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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Electoral democracy, lottocracy, and social inequality

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Abstract

This article compares electoral democracy and lottocracy from the perspective of social egalitarianism. Social egalitarians hold that political institutions should be assessed by whether they enable persons to stand to one another as social equals, rather than as inferiors and superiors. I distinguish two dimensions of social inequality relevant to the justification of political procedures: asymmetries of inescapable and final power and unmerited disparities of consideration. I then argue, first, that electoral democracy is not obviously superior to lottocracy in addressing the vertical inequality of political power between officials and non-officials, because electoral accountability does not by itself secure egalitarian popular control and is vulnerable to inequalities of informal influence. Second, I argue that lottocracy has a prima facie advantage in addressing the biased composition of legislative officials, thereby addressing the social egalitarian concern about disparities of consideration. Unlike electoral democracy, sortition reduces the extent to which wealth, voter bias, and various demographic or socioeconomic characteristics shape individuals' prospects of obtaining political office. The article thus identifies social egalitarian considerations that matter for the comparative evaluation of electoral democracy and lottocracy.

Keywords: electoral democracy; lottocracy; social equality; structural inequalities; voter biases

1. Introduction

Lottocracy – a political procedure in which legislative officials are selected by sortition or random selection – is increasingly recognized as a promising alternative to electoral democracy, in which each citizen has an equal vote in selecting officials. Many have argued that lottocracy is not just potentially instrumentally superior to electoral democracy (Landemore, 2020; Guerrero, 2024: chaps. 13–14) but also comparable to electoral democracy in realizing political equality, as it gives everyone an equal chance of being selected as a representative (Stone, 2016; Jakobi, 2019; Abizadeh, 2021b: 797; Guerrero, 2024: 321–322). Considering these potential advantages, its advocates regard lottocracy as a worthy object of political reform, especially given the persistent concern that electoral democracy might effectively amount to rule by 'elected oligarchs', given its failures of popular control, biased selection of representatives, and elected officials' susceptibility to influence from powerful socioeconomic interests. However, there are also attempts to defend electoral democracy against the challenges from lottocrats. Some stress that an electoral accountability mechanism is necessary to make popular control possible in principle (Lafont, 2020: chap. 4). Others argue that randomly selected officials may also be subject to socioeconomic influences (Landa and Pevnick, 2021, 2025: chap. 5). Still others argue that lottocracy is undesirable even in terms of fairness, since what is distributed by lot in such systems is a position of power and authority over others, which is an inherently unjust advantage (Umbers, 2021).

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This article aims to contribute to this debate from the perspective of social egalitarianism (or relational egalitarianism, interchangeably). As widely acknowledged, social egalitarians understand the ideal of equality as primarily concerning interpersonal relations: each person has a claim to stand with others as a social equal, rather than as a social inferior or superior. Actions and institutions should be evaluated, at least in part, in terms of whether they meet this claim; ideally, everyone's claim against social inequality should be satisfied. This ideal, initially emerging from the critical literature on distributive egalitarianism (Young, 1990; Wolff, 1998; Anderson, 1999; Scheffler, 2003), has also been applied in democratic theory more recently, to explore whether democratic procedures are justified over non-democratic alternatives (Anderson, 2009; Kolodny, 2014; Viehoff, 2014; González-Ricoy and Queralt, 2018; Viehoff, 2019; Wilson, 2019; Bengtson, 2020; Lovett, 2021; Schemmel, 2021; Cox, 2022; Ingham, 2022; Peña-Rangel, 2022; Kolodny, 2023; Zuehl, 2023; Zuehl, 2024).

The current literature has not yet adequately developed the implications of social egalitarianism for the comparative evaluation of lottocracy and electoral democracy, apart from a few burgeoning studies (Umbers, 2021: 317–319; Peña-Rangel, 2022: 155; Kolodny, 2023: 337–340; Guerrero, 2024: 323). This gap is worth exploring, especially because the debate between electoral democrats and lottocrats seems to be closely connected with issues of social egalitarian concern: the inequality of political power, advantages and disadvantages associated with demographic characteristics (such as gender, race, income class, and so on), and undue influence that socioeconomically powerful individuals and groups can exert on other people's lives. To be sure, the concern for social equality is not universally accepted, and there are critical investigations into whether this concern has deeper moral grounds (cf. Zuehl, 2024; Chan, 2025; Van Wietmarschen, 2025). Nevertheless, preliminary exploration of its implications for the design of political procedures is worthwhile both practically, because it helps us understand the relative advantages and disadvantages of sortition and election as mechanisms for selecting representatives, and theoretically, because it helps us explore the full implications of social equality for political institutions.

