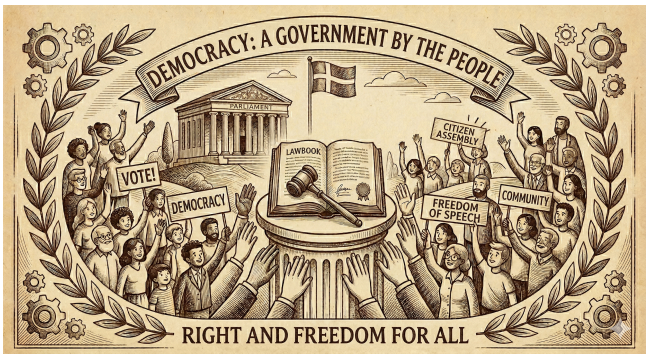
Sortition as a Supplement to Danish Representative Democracy

Essay - January 2026

Introduction

Democracy means “power of the people.” It is the foundation of our society. Most people would naturally answer yes if asked whether democracy is a good thing, but if the question is whether it functions well, the answer is often no. It is this discrepancy that this essay attempts to explain while simultaneously proposing a solution.

Our current system is challenged by a growing distance between citizens and decision-makers, where legislation is often shaped by media pressure and individual cases rather than long-term principles. We see a tendency for power to be concentrated within a uniform group of professional politicians. This means that the diverse experiences and perspectives of the population are reflected in decisions only to a limited extent.



Democracy should not be considered static. If society changes, the way we organise democracy must also evolve. The question is, therefore, how our democracy can be strengthened and further developed.

This essay presents a concrete proposal for how Danish democracy can be further developed through a supplement to the existing system.

The text covers the following:

- The background of how this essay came to be
- The challenges characterising our current democratic system
- An alternative democratic approach called sortition
- How Danish democracy can be improved by a bicameral system
- How this is implemented in practice

I take my starting point in Danish democracy, as it is the system I know best and can relate to most concretely. However, many of the principles could be applied to the democratic models of other countries.

Implementing changes will, in practice, require a constitutional amendment. There are several matters in the constitution that could be addressed, but the focus here is on the core – strengthening representation and improving the quality of legislation in Denmark.

One thing is certain – the democracy we have today is not the perfect final version. If one does not adapt when the world changes, there is a risk of being overtaken as a society.

Background

This essay has a long history of creation. It began with a series of concrete observations of problems in society – problems that could often be traced back to unnecessarily complex rules or directly to poorly drafted laws. Disagreement over legislation is not unusual in itself, but it gradually became clear that these were more than isolated errors. The recurring problems pointed towards a deeper cause – the way our democracy is organised and practised.

My interest was seriously piqued when I became a lay judge and juror in Næstved. Here, you are selected by signing up as a candidate and subsequently being drawn randomly by lot. This system of selection, and thereafter the actual work of deciding whether someone is guilty and what punishment they should receive, aroused my interest. This personal acquaintance with drawing lots as a selection method sparked curiosity as to whether the principle could be used more broadly than in the legal system. I quickly discovered that internationally it is called “sortition” when people are randomly selected to make decisions on everyone's behalf.

The system can be applied at many levels. What about holding hearings with a group of people selected by sortition? Then people other than the usual ones would have their voices heard. The consultation responses would actually be representative of the population and therefore far more useful for politicians than public hearings where it is self-selected citizens who attend or express themselves in writing.

I have participated in a user panel that was selected by sortition. Here, the selection was managed to ensure there was geographical and gender diversity in the panel, as there would otherwise be a preponderance of English-speaking male members. This experience emphasised that drawing lots should not only be random but also differentiated (stratified), so that representative breadth is ensured rather than “accidental” bias.

After a search on the web for movements within sortition, I somewhat spontaneously joined the English organisation Sortition Foundation, which works to promote the use of sortition. At one point, I had a wish to start a Danish branch and therefore investigated more specifically whether organisations already existed in Denmark that deal with this in one way or another.

It turned out that such organisations do indeed exist, and I have since visited several of them. They all primarily focus on citizens' assemblies, which are also based on sortition, but in a specific form that is mainly advisory, without real power. The organisations are typically financed through the organisation and holding of these municipal citizens' assemblies. Unfortunately, one often sees that the recommendations are only implemented to a limited extent afterwards.

This shows that sortition is already used, but typically in a temporary and advisory format – not as part of the actual legislative process, which is a central difference in this essay. Later, I learned that the seriousness and energy displayed by the citizens in a panel is directly proportional to the power that the panel holds.

One person said directly to me: “Surely you don't wish to be one of those who want to replace the Folketing.” This is a clear expression of how taboo it is to deal with this subject. Along the way, it has thus become my mission to improve democracy.

The reaction illustrated that sortition is often considered a confrontation with the election-based system, while the intention of this essay is to supplement and strengthen it – not replace it. I do not see it as radical, but as a necessary modernisation project that follows Denmark's democratic tradition of reform and balance in society.

Based on my investigations, I formed a small organisation of people who created a website (https://sortition.dk), and participated in a few political festivals (Folkemøder) to inform the population about sortition. For me personally, the work resulted in various collaborations both in Denmark and internationally.

When the Sortition Foundation in England changed focus and removed its international direction, I co-founded the organisation “International Network of Sortition Advocates” (INSA) (https://insa.site), which wishes to promote sortition internationally by coordinating international organisations to learn from others' experiences and pass on “best practice”.

The international perspective provided insight into how sortition is used and can be implemented in different contexts – which models create real influence. Within INSA, the idea arose to work with constitutions and to create a proposal for a generic constitution that includes sortition.

It proved difficult to get people with very different international backgrounds to sign up for this work, which is why I gathered a small group of Danes who, over the winter of 2024 to 2025, discussed this subject to permanently include sortition in Danish democracy.

When we began this work, I had an idealistic notion of how democracy ought to function. A central trade-off from the start of the work, however, was that every idea had to be evaluated in relation to whether it could be realised. This balance between ideals and the possible has, in my view, led to a solidly well-developed proposal, and I am convinced that the proposal presented constitutes a better and more realistic system than my original ideas. The decision to establish a new independent chamber was, for example, a result of this trade-off.

Initially, the intention was that the work should end with an article in a major Danish newspaper, and this goal still exists, but as an intermediate step, I have prepared this essay. I am eternally grateful to the individuals who have contributed time and thoughts to this work. It is as much their work as mine, even though this essay takes its starting point in my personal experiences.

On this journey, I have also had meetings with political parties in the Folketing and elsewhere to find out where politicians stand and potentially, in the long term, cooperate on introducing sortition more permanently.

I am a 58-year-old businessman, the founder and co-owner of various companies within technology and software. I am trained as a Molecular Biologist and Computer Scientist and have worked as a developer, head of development, sales manager, and CEO. I have primarily had the public sector as customers over the years. These experiences are

mentioned not to legitimise my views, but to provide insight into my perspective: both as a citizen, a professional, and in collaboration with the public sector.

What is wrong

The current parliamentary system in Denmark faces significant challenges. It has evolved into a competitive democracy where focus is increasingly on party-political rivalry rather than the long-term needs of society. Public debate is often characterised by tactical attacks, personality-focused conflicts, and mutual suspicion, where political mud-slinging receives more attention than substantial solutions. The result is a system where short-term gains and positioning are prioritised over thorough discussions of complex problems.

One of the biggest problems is the growing distance between politicians and citizens. Many experience that decisions do not always reflect the wishes and needs of the population. Instead, the system favours short-term solutions that can secure re-election, rather than long-term initiatives to handle deep societal problems such as climate change and social inequality.

Source: https://www.pexels.com

This dynamic means that some groups feel less heard and represented. Although politicians are well-intentioned, they are influenced by a system that largely links to electoral processes, which reward re-election and the preservation of power rather than long-term thinking and courageous decisions.

Decisions are made reactively rather than proactively – "there was a problem, and we did something about it, so vote for us". This means that bills are largely shaped by communicative considerations, media pressure, and party strategy rather than professional assessment and long-term planning.

Complexity of Legislation

One of the very great challenges in modern democracies is the conflict between the desire for simple, manageable rules and the need to manage a complex reality. A vicious circle where both political psychology and societal development drive the amount of legislation upwards.

It is very much about "covering one's back." In today's political climate, there is a widespread zero-error culture. If an individual case arises in the media, the public and the opposition demand action now. The politician's fastest way to show decisiveness is to create a new rule or add more regulation to the current rules intended to prevent precisely that error from happening again.

Thus legislation becomes based upon individual cases rather than general principles. This creates a patchwork of complex and special rules with no coherent oversight.

