Democracy Through Multi-Body Sortition: Athenian Lessons for the Modern Day

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Abstract

Mature Classical Athenian democracy is presented as a representative system, rather than the commonly described form of “direct democracy.” When viewed in this way, the commonly assumed problem of scale in applying Athenian democracy to modern nation states is solved, and principles and practices of the Athenian model of democracy continue to have relevance today. The key role of sortition (selection by lot) to form multiple deliberative bodies is explained. Five dilemmas faced by modern proposals for the use of sortition are examined. Finally, a new model of lawmaking using multiple allotted bodies is presented, which resolves these dilemmas and which can be implemented in many ways, from a small addition to an existing system to a more fundamental reform such as replacing one or both elected chambers of a legislature.

Recommended Citation