The main thesis of this paper is that lottocracy has prima facie advantages over electoral democracy from the social egalitarian perspective. Section 2 begins by describing two dimensions of social equality – the power and attitudinal dimensions – that matter to the comparative evaluation of political procedures. The rest of the paper then defends the main thesis by examining two problems with representative political systems, for which election and sortition can be presented and assessed as alternative solutions. Section 3 discusses vertical inequality of political power between legislative officials and non-officials. Here, I argue, somewhat negatively, that the possibility of popular control and accountability does not obviously establish the social egalitarian advantage of electoral democracy over lottocracy. Section 4 discusses the biased composition of officials: the tendency of individuals' prospects of occupying political office to vary with their demographic characteristics. Here, I argue, more positively, that once we diagnose the problem of biased composition in terms of social inequality, we can see lottocracy as a prima facie more promising solution than electoral democracy.

Before proceeding, two preliminaries may help clarify the scope of this paper. First, this paper focuses mainly on a lottocratic legislative assembly (Zakaras, 2010; Landemore, 2020; Abizadeh, 2021b; Guerrero, 2024). There are other proposals for the use of the lot in political decision-making, such as enfranchisement lottery (López-Guerra, 2014), lottery voting (Saunders, 2010), and corruption-oversight jury (Bagg, 2024). For reasons of space, I leave open whether my arguments apply to those proposals as well. I also do not delve into the institutional details of a lottocratic legislature. It may be single-or general-issue; it may be single-or multi-chamber; its members may or may not have the power to initiate new legislative bills; and so on. The bare minimum condition for a lottocratic legislature, I stipulate, is that its members, selected from the demos by sortition of some sort, have the formal power to determine whether to approve or disapprove at least some legislative bills.

Second, my argument for lottocracy over electoral democracy is prima facie. This is because the comparative effects of election and sortition in alleviating the social egalitarian concerns about the

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problems outlined above should ultimately be assessed empirically, which is currently infeasible due to the lack of observable instances of a lottocratic legislature.[1] This problem plagues most comparative-evaluative studies between electoral democracy and lottocracy, as acknowledged in the literature (Umbers, 2021: 323; Ingham *et al.*, 2025: 643–644). To be sure, the effect of random selection is not completely intractable. Some have suggested that the effects of lottocratic legislative representation can be predicted by extrapolating from the effects of random selection in other institutional settings, such as juries, deliberative mini-publics, or citizens' assemblies with randomly selected members (Lever and Destri, 2024: 96). Others have conducted experimental studies, for instance to see how people's acceptance of policies depends on the form of political procedure, including procedures with a lottocratic form (Arnesen and Peters, 2018; Yamaguchi *et al.*, 2024). My general position is that, for the topics discussed here as well, we should seek research designs that facilitate more rigorous comparisons.

2. Two dimensions of social inequality

In this section, I aim to articulate the social egalitarian perspective from which to develop a comparative justification between lottocracy and electoral democracy. This task requires specifying dimensions of social equality: when individuals have complaints about being involved in relations of 'social inferiors and superiors' rather than 'social equals', what specific aspects of their relations ground those complaints? My review, albeit selective, focuses on two widely discussed dimensions that are relevant for our subsequent inquiry: asymmetries of power and disparities of consideration.

2.1. Asymmetries of power

First, many social egalitarians think that asymmetries of power constitute social inequality (Umbers, 2021: 316; Peña-Rangel, 2022: 146–147; Kolodny, 2023: 91, 93). This claim should be qualified, but let me first describe the general idea. One's *power over another person* is one's agential capacity to effect outcomes (such as specific states, dispositions, or actions) in that person, in conformity with one's will or interests, by way of one's intentional actions (including both performing and forbearing).[2] Where there is an asymmetry of power, either person A has greater power over B and B lacks reciprocal power over A, or A has greater power over others than B has over them. Consider an example. In feudal societies, the lord of the manor has power over peasants, such as the capacity to deprive them of their property or to inflict physical violence on them, in conformity with the lord's interests or will. The lord exercises this power by, for instance, commanding his subordinates (e.g., armed soldiers) to carry out his preferred course of deprivation or infliction. Suppose a peasant does not have symmetrical power over the lord. In this case, there is an asymmetry of power between the lord and the peasant. According to the view considered here, this fact can constitute the lord's social superiority to the peasant.