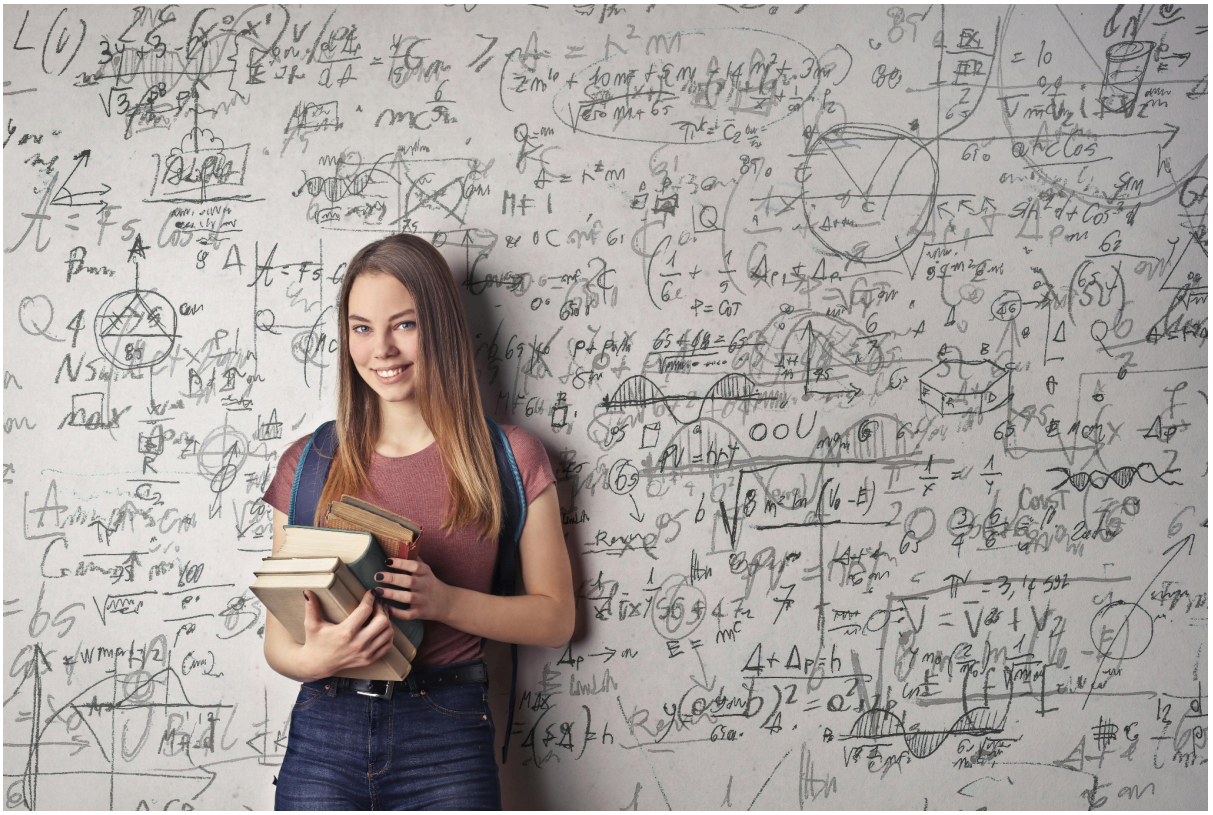
Politicians and civil servants likewise fear removing rules or changing the implementation. If a rule is removed, and something subsequently goes wrong (e.g., a food scandal or an environmental accident), the responsible minister will be held accountable for having "relaxed the control." It is far safer for politicians and civil servants to propose more control than less control. Therefore, the volume of rules grows exponentially and completely automatically.

Many point to this as a pressing problem for the EU in general and believe that extensive regulation has hampered dynamics compared to countries like China and the USA.

Is it a law of nature? The answer is presumably no, but it is a consequence of development and choices. We have built a system where "trust" has been replaced by "control and documentation," because we do not accept that errors happen.

For every new problem, a new rule arises. For every rule, there’s a new administrative layer. Tax increases occur, not to create new infrastructure or increased productivity, but to match society's growing complexity as it is experienced by legislators and the civil service. Decisions become more abstract and further from their consequences. Slowly, the system begins to exist for its own continuation.

This is a decisive turning point, because when regulation, procedures, and correctness become more important than the reality they are intended to regulate, friction arises. Not necessarily in the form of rebellion, but in stagnation, distance, and loss of legitimacy.



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Legislative processing

When a bill is introduced in the Folketing by the government, it is thoroughly prepared legally, but in practice it is often merely a starting point for further political processing. At the same time, there is a significant difference in how proposals come into being: The government's bills are drafted in the ministries by the civil service and are often politically aligned in advance, while proposals from parties outside the government function to a higher degree as political initiatives indicating a direction rather than a finished law.

A bill in the Folketing is processed in three steps: At the 1st reading, the proposal is discussed broadly, after which, following a vote, it is sent to committee processing and eventual amendments are drafted. At the 2nd reading, amendments are reviewed and adopted by vote, and at the 3rd reading, the final decision is made as to whether the bill shall be passed or rejected.

The real engine of the Folketing is focused on the committees required to process a bill. As legislation increasingly encompasses complex and cross-cutting issues, the processing of bills is often distributed across several committees and ministries in the Folketing. This can weaken it overall and make the placement of responsibility for the final proposed bill unclear.

At the same time, there are strong incentives to introduce new legislation as a reaction to specific problems, while mechanisms that systematically assess the necessity, proportionality, and interaction with existing rules exist only to a limited extent.

A proposal on IT security, for example, can be processed in the Legal Affairs Committee and the Committee for Digitalisation and IT (if it exists during that period). Likewise, other

committees such as the Business Committee, the Defence Committee, and the European Affairs Committee are involved and provide statements.

Impact assessments and consultation processes contribute to enlightenment but rarely lead to actual changes. When a bill is sent for consultation, the political agreement has typically already been concluded between the parties. Changing anything fundamental would require reopening a difficult political negotiation. Consultation responses often point to professional problems, but the decision is made on political (value-based) premises.

Over time, this leads to a gradual accumulation of regulation, increased competence for the administration, and varying legislative quality, which places greater demands on authorities, businesses, and citizens alike.

The Folketing leaves details to the administration in connection with bills, which creates executive orders, guidelines, and administrative practice. The consequence is less political decision-making regarding the details and more power to the civil service.

Thus, no one has overall responsibility; each committee sees only its own angle, and ambiguities are pushed further along in the process. The result is often compromise language or content with unclear purposes.

One challenge is that the government does not only function as the executive power (implementation body) but also plays a central role in the legislative process. It introduces the majority of bills and often functions as both the negotiation leader and the negotiation arena. If one desires a clearer separation of powers, it could therefore be argued that the Folketing should, to a higher degree, be a place where legislation is drafted. Today, the majority of bills (around 80–90%) come from the government. That was hardly the intention of the Constitution.

Representation

Politicians in Denmark have a background that is skewed compared to the composition of the population. There is a significant over-representation of individuals with long-term legal, economic, and administrative education, resulting in a rather uniform group that finds it difficult to represent the whole of society.

This means that problems are primarily viewed by people who are accustomed to processing them through law, politics, and economics. This creates a relatively narrow field of action, limited by the logics of these disciplines. There is a need for other ways of understanding and managing societal problems than those typically proposed by these professional groups.

Many politicians have relatively limited professional experience from the private labour market. Several go directly from the educational system into politics, possibly with experience from public organisations or trade unions.

For many, political life functions as a long-term career path, which naturally affects representation, decision-making processes, and risk appetite.

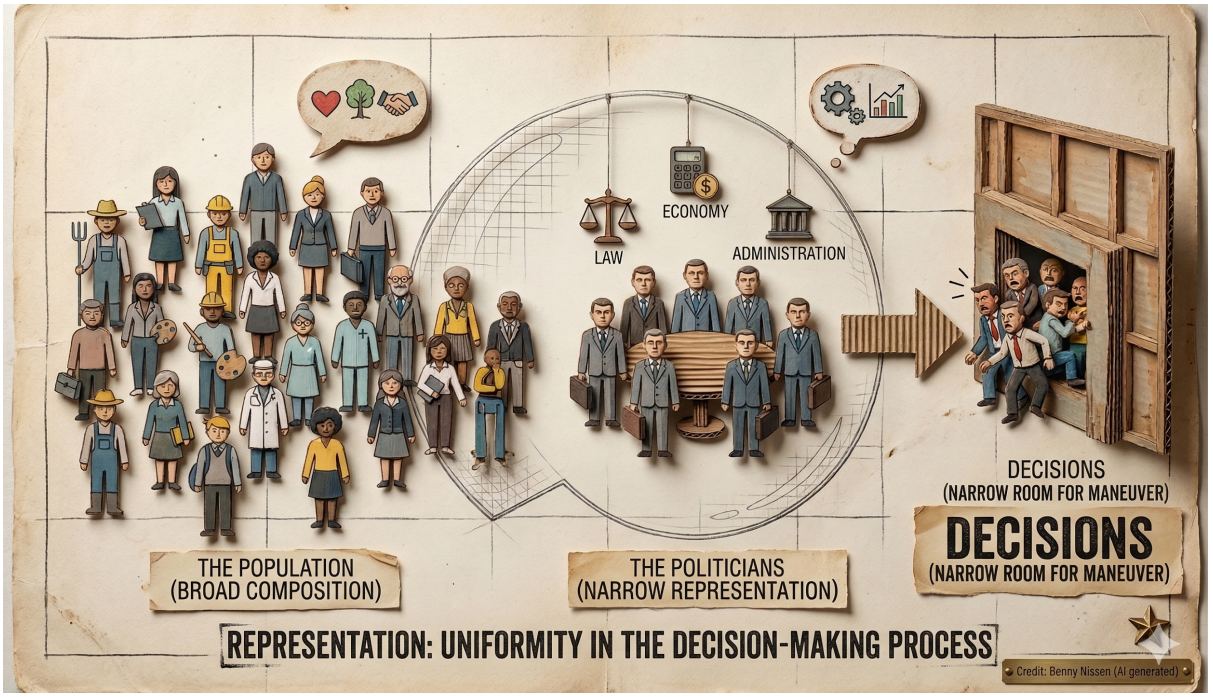
In individual cases, one sees political engagements recurring across generations within the same family. This raises the natural question of how well representation functions in practice?

Research shows that homogeneous groups typically make poorer decisions because perspectives become narrow and fewer assumptions are challenged. The extreme example is dictators, who only represent themselves and their own views. In a democracy, power should be distributed so that no single group – not even political professionals – dominates the decision-making process.

The claim that experts and technocrats are best suited to lead a country is one heard occasionally, unfortunately also from some politicians. This viewpoint is essentially an appeal for technocracy. In a democracy, the challenge is about finding the balance between professional expertise and broad representation.

International experience shows that electoral mechanisms favour leaders with strong personal strategic competencies and charisma, which does not necessarily ensure broad representation or a collaborative orientation. The point is that elections in themselves do not guarantee optimal democratic processes. Trump, Putin, Erdogan, Netanyahu, and Orban all represent personality types that differ significantly from the average population.

Elections and the concentration of power favour leaders with strong personal power strategies over collaborative and society-oriented profiles. History shows that elections alone do not ensure good democratic results. Our cooperation, and increasingly our laws, resemble the mindset of the elected leaders, which is therefore not necessarily representative of the thoughts and opinions of the general population.



Credit: Benny Nissen (AI generated)

Influence

Modern liberal democracies protect the electoral system through the separation of powers, judicial review, free elections, independent institutions, as well as a free press and the protection of rights. These safeguards are, however, primarily developed to prevent sudden seizures of power, not the gradual and legal concentration of power. They presuppose, to a high degree, that political actors act in good faith.

