because non-selected citizens have not chosen these representatives and cannot deselect them either, they will likely demand the highest transparency and impartiality in the deliberative process. Second, if the RSC has a subordinated function and is not the locus of final decision, they will likely be less exposed to lobbies (Landa & Pevnick, 2020). Therefore, there is a trade-off between fully empowering the RSC and protecting its independence and deliberative potential. A fully empowered RSC may be more consequential but offer a less valuable input if it is more exposed to capture and political games. Thus, opting for a subordinated role certainly weakens our proposal in terms of impact, but it strengthens its epistemic potential – and possibly its perceived legitimacy.

What is clear is that more attention should be directed, when turning such general proposal into a concrete institution, to the specific conditions under which the independence of randomly selected representatives can be maximized. For example, different degrees of anonymity could be used in the RSC in order to make capture more difficult. For instance, it could combine public (e.g. televised) plenary sessions with sub-group sessions in which the transcripts of the discussions would be made publicly available, but without revealing the identity of each deliberants. So, interest groups outside the RSC would have no way of knowing – and monitoring – who says what in these sub-group sessions.

7. A lack of power?

Before concluding, let us acknowledge the limits of our proposal. One could argue that, because in the envisioned model final decision power remains within the realm of the elected house, the green benefits of the RSC will remain vacuous, without reach. Consider, as an illustration, the fourth argument: one could say that we should not overestimate the benefits of the RSC's independence on the grounds that legislative powers will stay in the hands of the lower, potentially corrupted house. Elected officials will remain vulnerable to capture even in the presence of a more independent RSC; industry groups will still have the incentive and the capacity to interfere at the levels of government where effective power is held²².

A revealing example is what happened to a citizens' jury in the state of New South Wales, Australia, regarding a new proposal on waste management and recycling: industry groups

²² What is more, one could argue that legislatures are not the real site of political power anymore. The power of the executive is increasing in most contemporary democracies (Rosanvallon, 2015) and many important decisions are made within political parties or in backstage party negotiations. These are clear limitations to our proposal, but they do not make a RSC completely powerless and hence devoid of interest, as we shall see.

deployed significant resources lobbying ministers and discrediting the citizens' jury (Hendriks, 2011, pp. 71–73). Despite the interference, the panel did occur, and the participants reached a conclusion favorable to the reform opposed by industry groups, although their recommendations were not, at the end of the process, enacted in the new legislature (Hendriks, 2011, pp. 73–75). So, this case study presents mitigated results: while the recommendations of the citizens' jury have not been picked up by elected officials, their deliberative process *did* succeed in unfolding independently, despite external meddling. But why should we be appreciative of a sophisticated deliberative arena, with high (eco-)epistemic standards, relieved from its myopia, achieving a generational rapprochement, and free of corporate shortsighted meddling, if at the end of the day those who make decisions keep surfing the status quo?

This criticism certainly has some appeal. We could surely imagine a more ambitious set of reforms empowering the youth and blocking the influence of money in politics. In this respect, our proposal should be seen as one possible avenue towards environment-friendly political change, to be accompanied with many other reforms of our institutions. This being said, we believe that the impact of a RSC would be real.

The impact of the deliberative input of a RSC, institutionalized at the heart of the representative system, would not be comparable to that of past experiences of mini-publics, such as the ones evoked thus far (the British Columbia Citizen Assembly, the Hertfordshire citizens' jury, and the citizens' jury in New South Wales). These participatory experiments should certainly inform our reflections, but we should not forget that the vast majority of mini-publics (not just the three above) have been brief, sporadic, poorly covered by the media, and extremely limited in their mandate and authority. For example, the British Columbia Citizen Assembly did enjoy a consequential mandate: it could propose a new electoral system for the province, and the government committed to carry out the reform if it were to obtain a 60% support in a referendum. Although it obtained majority approval, it did not get a sufficient support. Why? Besides the bias in favor of the status quo induced by the supermajority requirement (Schwartzberg, 2014), part of the answer has certainly something to do with the fact that the citizen assembly and its proposal did not get adequate media coverage, and as a result, 40% of citizens still knew nothing about the Citizen Assembly by the time of voting (Warren & Pearce, 2008, p. 174).

A RSC, however, could have a more prominent role, because of its permanency and its formal integration into the political landscape. It would have a consequential mandate (proposing legislation, making amendments and delaying decision-making) and would control its own agenda. This is why we prefer this institutionalized model to one-off mini-publics or citizen conventions for climate. To be sure, as there has never been this kind of institution in modern mass democracies, we are bound to make some speculations about

its effects on the political landscape. Yet one of the factors that will greatly affect its relevance and influence will be the media coverage it will most probably get, if only – at first – as a result of public curiosity. With this condition being met, we can be confident that this new institution would be quite influential, with its green qualities overflowing its walls.

Additional support for this conclusion stems from the study of existing bicameral legislatures. Even when upper chambers do not enjoy final decision power, they do exercise influence over decisions made by lower houses (Tsebelis and Money 1997). And this does not only occur when political majorities are aligned in both chambers. Some degree of compromise is often achieved because the lower house is impatient to pass a law and afraid of losing its majority support (Tsebelis and Money 1997, pp. 173-175). In the case of a bicameral (or tricameral) system with a RSC, there might also be public pressure to compromise with the RSC if it enjoys more popular support than the elected chamber (Vandamme et al., 2018). For the rest, the exact influence of the RSC will depend on background traditions and institutional details such as the “navette” system between the two chambers and the rules for overcoming disagreements between them (Tsebelis & Money, 1997), which we cannot discuss here.

8. Conclusion

There are several reasons to believe that a randomly selected chamber would have green virtues. In addition to the general epistemic benefits of increasing social and cognitive diversity, it would likely bring to the forefront of the public debate a greater variety of perspectives on environmental and climate issues. Its deliberative character and input would be of great value to inform policy and in the aim to change our collective preferences toward sustainability. The RSC would be partly freed from the myopic horizon of electoral democracy, the myopic interests of older generations, and the myopic interests of the corporate world. Under the right conditions, it could even mitigate these short-term views and interests. Yet the precise effects of a RSC would depend on many factors, such as media practices, cultural idiosyncrasies, and democratic traditions already anchored in a polity. And as we acknowledged from the start, many other measures will be necessary to take up the environmental and climate challenges ahead of us.

Getting such a reform off the ground would require political leadership and strong pressure from the civil society, social movements to the forefront (Felicetti & della Porta, 2019). It may require going through a gradualist approach (Burks & Kies, 2019; Gastil & Wright, 2019, pp. 337–340). In any case, there are reasons to believe that the reform is feasible in a not too remote future. The main reason is that one does not need to be willing to solve the climate crisis to see value in it. If that were the case, our proposal would face the “bootstrapping objection” – that if there is not enough political will to remedy the climate

crisis, there will not be enough will to implement a RSC either (Kates, 2015). As mentioned in the second section, there is a great diversity of reasons to reform our bicameral systems introducing some degree of sortition in it. And political actors could be motivated to initiate such reform as a result of growing citizen dissatisfaction with existing representative institutions. Reforming the second chamber rather than the main one may be the compromise that makes the reform acceptable to them. And this is why the relative modesty of the proposed reform, discussed in section 7, may constitute its strength. In sum, randomly selected assemblies connected to the law-making process are not completely utopian, and they may generate beneficial effects (on environmental issues in particular) that their implementers had not anticipated or did not directly pursue when introducing the reform.

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