More generally, and with qualifications explained shortly, the claim is this: within an ongoing social relation, if person A has greater power in comparison with person B, that fact presumptively constitutes A's objectionable social superiority over B, unless that power asymmetry is 'tempered' in some appropriate way. The claim is not that 'A's greater power in comparison with B constitutes A's objectionable social superiority to B, period'. That would commit us to an implausibly sweeping problematization of most social relations. Asymmetrical power is everywhere: differences in brute physical strength or financial capacity between spouses and other intimate partners, 'chain of command' relations within private firms and bureaucratic institutions, and asymmetrical persuasive abilities among participants in public discourse. Intuitively, not all such relations are objectionable, and some do not even look like 'social inequality' in the first place. A pressing task for social egalitarians,

[1] I thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to address this methodological concern.
[2] I have borrowed this formulation from Abizadeh (2023: 6).

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then, is to delineate which cases of asymmetrical power count as 'objectionable social inequality' and to explain that delineation.

So, the important part of the above claim is that asymmetrical power *presumptively* constitutes social inequality *unless it is tempered*. To temper it is to eliminate or mitigate its inferiority-making implication. Niko Kolodny's account of social inequality (or 'relations of inferiority' in his terms) exemplifies this structure. He suggests various 'tempering factors' that, if in place, would render an asymmetrical power relation not an instance of social inequality, or else a less objectionable or unobjectionable one (Kolodny, 2023: chaps. 5 and 8).

Examining all the tempering factors suggested by Kolodny is beyond the scope of this paper. Here, let me review two factors that are particularly relevant to our purpose. The first factor is 'Escapability' (Kolodny, 2023: 100). For instance, although a slave-owner might enjoy greater power over a slave, the slave can still stand as socially equal with the owner if they enjoy an ongoing opportunity to exit the relation. Such escapability may even render the label 'slavery' inapplicable. More generally, the easier it is for someone standing in a locally subordinate position to exit the relation at will, the less they seem to stand in a relation of social inferiority. The second factor is 'Downward Equalization' (Kolodny, 2023: 100–101). Asymmetries of power need not constitute objectionable social inequality if they are regulated by higher-order decisions, in the making of which the relevant parties have an equal say. For instance, corporate subordinates may be locally subordinated to their bosses, who regularly possess and wield greater power over them (in task-assignment, performance evaluation, personnel matters, and so on). Yet that relation may not be objectionable, provided that both parties have an effective equal say over the higher-order decisions, such as contracts and labor laws, that determine the terms of their interaction.

Thus, given the appropriate tempering factors, some asymmetrical power relations are unobjectionable, and others are not social inequality at all. However, as Kolodny argues, such tempering manoeuvres are unavailable for some special relations, notably asymmetries of *political* power. Let political power refer to the power to determine what political decisions (e.g., laws) are to be imposed upon members of society; voting power in referenda is a typical example. The difficulty of tempering asymmetrical political power stems from special features of political decisions (cf. González-Ricoy and Queralt, 2018: 618–619; Kolodny, 2023: 122–123). First, from the perspective of each member of society, the subjection to political decisions is virtually *inescapable*; the cost of exiting their reach (i.e., the state's jurisdiction) would be unbearably high. Second, political decisions are *final*; they can regulate virtually any non-political relation or decision and are not themselves regulated by higher-order decisions. Both Escapability and Downward Equalization fail to obtain. So, any asymmetry in people's opportunities to influence political decisions may particularly undermine the egalitarian quality of their social relations: to the extent person A enjoys greater influence over political decisions than person B, B is objectionably positioned as socially inferior to A.

This account has been presented as a non-instrumental reason for democratic political procedure, broadly construed: if anyone has influence over political decisions, everyone else should be guaranteed equal influence (which is compatible not only with universal suffrage but also with decision-making by lot, in which no one has positive influence over selection). Social equality demands equal political power because its absence constitutes objectionable social inequality (Kolodny, 2023: 137–138, 323–325).