In practice, it has proven possible to erode these mechanisms from within. Elections determine who governs, but do not necessarily limit how much power they obtain once elected. When the same political majority controls the government, parliament, and judicial appointments, the separation of powers loses its real function. Courts can be politicised, norms can be disregarded, and the protection of rights does not prevent the institutional balance from disappearing.

The central problem is structural: all political power originates from the same electoral logic and the same party system. Thus, a critical single point of failure arises. Experience from, among others, Russia shows that authoritarian development often occurs gradually, legally on the surface, and without abolishing elections or formal rights.

There is a need for institutional counterweights which:

- Do not originate from elections
- Are not party-political
- Cannot be taken over strategically

Traditional liberal security systems are not sufficient on their own. If democracy is to be protected against modern authoritarian erosion, it requires institutional counterweights with a different source of legitimacy than the election-based system.

Politicians and parties

One might be led to believe that it is people who are especially suited to govern who gain power and make the laws. However, the current representative democracy selects for individuals who can handle the pressure from the media and political opponents. Thus, it often selects individuals who possess strong communicative and strategic competencies, not necessarily those with broad experience, professional insight, or a representative background. These are often people who are good at speaking, persuading, and appearing strong in the press and on social media.

Politicians and parties largely use the press and social media as a strategic mouthpiece rather than as a forum for open debate. They carefully craft their message to ensure attention and clicks, while they gain access to an effective distribution channel for their narrative.

This relationship of mutual dependency means that complex proposals are often reduced to slogans, where pace and drama are prioritised over substance. The result is that a real assessment of the content rarely occurs. Statements are reported, reactions are recounted, but the fundamental discussion of assumptions, consequences, and alternatives is absent.

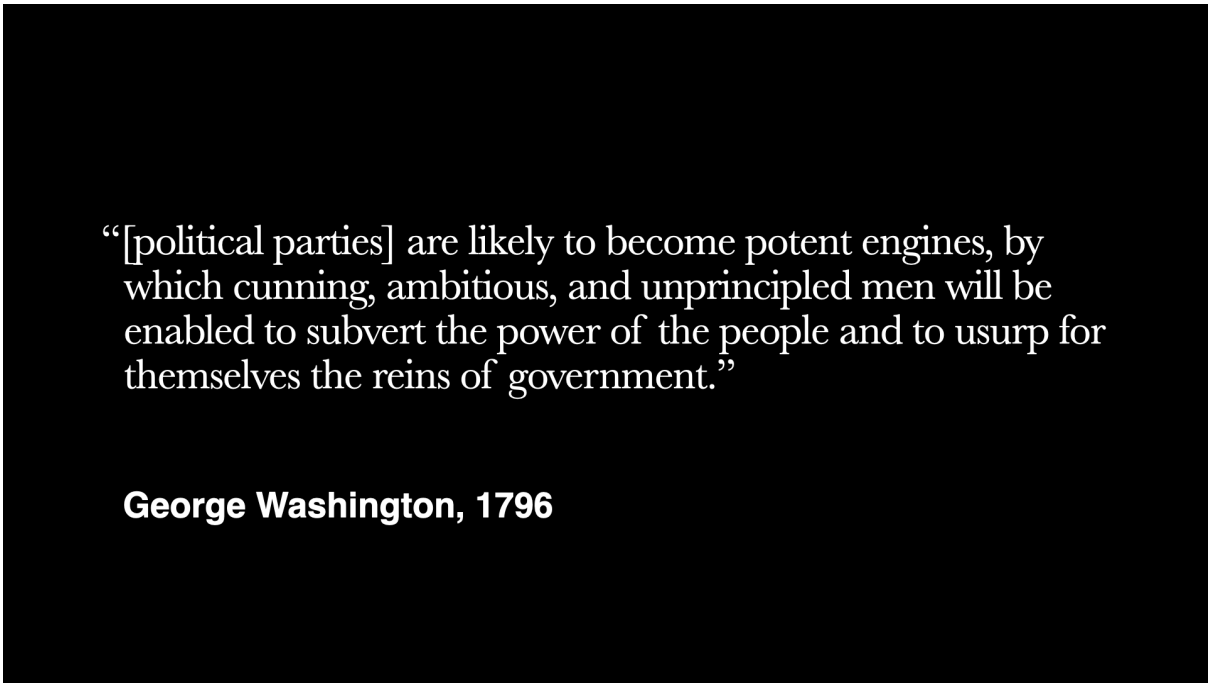
At the same time, it becomes more difficult for politicians to hold on to their own views the more responsibility and influence they gain—and the more that is at stake for both themselves and their party.

Parties in Denmark play a central role today, but they are not mentioned in the Constitution and have emerged gradually through ordinary legislation and practice, and are thus weakly anchored legally. They function primarily as a strategic necessity to maximise attention and votes. But what actually controls the parties? Membership numbers have fallen dramatically over the years, from around 20 per cent of the population to now only approximately 2 to 3 per cent. The parties are no longer deeply rooted in the population but are rather controlled by small, closed circles.

This means that the political mandate can no longer be said to originate from a membership democracy.

Where party congresses and annual meetings were previously gatherings for real political debate, they are today largely reduced to staged events. The focus has shifted from the discussion of content to presentation—from internal exchange of opinions to the communication of finely tuned messages and personas. The part of the annual meetings where members debate politics with each other and influence the course has largely disappeared from the agenda.

The large political parties today function organisationally in many ways like corporations, with clear hierarchies, career paths, and central management. The focus is increasingly on the party's continued relevance and support, which contributes to a high degree of political adaptation. Politics is often treated strategically, where voter support is understood as a goal to be optimised.



Public domain

I have had acquaintances who entered local politics, but it didn’t take long before they left it. The explanation they give is that they did not feel they could make any difference and were required to follow the party line. This means that good potential candidates choose not to engage, which reduces representation and the breadth of experience in political work. At the municipal level, it is likewise heavily dependent on who is willing to carry out the work in a city council for a small fee alongside one's full-time job.

The above indicates that the problem is not only about structure but also about incentives and the culture within the political party system.

Several politicians with whom I have discussed these topics agree that the parties constitute a significant part of the problem. Their suggestions often involve changing the function or structure of the parties to create a better-functioning democratic system. Personally, however, I find it difficult to see how this could be possible as long as the fundamental reasons why parties emerge continue to exist.

Nor do I believe that the individuals who originally drafted the Constitution had sufficiently thought through this challenge. After all, it is difficult to imagine how 179 members of the Folketing are to agree on legislation without some form of organisation.

Many complain that "party-hoppers" exist, but the Constitution actually establishes that members of the Folketing are bound solely by their own conviction. One elects a person and not a party. The individual is only responsible to their own conscience in their legislative work. That they are partially elected through party votes is a later added complexity.

Where elections are used

There is a difference in how democracy functions at the state level and in regions and municipalities. My opinion is that the problem is greatest at the state level because it is most disconnected from the ordinary citizen. This is not to say that there are not similar problems elsewhere where elections are used.

National and semi-public bodies

- Parochial Church Councils (the Church of Denmark)
- University boards and academic councils
- Vocational education committees, AMU committees, etc.
- Boards of self-governing institutions (e.g., upper secondary schools, schools, cultural institutions)

Labour market and companies

- Occupational Health and Safety Organisations (AMO)
- Shop stewards (TR)
- Trade unions
- Company boards (employee representatives)

Housing, associations, and organisations

- Non-profit housing organisations

- Housing cooperatives
- Unemployment insurance funds (A-kasser)
- Cooperative enterprises and member organisations (e.g., Coop, sports associations)

Special areas

- School boards in primary and lower secondary schools
- Pension funds and insurance associations (member-controlled)
- Patient involvement committees (e.g., in regions)

The smaller an organisation is, the better the election processes typically seem to function. It is only in very large organisations, where there is a lot at stake, that the challenges of elections truly become apparent.

However, the challenge is deeper than just the scale of the organisation. Elections have become a one-dimensional way of governing that permeates our entire society. From the smallest sports club to the highest state institutions, we have institutionalised the idea that a vote is the only valid expression of democratic will.

This "election-centrism" has become dominant largely because those in power in the Folketing only operate within this specific logic. For them, the election is the only source of legitimacy they know and trust, which often blinds them to alternative models, such as processes using sortition. Even though these alternatives exist and have historical roots, the culture of elections has become so entrenched among the political elite that it overshadows other ways of making collective decisions.

What is sortition

Sortition, also known as drawing lots or lottocracy, is a process where members of a decision-making assembly are selected randomly from among the population. This was a central part of ancient Athenian democracy and has been used in various places throughout history. It is the subject of modern experiments in, among other things, citizens' assemblies worldwide.

Sortition ensures a representation that is independent of political power and economic influence. The random element means that selected citizens represent a good cross-section of the population.

Taken from Sortition Foundation website

Sortition is seen as a democratic tool that counteracts the concentration of power and provides access to more types of experiences and perspectives than the current election-based system typically produces.

Sortition can restore the connection between citizens and decision-makers. By involving ordinary citizens directly in the legislative process decisions will, to a higher degree, reflect the reality experienced by the population. At the same time, a sortition chamber can prioritise long-term goals, as it is not subject to election cycles or party-political interests. Representation ensures a greater diversity of perspectives and can reduce polarisation in politics.

Sortition is not an alternative to professional expertise, but a means to decide political directions and value-based choices on a more representative basis, while experts contribute knowledge. A great many of the participants in a sortition-based panel change their minds during the process – when they receive more information and can discuss a topic thoroughly.

Sortition requires, like so much else, a significant effort to ensure that the selected members are prepared and supported in their role. Many citizens may feel uncertain about their abilities to make political decisions. There is also a risk of low participation if selected citizens do not wish to participate.

Selection can occur in several ways, but it is recommended that they are chosen completely randomly from among all citizens.

> As an alternative, citizens can sign up on a list from which names are then drawn randomly. This method has the problem that one does not achieve a truly random selection, and it typically results in a bias among the individuals who are selected.