2.2. Disparities of consideration

Social egalitarians are concerned not only with asymmetrical power but also with patterned inegalitarian attitudes among members of society. Among such attitudes, I will focus on *consideration for persons*, which Kolodny (2014: 297) roughly characterizes as 'those responses that ... we feel, either every person is owed equally simply in virtue of being a person, or are problematic for anyone to give

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anyone else' (see also Cox, 2022: 100–102; Zuehl, 2024: 573, 579–580).[3] It encompasses a variety of respectful attitudes or expressive behaviours, such as 'evaluation' or 'valuing' of the worth of a person (Van Wietmarschen, 2022: 923–927), judgements about the 'fundamental moral importance' of a person's interests (Viehoff, 2019: 18), or simply the willingness to serve a person's interests.[4] Specific forms of behaviour expressing such attitudes also matter, such as 'bowing and scraping, fawning and toadying' (Walzer, 1983: xiii; Cox, 2022: 100), or 'bending the knee [and] kissing the ring' (Zuehl, 2024: 579). The idea, then, is that disparities of such kinds of consideration constitute social inequality: within an ongoing social relation, when A receives such favourable attitudes and behaviours in a patterned way from B or others more than B does from A or others, A thereby stands as socially superior to B. Indeed, Ryan Cox contends that finding oneself receiving lesser consideration is the core of our '*experience* of subordination, or inferiority' and that such experience is central to the very phenomenon of social inequality (Cox, 2022: 101, original emphasis).

To be sure, disparities of consideration are ubiquitous, so once again social egalitarians must explain what factor marks out instances of unequal consideration that instantiate objectionable social inequality. Social egalitarians can answer this question by distinguishing between what Kolodny (2023: 104–105) calls 'merited' and 'unmerited' disparities of consideration. Merited disparities are based on reasonably accurate assessments of the relevant individuals' qualities, achievements, or situations that are relevant to the weight of their interests and claims within a certain context. Unmerited disparities, by contrast, lack such assessments. In less pronounced instances of unmerited disparities, those who pay greater consideration to person A over others might do so 'out of pure self-interest, simply to curry [A's] favor' or even as 'unthinking habit' (Kolodny, 2023: 104–105). In more pronounced instances, those who pay greater consideration to A over others might do so because they believe A has a certain trait that makes A fundamentally morally superior to others. Viehoff (2019: 17) illustrates this by comparing two cases: a medical doctor has the capacity to make other drivers on the road scramble out of the way (e.g., by signalling a special flashlight attached to the doctor's car) because this practice is generally believed to enhance the efficiency of essential medical service; in contrast, a manor lord has the capacity to do the same, but because this practice is societally believed to confirm the fundamental moral superiority of the lord over others. The doctor receives greater consideration in a merited way; the lord in an unmerited way.

2.3. Power and consideration interact

Asymmetries of power and disparities of consideration often interact to give rise to social inequality. On the one hand, power asymmetries may causally depend on, or be enhanced by, disparities of consideration. Consider, again, the greater power of the lord over the peasants. The lord often does not literally wield his own physical force to deprive the peasants of their property or to inflict physical violence on them. The lord's power quite often depends on his tendency to be obeyed or complied with when he issues commands to his armed subordinates. Such a tendency is called '*de facto* authority' (Kolodny, 2023: 91–93; see also Anderson, 2012: 42–43), and Zuehl insightfully observes that it is also a subspecies of consideration for persons, which he calls 'practical deference' (Zuehl, 2024: 578). That is, the armed subordinates, upon hearing the action-guiding commands issued by the lord, practically defer to the lord in concert, carrying out the lord's preferred course of deprivation or infliction. They thereby make the lord powerful vis-à-vis the peasants. This is one of the ways in which greater consideration often serves as a resource for greater power.

On the other hand, greater power may tend to bring about societal patterns of consideration, where those with greater power tend to be regarded as more excellent, more deserving of practical deference

[3]Consideration is not the only subcategory of attitudes that can constitute social inequality. Esteem for qualities or achievement is another important subcategory (Anderson, 2012: 43; Kolodny, 2023: 106–108; see also Motchoulski, 2021: 623–625). Due to space limitation, I will set the latter subcategory aside.

[4]Compare Kolodny's (2023: 108–114) classification of consideration for persons.

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or obedience, worthy of receiving greater respect or consideration for their interests, or otherwise treated in ways that express these attitudes, compared with those with lesser power. Cox's 'extraction theory' of the bad of asymmetrical power articulates this idea: power asymmetries 'are problematic ... because, in certain circumstances, they can be *used* to *extract* greater consideration for those with greater power' (Cox, 2022: 99–100, original emphases). To the extent that person A has greater power over person B, or greater power over others than B has over them, A will be able to extract or attract greater consideration from B or others, thereby enjoying superior social standing.