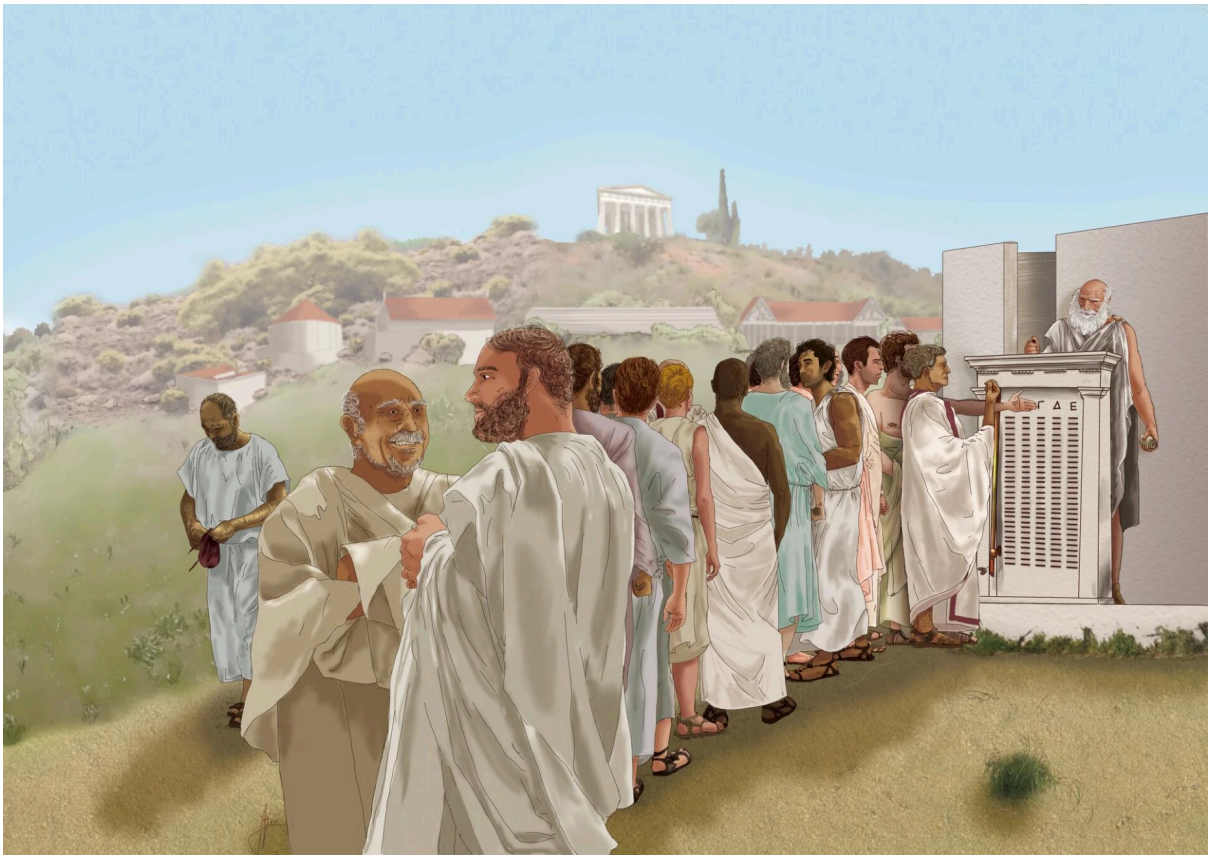
Numerous citizens' assemblies and studies show that ordinary people are competent, if they are given the right framework. This is confirmed by both national and international experiences.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has conducted a review of citizen processes based on thorough dialogue and deliberation, which shows that facilitation, access to independent experts, and clear roles enable participants to work competently with complex issues and formulate well-founded recommendations.

The clear strength of sortition is that it enables a far better democratic conversation about society's problems. By removing election campaigns, party pressure, and career considerations, space is created for more open, knowledge-based, and nuanced discussions, where the focus is on understanding the problem and solutions rather than positioning.

The disadvantage of sortition is that experienced and skilled participants cannot remain in the system over a longer period, and that the model as presented here is not suited for rapid decisions. At the same time, precisely these conditions help prevent the formation of a new political elite, because the entire population knows that next time it could be themselves who are appointed. A slower and more thorough legislative process must also, in most cases, be regarded as a strength rather than a weakness.

The system was used in the ancient Athenian city government and is thus the original form of democracy. Sortition was intended to ensure that all interested persons had an equal chance of obtaining a public office or being selected for an assembly. It minimises party formation or the emergence of factions, as there is no effect in making a lot of promises or standing together to win at the next election.



The ancient randomness machine – kleroterion (unknown source)

A central argument for sortition in Athens was that a free man could only realise the necessity of being governed and being subject to laws if he himself had experience in governing – in other words, he understood the necessity.

Sortition thus promotes decisions based on objectivity and common interest rather than power strategy and election campaigning. In ancient Greek democracy, sortition was the traditional and primary method for the appointment of political officials, and its use was considered an important characteristic of democracy.

“It is accepted as democratic when public offices are filled via lot, and oligarchic when they are filled via election,” Aristotle wrote.

Plato's famous thought—that only the one who does not desire power is fit to exercise it—is based on the fundamental insight that those who actively seek power by standing for election are often those at greatest risk of being shaped by power and using it in their own interest.

In ancient Greece, only citizens could be selected. That a large part of the population were slaves, foreigners, or women, we shall set aside for a moment. The word “idiot” is of Greek origin and was applied to persons who did not participate or involve themselves in public administration and legislation (*idiotes*).

The point is not that we should copy the historical model, but that drawing lots is an old and legitimate democratic mechanism that has been displaced by electoral politics.

Kilde: https://pixabay.com

Democracy has taken many different forms throughout history and across countries. The system we know today with elected legislators was not originally described as democratic. On the contrary, there was a conscious desire to avoid the connection to Athenian and Venetian democracy and other places where sortition had been used.

The goal of the election-based system was to maintain a certain control over who drafted the laws – preferably the so-called "best" citizens. It was only during the 19th century that the election-based system began to be referred to as democracy. Constitutional systems in the USA and France were not called democratic to begin with. “Democracy” was perceived as direct rule by the people and something unstable and dangerous. Instead, people spoke of a republic, representation, and a mixed constitution.

The term “democracy” is, therefore, to a high degree historical and value-laden, rather than precisely descriptive.

Why an extra chamber

A chamber based on sortition as a supplement to the Folketing can solve some of the greatest challenges in modern democracy – including the dominance of power elites, short-term politics, and increasing polarisation – while simultaneously preserving the voters' electoral influence through a bicameral system.

Referendums should not be used, as the individual citizen does not wish to, or have the possibility to, familiarise themselves with the case and therefore votes on an emotional basis, while there are also significant opportunities for manipulation.

Research indicates that the most sustainable system combines elections and sortition in a way where the two mechanisms supplement each other:

- Elections to the Folketing ensure political decisiveness and accountability because voters can replace politicians.
- Sortition ensures equality, independence from special interests, and a more long-term perspective due to a better public debate.

In this way, the strengths of both systems are utilised without one replacing the other.

But the road there is not easy. There are major obstacles: The Constitution must be amended, the established parties will in all likelihood oppose the reform because they lose power, and there may be scepticism in the population toward non-elected decision-makers.

These barriers are primarily about institutional inertia and power balances, not about the model itself being impractical.

Denmark's culture of cooperation and high degree of trust present both advantages and challenges. An advantage because we already have experience with compromises and broad political agreements. A challenge because some perceive the system as functioning well enough and may therefore lack the motivation for change.

An extra chamber based on sortition can function as a valuable supplement to the Folketing. The Folketing and the government will continue to handle acute challenges as well as proposals for the Finance Act, while the sortition chamber will focus on long-term goals and matters of principle, such as environmental policy and social justice.

This cooperation will combine election-based rapid efficiency with the broader perspectives of the citizens.

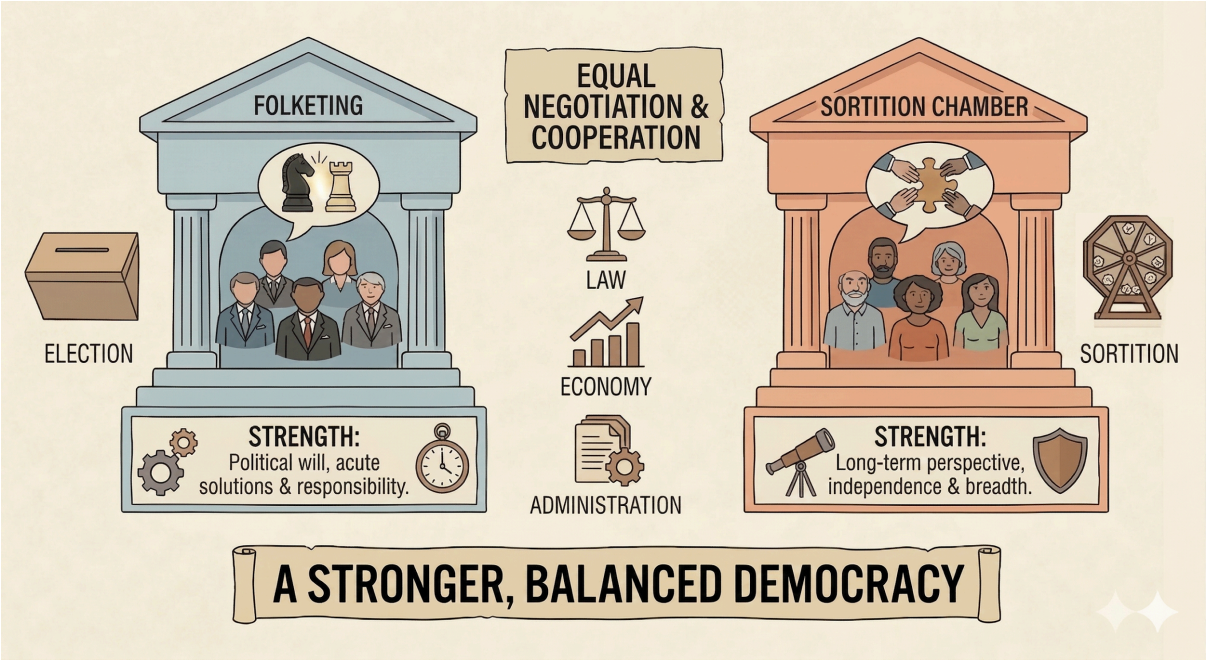
To succeed, the recommendations of the citizens' assembly must be sought after and taken seriously. There must be clear rules and transparency regarding selection and expert assistance. The distribution of power must be balanced so that sortition gains real influence.