This understanding of the relationship between asymmetries of power and disparities of consideration can be applied to political inequality. Consider horizontal inequality of political power, such as unequal votes. There are two ways such inequality is associated with objectionable social inequality. First, unequal political power may itself reflect or express some unmerited disparities of consideration. The racially biased implementation of the U.S. voter literacy tests in the Jim-Crow era illustrates the point: the effective disenfranchisement of African Americans reflected the general, categorical disregard for their interests in comparison with the interests of Whites (which can be seen as an instance of 'hierarchy of standing', in the terms of Anderson, 2012: 43). Second, as expected by the extraction theory, unequal political power will often give rise to unmerited disparities of consideration. It does so by providing incentives for others to attend more favourably to the will and interests of those with greater political power than to those of others. Sean Ingham provides a relevant illustration. When voter A enjoys greater political power than voter B (such as extra votes), and if such inequality is publicly known to exist between other A-like voters and B-like voters as well, then the inequality 'would be expected to shape political parties' incentives to give consideration to the preferences of' the A-like voters, rather than those of the B-like voters (Ingham, 2022: 699). Thus, on this account, unequal political power causes social inequality by bringing about disparities of consideration. This instance of social inequality is objectionable if the disparities so caused are unmerited – for instance, if the A-like voters lack impartial regard for the public interest, tend to favour their own partial interests, or are willing to impose harmful laws and policies on B-like voters.[5]

2.4. Taking stock

I have reviewed two potential dimensions of social relations that, unless tempered, can constitute social inequality: asymmetries of power and disparities of consideration. The general idea of social egalitarianism that each person has a claim against being involved in relations of social inequality can be specified with the following two moral claims:

- *Claim against Lesser Power*: one has a claim, derived from the concern for equal social standing, that one be not subjected to anyone else's greater inescapable and final power over one.
- *Claim against Lesser Consideration*: one has a claim, derived from the concern for equal social standing, that one be not involved in unmerited disparities of consideration, or subjected to practices that reflect such disparities, in which one receives lesser consideration than someone else.

These claims will impose practical demands and constraints on how the state should design and implement its basic social institutions, including the political procedure. As Anderson (1999: 289), Kolodny (2023: 101–102), and Wodak (2024: 386) stress, the concern for social equality has a deontic point: to impose demands on agents (the state, in particular) to temper relations of social inequality, albeit within the practicable range, and avoid creating new such relations. The Claims against Lesser

[5]Of course, whether unequal political power causes unmerited disparities of consideration is an empirical question. Proponents of epistocracy, for instance, hope that epistocratic voters are better than others at pursuing the impartial advancement of the public interest (see, e.g., Brennan, 2016). Assessing that hope is beyond this paper's scope.

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Power and Consideration specify what those demands are; these claims will inform our subsequent comparisons between electoral democracy and lottocracy.

Before moving on, let me make a methodological reservation. I have reviewed two distinct thoughts about how political and social inequalities may be related: unequal political power may directly constitute social inequality (§2.1), or it may indirectly give rise to social inequality by causing or expressing disparities of consideration (§2.3). Determining which is the precise relation is beyond this paper's scope. To proceed on a sufficiently weak assumption, I will regard both the constitutive and the causal claims as potential perspectives on how political inequality might be an affront to social equality (as suggested, for instance, by Peña-Rangel, 2022: 145). To be sure, especially the first thought is criticized in the recent literature. Some argue that disparities of consideration are the conceptual core of social inequality and that unequal political power is only causally related to them (Cox, 2022; Van Wietmarschen, 2022; Zuehl, 2024). Defending the constitutive claim against their objections is a topic for another paper. If no defence is forthcoming, my subsequent arguments, where they depend on the constitutive claim, may be less forceful than I expect them to be.[6]

From the next section, I will explore the implications of the accounts just reviewed for the comparative justification between lottocracy and electoral democracy. I will start with the basic problem both systems encounter: the vertical inequality of political power that inheres in any representative political system (§3). I will then discuss more specific problems of biased composition of officials and argue that lottocracy is prima facie more effective in addressing them (§4).

3. Vertical political inequality and popular control

In this section, I describe the problem of *vertical political inequality* between officials and non-officials under representative political systems and argue, modestly, that election is not obviously superior to sortition in addressing the social egalitarian concern about it. First, I describe the social egalitarian concern. Second, I review the demand for popular control that some social egalitarians have proposed to address it. Third, I argue that electoral democracy regularly fails to meet that demand in the way required by social equality – in particular because the collective control it could make possible is not equally shared among citizens under realistic circumstances.