In Denmark, we have experimented with the “Citizens’ Assembly on Climate” (*Klimaborgerstinget*), which was a citizens' assembly established by the Folketing. The purpose was to give citizens a voice in the green transition, as politicians wanted input on the difficult dilemmas brought about by the climate crisis. Their many recommendations were of high quality, but as they were only advisory, many proposals were either rejected or

significantly diluted, as they were politically considered too controversial or difficult to implement. This is an example of why we must have an extra chamber with real power.

It is crucial that both chambers are equal and have equal power. If one chamber has more power than the other, the Folketing could override the sortition chamber by, for example, a 66% voting majority in the Folketing, but this is not recommended. It would immediately make the sortition chamber less valuable than the Folketing, and there are other solutions for deadlocked situations.

Mechanisms must be established where disagreements are handled through negotiation and process, rather than hierarchical overrule, so that the chambers function as equal partners.



Credit: Benny Nissen (AI generated)

Denmark has previously had a bicameral system, where the *Landsting* functioned as a conservative corrective to the *Folketing*. Today, the desire is once again for a bicameral system – this time to give citizens themselves a direct role in keeping the decisions of the *Folketing* in check.

The difference in democratic legitimacy between the *Folketing* and the *Landsting* was difficult to defend. There was a significant social bias in the composition of the *Landsting*. In practice, it was dominated by older, more affluent, and conservative voters. This gave the impression of an elitist veto chamber. The *Landsting* voted markedly differently on social and distributional policies.

The historical problem was that the two political chambers had the same type of legitimacy but different social profiles, and therefore functioned as a political veto. Over time, the rules were changed so that the right to vote for the *Landsting* more closely resembled the rules for the *Folketing*, which of course meant that the two chambers more or less had the same political distribution and therefore often voted the same way.

The *Landsting* thus lost its original function as a corrective and more reflective supplement to the *Folketing* and became, in practice, a copy of the *Folketing*. When the *Landsting* disagreed, it was criticised as undemocratic. When it agreed, it was criticised as redundant.

The *Landsting* did not fall because a bicameral system in itself is bad, but because:

- Both chambers were election-based
- The chambers lacked clearly separated roles
- It was felt to be a waste of money

This is precisely what a sortition chamber attempts to handle in a better way. The problem was not the idea of two chambers, but the specific way it was implemented and how it evolved.

What is the structure

By drawing lots from the civil registry, 300 people are selected to sit in the sortition chamber, which we will hereafter call the SBT (*Sortition BorgerTing* – Sortition Citizens' Assembly). All Danish citizens over the age of 18 can be selected, and no societal differentiation (stratification) is made for income, gender, or the like, as the number of people in the SBT and a continuous replacement should ensure an even distribution across most parameters.

Participation in the SBT is to be considered a civic duty that can only be avoided with difficulty, and in the few cases where this occurs, a replacement is selected at random. A working group decides whether a citizen's reason for not participating in the work is valid. If the SBT does not judge the reason to be valid, it must be made public, but there is no actual penalty.

The selected citizens are to receive the same salary income as they earned on average over the last 3 years plus 10%. However, with a minimum equal to the salary received by members of the Folketing and a maximum limit that is continuously adjusted. This ensures that participation is realistically possible for most social groups and that economic barriers do not hinder participation.

Many would likely argue for equal pay for equal work, but this is a special case where the goal of representation is more important. Furthermore, there is already no uniform income in society for the same work.

One possibility is that the work in the SBT is performed part-time alongside a normal job, as in local politics. However, this would hardly allow enough time for the task, and only a few would undertake the work, which weakens representativeness. At the same time, part-time work does not solve the problem of absence from the original job, but it could nevertheless be considered as an option, as it would help, for example, the self-employed.

There shall be a continuous replacement of members in the SBT. One-fourth is replaced every year, and the individual member thus sits for 4 years. This creates continuity while ensuring a continuous renewal of perspectives. Likewise, one avoids too large a hiatus in the work, which would occur if all 300 were to be replaced at the same time.

The 300 individuals work in committees of 20 members. Thus, a maximum of 15 committees can be active simultaneously. The committees are composed with a broad representation across age, gender, and geography by being assembled randomly. Which committee receives which bill to work on is also random.

In addition to the permanent committees, smaller working groups of 12 members can be established to handle specific matters, such as preparing an internal bill. The members of these working groups are selected through voluntary sign-up. Members can sign up for several working groups, possibly with priority. The final group composition is determined by random draw from among the members who have wished to be part of the work.

The working groups provide the opportunity for in-depth study without burdening the permanent committees. They also allow members with a greater work capacity to utilise this.

To avoid duplication of work and conflict, a permanent cooperation body should be established between the chambers – a kind of joint committee. This committee is to coordinate the processing of dual cases and create common formulations whenever possible. This body shall function as a link, not as a power centre, and shall support cooperation rather than competition.

The members of the joint committee are selected from among the members of both chambers and assembled in a balanced manner – for example, 12 from each chamber, which from the SBT will be a working group. The committee shall not be able to override a chamber but shall ensure that the cooperation runs smoothly.

To ensure that a chamber cannot indefinitely postpone a case, time limits should be set for the processing at many levels. If these are not met, it can trigger an automatic forwarding to the other chamber with automatic approval. This will prevent delays, ensure progress in legislation, and create a layer of protection against strategic stalling.

The question of government and ministries requires new thinking in a system with two chambers. The SBT shall, of course, not have its own government, but it must have access to ministries and the civil service on an equal footing with the Folketing. All ministries shall be obliged to serve both chambers with legislative preparatory work, advice, and implementation. This supports neutral civil service conduct and balanced decision support to ensure transparency.

This means that the function of the ministries is not fundamentally changed, but that their duty of service is expanded to two chambers instead of one. Ministers are appointed, as they are today, by the Prime Minister. Changes in the number and type of ministries should only occur through bills processed and approved by both chambers to ensure more long-term stability.

One could imagine the SBT gaining more power over the appointment of ministers, so that they, for example, are approved by the SBT and are not automatically replaced upon a change of government, but instead are employed on fixed-term contracts—for example, 2 years at a time—with the possibility of reappointment. This would provide more stability and professionalisation. However, this would break with the current system, where the Prime Minister can freely assemble their team, and the premise is to change as little as possible of the existing setup.

The SBT and the Folketing must be institutionally separate – with their own procedures, secretariats, and forms of work – but with access to shared infrastructure such as ministries and advice. The decoupling is not about isolation but about independence in the political and decision-making process. This ensures that the SBT can act without party-political pressure and promote the citizens' perspectives on an equal footing with the elected representatives.

A dedicated secretariat shall provide administrative and professional support to the SBT. This includes legal advice, calendar management, communication help, and organisational assistance to committees, working groups, and plenary debates. The SBT's secretariat thus functions as a neutral support body and not as a political actor.

The SBT's secretariat shall have a press department that communicates decisions and work processes to the public. The press is granted access to open debates, and press briefings

can be arranged after important votes. Openness and active communication are crucial for legitimacy, as a sortition chamber does not have political candidates to explain decisions publicly.

This proposal outlines a cooperation-oriented but independent role for the SBT, where citizen participation, merit, quality, and structure are keywords. It unites the dynamics of the existing political system with other democratic principles and control mechanisms.

Another advantage is that the Folketing's structure and current work processes are changed minimally and function more or less as they always have. Hopefully, this makes the implementation of the extra chamber easier.

How proposals are processed

The SBT processes proposals through a structured and thorough process that ensures quality, broad representation, and transparency. The process involves several phases and levels.

Cases can be brought before the SBT in several ways. Firstly, the SBT has the right of initiative: members of the chamber can propose topics they believe should be addressed. Secondly, the Folketing must forward proposals to the SBT. The right of initiative is thus shared between the chambers and the government. This ensures that the SBT functions independently while simultaneously playing an integrated role in the existing legislative process.

Furthermore, opportunities should be created for citizens to influence the agenda—for example, through the current digital citizens' initiative scheme or via organisations that can formulate and submit cases to the SBT. This ensures popular anchoring and participation, making it possible for the population to place topics on the agenda without having to use party-political channels.

If a case is brought up in both chambers in parallel—that is, in both the Folketing and the SBT—there should be clear procedures for how this is handled. In practice, it will often be the faster chamber that first formally introduces the proposal.

All cases are processed with a first, second, and third reading, just as in the Folketing. If a proposal is not good enough, it can be sent to a working group for improvements and reintroduced. This process ensures quality and thoroughness. In this way, even proposals with low initial support can be improved and matured instead of simply being rejected.

A crucial difference between the Folketing and the SBT is that bills in the Folketing, upon introduction, can often be regarded as general political ideas, where further specification occurs to a significant extent in the ministries and through a process characterised by political compromises.

In the SBT, on the other hand, bills are intended to be processed without actual negotiation and with an initially high level of detail. The focus is on substance, consequences, and long-term effects, and the civil service primarily participates in an advisory and supportive role rather than as driving actors in compromise processes.

The Process

All proposals originating internally from the SBT, from external organisations, or as a citizens' initiative are processed by the secretariat initiating a plenary vote to decide whether the proposal should be improved or elaborated upon by a working group. If at least 25% of the plenary votes for improvements, a working group is established for the purpose of refining the bill. The working group drafts a more thoroughly prepared bill and has 14 days to complete the work.

Once the new, improved bill is available, or if no working group is established, a plenary vote is held where members can only vote yes or no to further processing in a committee. If the vote yields a negative result, the bill is rejected immediately.

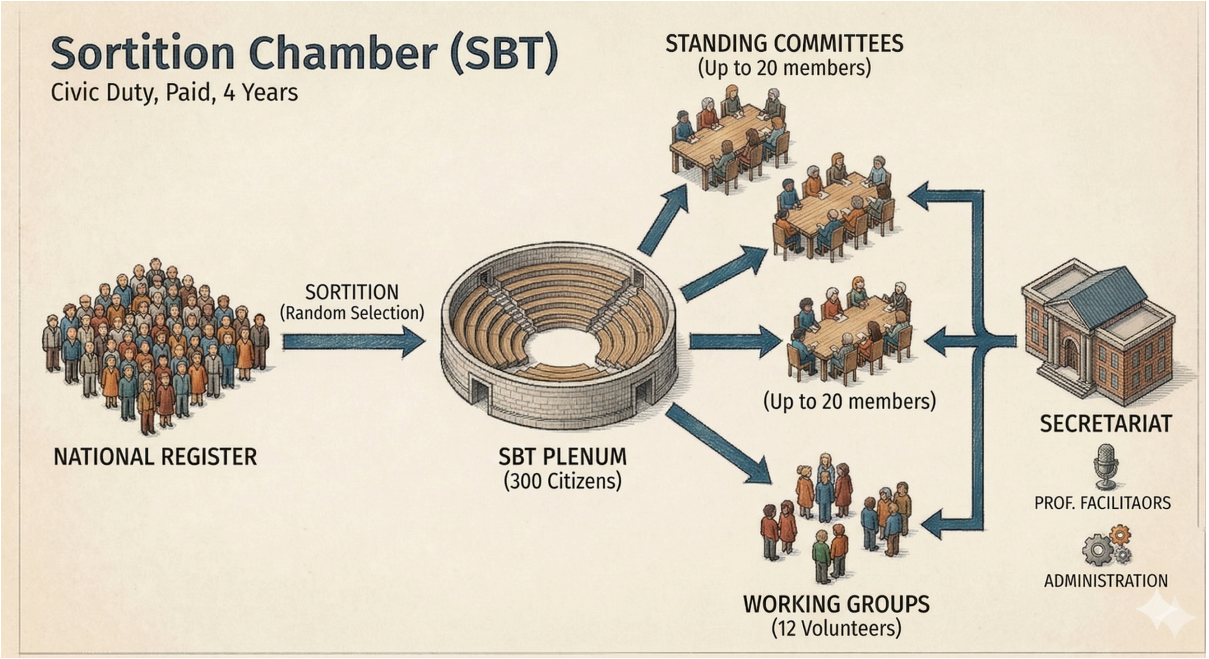
If the bill comes from the Folketing or the government, it must be processed in a slightly different manner, but overall following the same logic. The secretariat initiates a plenary vote to decide whether the proposal from the Folketing should be investigated further by a working group. If at least 25% of the plenary votes for further investigation, a working group is established with the purpose of assessing whether it makes sense for the SBT to process the proposal. The working group prepares a recommendation and has 14 days to complete the work.

Once the recommendation is available, or if no working group is established, a new plenary vote is held where members can only vote on whether it should proceed to processing in an SBT committee or if the bill is accepted in the form in which it currently exists. The system thus also functions as a mechanism to regulate the workload within the SBT.

For comparison, typically 200–300 bills are processed in a session of the Folketing. Most are minor and technical – for example, changes to existing legislation, implementation of EU rules, or administrative adjustments. Major reforms carry great political weight but constitute a smaller part of the total number. Activity is highest in the spring and autumn, and in practice, approximately one bill is introduced per working day. It is precisely for this reason that the more thorough SBT process makes particular sense for larger and more fundamental cases.

Urgent bills undergo the same process. In practice, this means the SBT must confirm that a proposal is urgent. However, it is expected that such cases will rarely be delayed, as the necessity for rapid processing will typically be evident.

Each committee and working group is led by a chairperson, whom the members of the individual committee elect from among their own members. The chairperson primarily manages the cooperation with the secretariat and the ministries. Additionally, each committee and working group is assigned a professional facilitator, who is randomly selected from a pool maintained by the secretariat. The facilitator is to ensure that the work is structured and efficient. After the work is completed, the facilitator is evaluated by the members so that the secretariat can continuously ensure the high quality of the facilitators.



Credit: Benny Nissen (AI generated)

Both the chairperson and the facilitator can be replaced at any time by a simple majority. This model separates content (the chairperson) from process management (the facilitator), which reduces the risk of hidden power and manipulation.

This is crucial to prevent experts, interest organisations, or strong personalities from dominating the process. This structure also ensures that the SBT's work is transparent, democratic, and efficiently organised, with a clear division of labour and a sound framework for decision-making.

First reading

Each committee works within a period of two months on a bill to arrive at a recommendation with relevant background material. The committee can also conclude its work before the two months have passed if there is agreement to do so. The committee does not need to be in complete agreement, and any disagreements are noted. All material is made public. During its work, the committee can obtain information externally and draw on ministries and the like.

This is reminiscent of classic committee processing in the Folketing, but with greater transparency because processes and minority statements are made public. The SBT committee is to work on investigating substance, consequences, and long-term effects. A committee in the Folketing works primarily on negotiating and formulating political compromises.

Second reading

During the second reading, 15 cross-functional groups of 20 members each are assembled, all of whom receive the proposals. These cross-functional groups review the proposals within a maximum of 14 days to ensure that all relevant aspects have been sufficiently addressed. They identify any deficiencies, needs for further investigation, or improvements

and send their conclusions to the secretariat, which compiles and coordinates the conclusions from the cross-functional groups.

If more than 10% of the cross-functional groups judge that the bill has not been processed well enough, it is handed over to a committee other than the one that initially processed it for further work. In other words, the first reading is resumed. This can only happen once, after which it must be sent to a plenary vote.

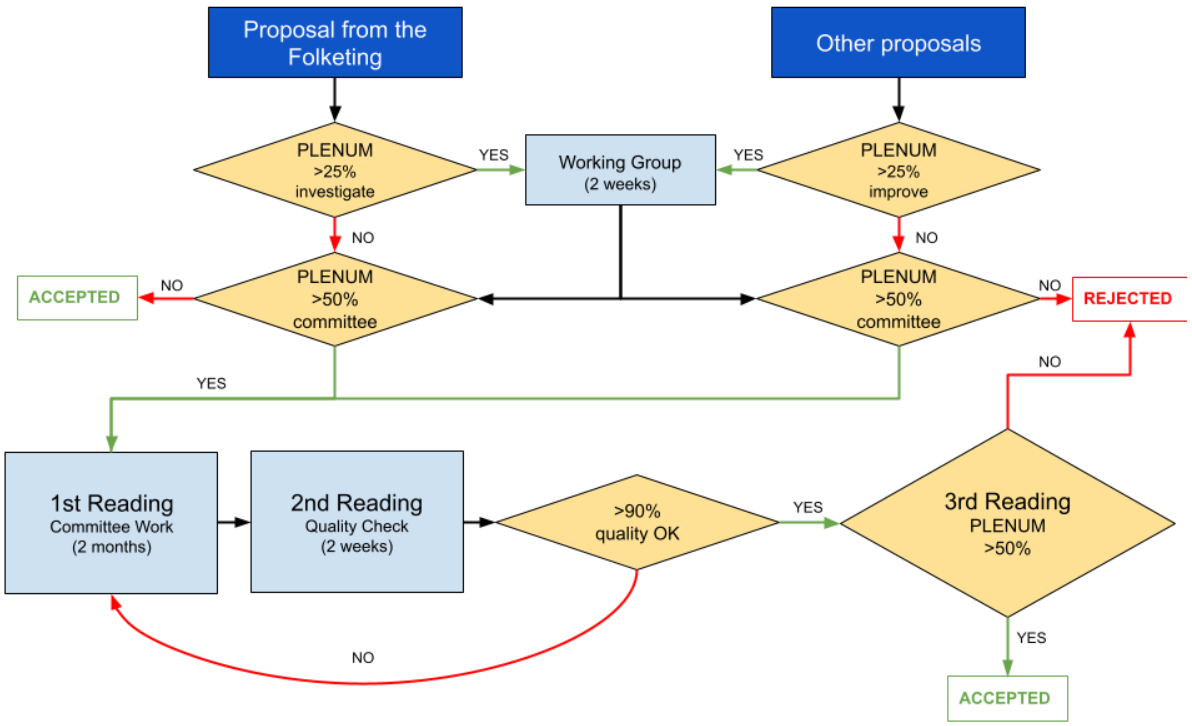
The purpose is quality assurance rather than changing content – the proposal only moves forward once the processing is exhaustive. Another advantage is that all members of the SBT thus become familiar with the bill before the plenary vote in the third reading.

When it is sent back to the first reading again, a working group can be established to improve the bill if it is poorly formulated or the like. This, of course, can only be done for bills originating from the SBT.

Third reading

If at least 90% of the cross-functional groups judge that the case has been sufficiently processed, the bill is forwarded for a final vote in plenary by simple majority. In the event of a tie, the bill is rejected. The final vote is conducted electronically and is secret from the public. However, individual votes are registered internally so that they can later be investigated for any suspicion of bribery or similar irregularities. Each member writes a brief justification for their vote. The secretariat then produces a summarised justification for the result of the vote, which is made public.

The internal register enables auditing and corruption control without compromising anonymity.



Credit: Benny Nissen

Meeting Formats and Facilities

The legislative work in the SBT is intended to take place primarily online or with in-person attendance regionally, should this be desired for facilities or social interaction.

Regional meeting places shall be available for individual members, committee meetings, and working group meetings, which reduces travel time and ensures regional anchoring. The frequency of online and regional meetings is determined continuously based on need and practical considerations. This makes participation easier and more sustainable in terms of climate and family life.

Additionally, there may potentially be one physical location in Denmark where all members of the SBT can gather for special events.

Credit: Benny Nissen

Confidentiality

In the *Folketing*, certain matters are treated as confidential for reasons of national security, intelligence, and foreign policy. This is necessary, but it also carries the risk that confidentiality is applied too broadly.

A sortition chamber should not abolish confidentiality, but rather discipline it.

The SBT must have access to confidential information to be able to make informed decisions, and members can therefore be subject to a duty of confidentiality and security clearance. However, the starting point should be openness, with the possibility of closed sessions where it is well-founded.

Precisely how confidentiality is initiated and handled in practice is not decisive here and will, in any case, be a matter of further procedures. The central element is the principle: the SBT must be able to challenge and verify whether confidentiality is actually necessary.