It has been a commonplace that a definitive feature of democratic political procedures is that they purport to establish 'a kind of equality among the participants at an essential stage of the decision-making process' (Christiano and Bajaj, 2024: §1). Precisely what democracy purports to equalize is a matter of dispute, but a widely shared view holds that it equalizes political power: the agential capacity to effect one's preferred political outcomes by voting and persuading, where those outcomes (e.g., laws and policies) coercively affect the states, dispositions, and actions of members of society generally.[7] As we saw (§2.1), one point of such equality is to constitute the equal social standing of those subjected to political decisions. Notice that, as far as social equality is concerned, the emphasis is on *equalizing* political power, rather than giving anyone any positive political power. Such equalization can be realized either by giving everyone equal positive influence over political decisions (as in the one person, one vote precept) or by giving it to none (as in the lottery). Hence the recurrent thought that electoral democracy and lottocracy are on a par in terms of political equality.

It has no less been a commonplace, however, that the *representative* political system is in tension with political equality. Any such system is conceptually characterized by 'vertical' inequality of political power, namely the asymmetries between officials and non-officials in their legally granted

[6]That said, some preliminary responses can be made. For instance, Zuehl (2024: 576–578) argues that unequal power cannot directly constitute social inequality because power lacks inherently 'social' character. However, I doubt that any proposed element of social inequality must conceptually have inherent sociality. If it must, then esteem and consideration could not constitute social inequality, either, since people can have or express those attitudes in asocial contexts, esteeming a long-dead person, or showing concern for those living on the opposite side of the Earth.

[7]For the understanding of political power as the agential capacity to effect political outcomes by means of intentional actions, see Abizadeh (2021a: 744).

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opportunities to influence substantive laws and policies. Such asymmetries remain in place even when 'horizontal' equality of political power is secured – for instance, even when each person enjoys an equal (positive or zero) opportunity to influence the selection of officials (Dworkin, 2000: 190–191; Abizadeh, 2021b: 796–797; Lovett, 2021: 175–176; Guerrero, 2024: 316; Lafont and Urbinati, 2024: 176–177). When it comes to legislation, for instance, only members of the legislature are formally allowed to speak, be officially recorded, and have their votes for bills counted. In contrast, non-officials enjoy zero direct influence or consideration with respect to these decisions. Insofar as representation is understood as the exercise or possession of social power by virtue of having a representative office (Rehfeld, 2018: 231–232), some such asymmetries seem conceptually indispensable to any representative political system.

The question is how this feature of representative systems can be reconciled with social equality. As some have argued, the Claim against Lesser Power makes it difficult to justify representative democracy (Viehoff, 2019: 23; Lovett, 2021: 176–177; Ingham, 2022: 689). Just like unequal voting rights, the vertical inequality of political power between officials and non-officials also seems to be an asymmetry of inescapable and final power because it is power over substantive laws and policies that are coercively imposed on everyone. Why not, then, conclude that representative democracy constitutes objectionable social inequality?

Some social egalitarians have attempted to address the problem so diagnosed. To make the Claim against Lesser Power and representative democracy compatible, they have appealed to the idea of *popular control*: officials do not stand as socially superior to non-officials provided that certain mechanisms make it the case that the former will robustly act precisely in ways instructed, mandated, or expressly preferred by the latter (Lovett, 2021: 186; Kolodny, 2023: 332).

Two reasons may explain why popular control serves to maintain social equality. First, popular control may nullify the 'finality' feature (reviewed in §2.1) of the greater political power held by officials. This is because the mechanisms of popular control involve effecting higher-order decisions that direct and regulate officials' actions and, when those directives and regulations are violated, remove the officials from office. Second, the agential status of officials may be virtually no different from that of non-officials if the latter successfully control the former. Within a certain context, if person B genuinely controls person A's actions, then A's agency seems virtually absorbed in B's; in standard terminology, A becomes B's 'delegate' in that context. So, whatever 'greater' power is exercised by A is virtually B's own power. To say that B is socially inferior to A even in that case would be to say, absurdly, that B is socially inferior to B. This phenomenon of absorbed agency can be observed in many contexts, for example, in the relation between clients and their lawyers or doctors (Lovett, 2021: 183), or between top officials in the government and lower-level bureaucratic staff (Kolodny, 2023: 331). For these reasons, it may be expected that if popular control of officials is fully effective, then each non-official's Claim against Lesser Power is satisfied even under representative political systems. This account gives us a criterion for the comparative evaluation between election and sortition as alternative methods to select officials: namely, *which method realizes popular control more effectively?*

On this criterion, defenders of electoral democracy argue that election is superior to sortition. They appeal to the possibility of electoral accountability as an essential mechanism of popular control. The basic idea is that non-officials, qua voters in elections, hold elected officials accountable by (1) rewarding them with future electoral successes for performing actions or bringing about outcomes favoured by the voters, and (2) penalizing them with future electoral failures for performing actions or bringing about outcomes disfavoured by the voters (Ingham *et al.*, 2025: 640–641). Electoral democrats argue that this mechanism is possible only under election, where non-officials are guaranteed equal *positive* influence over the selection of officials (Lovett, 2021: 186; Kolodny, 2023: 332 and 338). Under lottocracy, there is no mechanism of electoral accountability, so there is no mechanism of popular control so understood (Lafont and Urbinati, 2024: 176). Each non-official will thus be socially subordinated to each uncontrollable official (Umbers, 2021: 321–322; Kolodny, 2023: 338). This argument for election over sortition has an interesting feature. Although the basic concern driving the argument is a non-instrumental concern about vertical political inequality constituting social inequality, the

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argument *for election* is *instrumental*; it purports to show that election is a necessary and effective means to bring about the subjection of each official to popular control in which each voter has an equal share.

However, I doubt that the above argument for election is adequate to relieve the social egalitarian concern. Two points matter. First, we might grant that since a majority or plurality of voters determine who gets elected, it may be appropriate to say that a collective of citizens, or the citizenry, controls officials. However, no individual citizen effectively controls any official.[8] Each citizen usually enjoys at best an equal formal share (e.g., an equally weighted vote) in the collective's control over the officials, which does not amount to each citizen's control over officials. Indeed, Lafont and Urbinati (2024: §4.2.3) even stress that political representation under electoral democracy should not be understood as a principal–agent relationship like that between a client and a lawyer. They stress that 'democratic representation ... does not represent persons but problems, claims, and ideas' (Lafont and Urbinati, 2024: 150). The problem is that whatever ideal of deliberative or participatory democracy might be advanced by understanding political representation this way, it is left unexplained how social inequality between officials and non-officials is tempered. From the point of view of an individual citizen, an elected representative would appear virtually no different from a randomly selected representative in terms of whether *that citizen* can exert any symmetrical, bilateral power to control them.

The second point concerns a natural response to the first: some might respond that, to protect social equality from the threat of vertical political inequality, it suffices that (1) each official is controlled by the citizenry qua a collective and (2) no individual citizen enjoys greater influence over how the citizenry collectively control each official (Lovett, 2021: 186; Kolodny, 2023: 330–331). The idea is that the thought about absorbed agency scales up. If the citizenry as a collective body controls officials, the power officials wield is the citizenry's own, and if each citizen holds an equal share in that body's control, then no citizen is socially subordinated to anyone else when they collectively control the officials. What equal standing requires is thus each non-official's equal share in the collective control to which officials are subject, not individual control over the officials. The problem with this response, however, is that electoral democrats face difficulties explaining how condition (2) is realistically met. It is not enough to equalize each citizen's formal influence (e.g., vote) to determine how the citizenry control officials. Those who have greater informal influence – over campaign financing, media coverage, or lobby-group organization – enjoy a greater share in the citizenry's control over officials. Indeed, such informal influence often distorts the relative (re-)electability of candidates as well as the legislative positions of elected officials, as often emphasized in terms of 'political capture' (Guerrero, 2024: 62–64, 287–288; see also Abizadeh, 2021b: 797–798; Bagg, 2024: 94–95).

Part of the problem of electoral representation, then, is not necessarily the total lack of control but rather the asymmetrical shares that individuals or organizations have in popular control over officials. The failure of condition (2) is important. When that condition fails – if some citizens exercise disproportionately greater influence over the officials who exercise political power over all citizens – then the officials can no longer be understood as being subject to the equal collective control of the citizenry.[9] In that case, the less influential citizens are wronged twice over. First, since the control to which officials are subject is not the citizenry's equal control, the collective-control response no longer guards against the threat of social inequality posed by vertical political inequality, and the vertical inequality stands untempered as before. Second, a further asymmetry is introduced among citizens: those with greater informal influence hold greater power over the laws imposed on all, violating the less influential citizens' Claim against Lesser Power in its horizontal form. Moreover, the Claim against Lesser Consideration and Cox's 'extraction theory' (§2.3) also figure in diagnosing this problem. The officials and the powerful citizens both have greater power than ordinary citizens. This fact incentivizes

[8]Granted, democratic elections make everyone possibly pivotal. But one is pivotal only in the rare case of finding oneself in a majority by a one-vote margin, and even then no one in the minority is pivotal. So, on a strict interpretation of control as casting a pivotal vote, not everyone can enjoy control over officials, at least in a one-shot election.