“National security” must not function as an automatic justification for secrecy. Therefore, confidentiality should be subject to clear criteria, the possibility of independent oversight, and should, as a rule, be temporary.

Cooperation with the Folketing

The two chambers meet regularly in a joint committee to evaluate the cooperation and major cases. The joint committee shall have procedural responsibility, not decision-making authority. The cooperation is to be supported administratively by a coordinating joint secretariat that ensures a uniform information base.

The purpose of the cooperation between the chambers is not to create competition between them, but to ensure higher legislative quality, better long-term thinking, and a more robust democratic balance of power. The cooperation must be structured through fixed mechanisms that prioritise dialogue over conflict, but which provide clear solutions when consensus cannot be reached.

The existing *Folketing* functions as an aggregative democracy, where political positions are gathered through parties, and where conflicts often become strategic with a view to achieving a majority. In contrast, the SBT functions as a deliberative democracy, where knowledge and arguments are weighed through dialogue to reach the best possible solution.

When these two logics meet, there is a risk that the rhetoric and strategic manoeuvres of professional politicians will drown out the members of the SBT. The cooperation must therefore include procedural safeguards, such as neutral facilitation, to ensure that both parties are heard equally. This protects the independence of the sortition chamber.

Disagreement between the chambers is not a failure, but an expected and desired part of the system. To handle this, fixed procedures for conflict resolution are established. If a bill is passed in one chamber but rejected in the other, a negotiation phase is activated, where a conciliation committee with representatives from both chambers attempts to reach a revised formulation.

An ad hoc conciliation committee consisting of 24 members is established. The *Folketing* appoints 12 members proportionally according to the size of the party groups supporting the bill. The SBT appoints 12 members, and this proceeds in the same manner as the formation of all other working groups.

The conciliation committee is led by a chairmanship consisting of one representative from each chamber and a neutral facilitator from the Joint Secretariat. The committee's task is to draft a unified compromise proposal. The compromise proposal is sent to a plenary vote in both chambers, where it can either be adopted or rejected in its entirety. No amendments can be tabled.

The introduction of the joint conciliation committee with members selected by lot fundamentally changes the nature of political negotiations. In the current system, political parties often negotiate based on *quid pro quo* ("I support your bridge if you support my tax cut"). In the new system, members of the *Folketing* must negotiate with citizens who cannot be "bought" with future favours, as they leave the chamber again after a short time. This forces the members of the *Folketing* to use arguments rather than instruments of power, and the deliberative qualities of the SBT are thus transferred into the central decision-making space of the *Folketing*.

Another crucial point in the cooperation is that the SBT shall not be able to topple the government (vote of no confidence), as this is a political act linked to elections. The SBT can only issue a formal reprimand (a "nose").

When, for example, a minister receives a "nose" from the SBT, the individual is legally obliged to present an action plan to rectify the situation within 30 days. If this does not happen, the SBT can recommend that the *Folketing* dismiss the minister, which places significant public pressure on the members of the *Folketing* to act.

Conflict Procedure in Case of Disagreement Between the Folketing and the SBT

1. Adoption in one chamber

A bill is passed in either the *Folketing* or the SBT and is sent to the other chamber for processing.

2. Rejection in the other chamber

The other chamber rejects the proposal and must simultaneously publish a written justification for the rejection.

3. Activation of the negotiation phase

A joint conciliation committee is automatically established. The committee consists of 12 members from each chamber.

4. Revised proposal

The conciliation committee has a fixed deadline (e.g., 30 days) to draft a revised compromise proposal or state that a compromise is not possible.

5. Re-evaluation in both chambers

The revised proposal is processed and voted on separately in both chambers. It does not go through the usual committee process.

6. Decision

If both chambers pass the proposal, it becomes law. If one chamber continues to reject the proposal, it lapses and can only be reintroduced after a fixed cooling-off period of, for example, 3 months.

Purpose of the Model

- Disagreements are handled through process, not power.
- No chamber can unilaterally override the other.
- Deadlocks are avoided through deadlines and automatic mechanisms.
- Compromise is always the rational choice.

The Finance Act (The Budget)

The Finance Act is a special case. If one does not have power over how money is allocated, one effectively has no power. The Finance Act's allocation of resources will reflect the logic and desires of the existing *Folketing*. Initiatives based primarily on the SBT's wishes would almost automatically be underprioritised. If money is power, then the Finance Act is the centre of power.

To ensure the SBT has influence on the Finance Act, the idea is that the SBT continuously sends proposals to the government regarding financial requirements, so the government can include them in the Finance Act.

The process will be as follows:

1. The Finance Bill is introduced by the Government to both chambers no later than 1 September.
2. Disagreements regarding the Finance Act are handled in a conciliation committee during the month of November.
3. If the Finance Act has not been passed by 1 January, the state transitions to "temporary operations," as explained below (the 1/12th rule).
4. The SBT now drafts its own alternative proposal for a Finance Act within a working group.
5. If temporary operations have been in effect for 3 months, a joint vote is called, where both chambers gather to vote on the Finance Act from either the *Folketing* or the SBT by a simple majority of the members present.

The 1/12th rule means that each month, the state may spend an amount corresponding to one-twelfth of the previous year's budget plus inflation and population growth.

The funds may typically only be used to maintain existing obligations (salaries for nurses, police, payment of state pensions, etc.). No new construction projects, new reforms, or new subsidy schemes may be initiated.

The rule functions as a political "straitjacket." No one gets their way, as the government cannot implement its new policy or election promises. The SBT does not win either, as they cannot change the direction of society.

The result is that both parties have a strong incentive to reach a compromise as quickly as possible, because no one likes administering a country without the ability to make changes.

The EU has this rule enshrined in its treaties (Article 315). If the European Parliament and the Council do not agree, the EU may only spend 1/12th of the previous year's budget each month. Denmark currently has a similar mechanism called a "temporary appropriation act" (*midlertidig bevillingslov*).

If the 1/12th paralysis continues for too long (e.g., 3 months), the state risks decay. Therefore, the bicameral system includes a mandatory joint vote after this period. This ensures that the society will receive a Finance Act.

The joint vote chooses between the *Folketing's* original proposal and a modified proposal from the SBT. This ensures that a Finance Act is always adopted on the day. Simultaneously, it creates significant pressure on the government to reach an agreement before the joint vote, as the government risks the SBT's numerical majority (300 vs. 179) trumps the government's proposal.

The Constitution

The Constitution was drafted for a different time. Society was slower, communication and transport took significantly longer, and social media did not exist. The Constitution therefore largely reflects the historical and technological framework under which it was created – not the conditions that characterise a modern and highly connected society.

According to this proposal, the Constitution must be amended so that legislative power is shared between the *Folketing* and the Sortition Chamber. Section 3 must be adapted, and a new Section 28 must be inserted describing the role and structure of the Sortition Chamber.

The Finance Act and the levying of taxes (Sections 45 and 46) must be amended. It must be stipulated here that the Finance Bill is required to be presented to both chambers and that both chambers have to approve it. To avoid deadlocked situations between the chambers, any budget-technical safety mechanisms must also be included here.

The legislative process and conflict resolution (Section 41) must be fundamentally changed to include the cooperation or legislative processing between the two chambers.

The right of dissolution (Section 32), where the Prime Minister can call an election for the *Folketing* (dissolve the assembly) if he/she wishes, or if there is a vote of no confidence, the Sortition Chamber must be protected against dissolution. It should be specified who can be "fired" in the event of a stalemate.

An amendment to the Constitution is an extensive process, and the purpose should be to expand the existing power structure – not to overturn it – by adding sortition as an equal legislative body. Details are left to experts.

It is extremely difficult to make changes to the Constitution according to Section 88 – in fact, more difficult than in almost all other democracies. The procedure is:

1. The *Folketing* passes the amendment proposal.
2. An election for the *Folketing* is called.
3. The new *Folketing* must pass the exact same proposal again.
4. A referendum is held, where a majority of the votes cast (those who turned up) must be "yes," and these yes-votes must simultaneously constitute at least 40% of the eligible voters.

How it can be introduced

The described model cannot be introduced directly, as there would be too much resistance and uncertainty. However, it could relatively easily be tested in a municipality or region, initially acting in an advisory capacity without real power.

At the national level, it could be introduced according to the following plan:

1 – Pilot Phase (without constitutional amendment)

- Establish a national sortition-based citizens' assembly by ordinary law.
- Advisory role to the *Folketing*.
- Limited to a few policy areas (e.g., climate, digitalisation, long-term regulation, or specific aspects of legislation within, for example, climate).

2 – Institutionalisation

- Make the chamber permanent by law.
- Permanent secretariat, fixed procedures, annual work programmes.
- Formal obligation for the *Folketing* to respond to statements.

3 – Procedural Link to Legislation

- Requirements for the sortition chamber's processing of selected types of legislation (long-term, technical, cross-cutting).
- Suspensive veto or qualified right of objection (can be overridden).

4 – Parallel Legitimacy

- Gradual expansion of competencies based on experience and evaluation.
- Clear division of roles: *Folketing* = initiative and finance; Sortition Chamber = quality and long-term perspective.

5 – Constitutional Amendment

- Formal bicameral system.
- Competencies, interaction, and conflict mechanisms established.

The above would result in low political risk and provide the opportunity for adjustment before the transfer of power.

Legitimacy is built through practice – not theory.

Some might object that a permanent sortition chamber is a utopian thought or a risky experiment. But the model is not merely theory; it already exists in reality close to us. In 2019, the German-speaking community in East Belgium made history by institutionalising a permanent citizens' council (*Bürgerrat*) alongside their elected parliament. They do not have direct political power, but their proposals must be processed by the elected representatives.

The experiences from East Belgium show that the fear of incompetence or chaos is unfounded. On the contrary, the cooperation between elected politicians and citizens

selected by lot has created a more robust legislative process. This proves that a 'Balance model,' as proposed here, does not require us to reinvent the wheel, but that we dare to learn from the neighbours who have already taken the step from ad-hoc experiments to permanent democratic infrastructure.

Conclusion

Danish democracy stands at a crossroads. While the world around us evolves with increasing speed and complexity, we maintain a political system that fundamentally stems from a different era and is on a collision course with our basis of existence.

We ended up with a "competition democracy," where short-term election campaigns, party-political positioning, and career considerations often overshadow the long-term radical solutions that society and the world desperately need. The consequence is a growing gap between citizens and decision-makers, as well as a legislative process that risks losing legitimacy.

This development is not a sign of failing will among politicians, but of structures that reward short-term decisions and tactical considerations over future-proof solutions.

Our current representative model has served us well but has become too narrow, too short-sighted, and too one-sided to solve the challenges a society faces today. An additional sortition-based chamber is not a rejection of democracy – it is a strengthening of it. This provides Denmark with a system where power is balanced, more perspectives are included, and long-term decisions can be made without regard for election campaigns or career concerns.

This essay offers a concrete model for a bicameral system that combines the best of two worlds. A bicameral system based on both elections and sortition creates a more robust, representative, and forward-looking political ecosystem.

- The **Folketing** retains its efficiency in relation to daily operations and acute crises.
- The **SBT** adds the depth, independence, and long-term thinking that can only come from representatives of citizens who are free from party-political chains and the pressure of re-election.

Thus, a system is created where decisions are made in the public interest rather than in the logic of party organisations or special interests. Implementing this will require extra resources/money, but the gain is a stronger and more functional democracy. Those resources should, if necessary, be saved elsewhere.

The Sortition Chamber revives the original vision of the Constitution of 1849 with a legislative body of independent individuals who take a position on each individual case without ulterior motives. But where parties historically stifled this independence, the SBT removes the very cause of party formation by doing away with election campaigns, re-election, and political careers.

Sortition is not an idealistic experiment; it is a practical, historically rooted, and proven method that can make popular rule more representative, more legitimate, and more robust.

We owe it to future generations to evolve democracy instead of passively defending the status quo. Introducing a sortition chamber is not a revolution – it is a necessary evolution that brings citizens back to the centre of decisions and ensures that Denmark can continue to be one of the world's most trusting, fair, and forward-thinking democracies with an involved population.

I hope this essay is the start of a process that can improve democracy. There are, of course, loose ends, and many things can be further clarified, but the essay is hopefully a good starting point.

Implementing sortition requires political courage and the will to rethink parts of the Constitution. But the alternative – to continue unchanged in a system that makes poor short-term decisions and slowly loses the trust of the population – is far riskier. By introducing sortition, we create not just a fairer system, but a more robust society equipped to handle the crises of the future, from climate change to social inequality, with eyes fixed on the next generations rather than the next election.

The time has come to further develop democracy so that it once again matches its values and its name. It is necessary to take the step from a representative democracy that represents the few, to a thoroughly debating and reflecting (deliberative) democracy that involves the many. Let us create a popular rule that lives up to its name.

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- Torben Johansen

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Bibliography

This list contains references that support the central arguments of the essay. The list can serve as inspiration for further reading for those wishing to delve into the research behind sortition and democratic innovation. I have personally read only a few of these books. Most of my claims and arguments have emerged from my own observations, from a presentation, or in discussion with others.

Challenges of the Current Party System

This section gathers critiques of elections, elite formation, and the crisis of political parties.

David Van Reybrouck – Against Elections: The Case for Democracy (2016)
Provides a historical analysis showing that elections were originally introduced to avoid democracy, not to implement it. He specifically proposes a bicameral system where a citizens' assembly supplements elected politicians. He diagnoses "democratic fatigue syndrome."

Bernard Manin – The Principles of Representative Government (1997)
A historical review of how elections were originally introduced to ensure that "the best" (the aristocracy) ruled, and that sortition was deliberately rejected to prevent "the mob" from gaining power.

Peter Mair – Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy (2013)
Describes how parties have transitioned from being membership organisations to becoming "state agencies." They have retreated into the state, creating a vacuum ("the void") between citizens and politicians.

Kasper Møller Hansen (Professor, University of Copenhagen)
Danish research on voter behaviour and party membership. In 1960, approximately 20-25% of voters were members of a party; today, it is less than 4%.

Mark Bovens & Anchrit Wille – Diploma Democracy (2017)
Documents that we have moved from a democracy where different classes were represented to a "diploma democracy." The new political caste is defined not by money or nobility, but by university degrees.

Colin Crouch – Post-Democracy (2004)
Describes how politics has become a game for a narrow circle of professional experts and spin doctors, while the population is reduced to passive spectators who are only activated during elections.

Max Weber – Politics as a Vocation (1919)
The classic work on the professionalisation of the political caste and the distinction between living *for* politics and living *off* politics.

Brian Klaas – Corruptible: Who Gets Power and How It Changes Us (2021)
Examines the dynamics of power and corruption – focusing on who gains power, why they

get it, and what it means for them and for us. The book combines social science, evolutionary psychology, and interviews with leaders from around the world.

A. M. Mulvad, A. G. Larsen, and C. H. Ellersgaard – Tæm eliten (2017)
Describes how we live under the delusion that we are citizens in a true democracy. But when it comes to real influence, our society is a sham democracy. The answer to the current crisis of trust between citizens and politicians, and to the growing dominance of the elite, is more citizen-based democracy.

Thomas Homer-Dixon – The Ingenuity Gap (2000)
Society's problems (including legislation) are becoming more complex and faster-moving than our ability to understand, manage, and solve them. When the complexity of legislation exceeds our collective problem-solving capacity, a gap emerges that undermines efficiency, legitimacy, and quality.

Citizens' Potential and Collective Intelligence

This section gathers arguments showing that ordinary people make sound decisions.

James Surowiecki – The Wisdom of Crowds (2004)
Documents how the average of a diverse group often outperforms the smartest experts. Establishes the criteria for "wise groups" (including diversity and independence), which argues directly for sortition over party-political alignment.

Hugo Mercier & Dan Sperber – The Enigma of Reason (2017)
Argues from an evolutionary perspective that reason is social and not designed for isolation. We are blind to our own mistakes but good at spotting those of others. This scientifically supports why dialogue in a citizens' assembly effectively eliminates bias and raises the quality of decisions.

Scott E. Page – The Difference (2007)
Proves mathematically and sociologically that a diverse group of "ordinary" people often solves complex problems better than a homogeneous group of experts, because experts often share the same blind spots.

James Fishkin – When the People Speak (2009)
The pioneer of knowledge regarding citizen engagement. His experiments consistently show that when ordinary citizens gain access to experts and time for reflection, they significantly change their opinions and move away from polarisation.

OECD Report – Catching the Deliberative Wave (2020)
Analyses nearly 300 citizens' assemblies worldwide. It concludes that ordinary citizens are fully capable of handling complex political issues.

Irving Janis – Groupthink (1972)
The theory that homogeneous groups (such as party politicians) tend to ignore warnings and make irrational decisions to achieve consensus.

Democratic Innovation and Sortition in Practice

This section contains concrete solution models and arguments for sortition.

Hélène Landemore – Open Democracy (2020)
Argues that a true democracy requires an "open mini-public" (sortition chamber) that possesses real legislative power and is not merely advisory. She is one of the strongest international academic voices for this.

Brett Hennig – The End of Politicians (2017)
Argues that only sortition can remove the "party-political lenses" that prevent the resolution of long-term problems. Focuses heavily on legitimacy and the "wisdom of the crowd" – the idea that ordinary people often make wiser decisions than experts when given time and peace.

Niessen, C., & Reuchamps, M. – The institutionalisation of deliberative democracy (2020)
Documents the world's first permanent institutionalisation of a citizens' council in Belgium, which functions alongside the elected parliament and is a fixed part of the legislative apparatus.

Oliver Dowlen – The Political Potential of Sortition (2008)
Highlights "the blind break" – the fact that random selection prevents corruption and lobbying, as no one can be influenced in advance.

Manuel Arriaga – Rebooting Democracy (2014)
A practical guide on how citizens' assemblies can reboot democracy bypassing established parties. Highlights citizens' assemblies as a motivating and enlightening process that counteracts political disillusionment.

Jakob Jespersen – Livsdemokratiet (2024)
Because future generations, the world's poor, and nature are negatively affected by the decisions of the *Folketing*, the creation of a national second chamber of 180 members is proposed to safeguard the interests of these groups, elected by sortition. The work of the chamber is described in detail. The book also points to the possibility of a World Parliament elected by sortition to solve global problems.

The Role of the State, Complexity, and Long-Term Challenges

This section addresses the problems of short-termism and bureaucracy.

Rebecca Willis – Too Hot to Handle? (2020)
Interviews with numerous members of parliament who admit they know what needs to be done for the climate but do not dare to do it due to electoral pressure. Her research shows that citizens' assemblies (such as Climate Assembly UK) specifically dare to propose the solutions that politicians fear.

Graham Smith – Democratic Innovations (2009)
Theorises on how electoral cycles structurally prevent solutions to problems spanning 20–30 years, and how institutions without re-election (such as a sortition chamber) break this cycle.

Mariana Mazzucato – The Entrepreneurial State (2013)
Argues that major societal challenges require a state that dares to take long-term risks. This supports the argument that a sortition chamber is necessary to dare to think long-term and with vision.

Dennis Nørmark & Anders Fogh Jensen – Pseudoarbejde (2018)
Supports the point that politicians and the civil service produce unnecessary rules and laws to "cover their backs" and demonstrate decisiveness, which increases complexity without solving problems.

Tim Knudsen – Fra folkestyre til markedsdemokrati (2007)
Argues that we have moved away from classical popular rule (where citizens are participants) toward a form of "market democracy," where citizens are viewed as customers/users and politicians act as a kind of "board of directors" afraid of bad publicity.

Sigge Winther Nielsen – The Puzzle State: How to govern wicked problems in Western democracies (2025)
Addresses "wicked problems" (complex political and social challenges that cannot be solved by traditional methods) in a democratic context—why modern democracies struggle to handle them and how we can renew governance models to meet major societal challenges.

Nathan Gardels & Nicolas Berggruen – Renovating Democracy (2019)
Looks toward major global challenges (digitalisation, globalisation). The authors argue for "intelligent governance" that combines direct citizen participation (such as sortition) with merit-based expertise. They warn against pure populism (where the "will of the people" becomes unfiltered and emotional) and propose institutions that create reflected popular participation.