[9]I thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to make this point explicit.

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the officials and the powerful citizens to create a closed circuit of *mutually extracted greater consideration* of their interests, for instance through pork-barrelling and revolving-door job opportunities. The interests for which greater consideration is mutually extracted are likely to be the partial, private interests of individual officials and powerful citizens, so those interests will tend to deviate from the impartially weighed interests of the public. The mutually extracted greater consideration is thus likely to be unmerited, violating the Claim against Lesser Consideration.

So, to argue that popular control by means of electoral accountability relieves the social egalitarian concern about vertical political inequality, one must show a reasonable prospect that everyone's share in popular control over officials can be roughly equalized, overcoming the inequalities of informal influence that stem from socioeconomic and organizational power. To be sure, I am not arguing that lottocracy is more effective than electoral democracy in addressing the problem of political capture. There are both arguments for electoral democracy (e.g., Landa and Pevnick, 2021: 54; Hutton Ferris, 2025: 388–391; Ingham *et al.*, 2025: 639–640, 656–660) and for lottocracy (e.g., Guerrero, 2024: 287–299), both of which need to be backed with further formal, experimental, or empirical support. Hence, my modest claim is that electoral democracy is not obviously superior to lottocracy in relieving social egalitarian concerns. Granting this limitation, what can be said, at least prima facie, in defence of lottocracy?

I think we have some reason to believe that lottocratic officials may be fairly capture-resistant (if not more resistant than elected officials, then no less). Consider how capture works: it proceeds by offering an official selective benefits – campaign contributions, favourable coverage, post-office employment – sufficient to move them from the position they would otherwise take. So, the success of capture turns on the price of moving a given official, and whether capture is worth attempting turns on how much return the capturer can expect relative to that price. Now consider lottocracy. Because it diversifies the demographic composition of officials, lottocratic officials may themselves tend to be stakeholders in relevant legislative or policy issues, and stakeholder status raises the price of capture. That is, for officials who have personal stakes in the relevant issues, changing their position may involve acting against their own interests, or those of their family and friends, or of others who share their structural position – whereas for an official with no such stake, the position may rest more heavily on comparatively movable considerations, such as expected electoral advantage, which capturers can target directly by offering campaign financing, media coverage, and the like. For example, female representatives may have firmer positions on issues related to bodily autonomy, domestic abuse, or gendered structural inequalities, so they may be more resistant than male representatives to external incentives to change their positions on those issues. Similarly, representatives from ethnic minorities may be more resistant than those from majorities to external incentives to change their positions on issues related to equality of opportunity or criminal justice. Of course, these expectations are not to essentialize a certain type of stake for a certain demographic characteristic. They are instead based on the empirically plausible tendency that, given certain structural relations, a demographic characteristic may tend to attract certain advantages and disadvantages and thus give rise to similar experience, preferences, and judgements among those who share that characteristic (Young, 2000: 143–144). If such expectations are reasonable, the expected return to powerful actors from targeting such officials, relative to the effort required, is correspondingly lower: lottocratic officials may be less worth the effort required for powerful actors to capture precisely because they are harder to capture.[10] Thus, we lack sufficient reason to conclude that lottocratic officials are more vulnerable to political capture than elected officials.

[10]I do not intend to claim that these expectations sufficiently mitigate the concern about capture in lottocracy. Other measures may also be needed. For instance, Guerrero (2024: 290–296) suggests various institutional details to make lottocratic officials less worth the effort for powerful actors to capture, such as making compensatory salaries conditional on the selected officials' avoidance of contact with external organizations, implementing regular rotation of officials, and making the informant-identification processes immune to external influences by randomly selecting informants from an expert database.

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One therefore cannot claim to have defended election over sortition in terms of the Claim against Lesser Power or Lesser Consideration without first addressing the informal inequality of political influence. My modest claim is thus supported. The next section turns to one respect in which lottocracy does, at least prima facie, seem more defensible for social egalitarians. The relevant concern is the biased composition of officials, which, I argue, tends to place individuals with certain demographic characteristics in positions of greater political power, in ways that reflect or express disparities of consideration.

4. Biased composition of legislative officials

A number of empirical studies have described the extent to which the selection of officials under electoral democracies is biased, with individuals' relative likelihoods of successfully holding office varying with their demographic characteristics or, in other words, with the 'social group' to which they belong.[11] Ordinarily, officials are often said to be disproportionately male, richer, members of racial/ethnic majorities, and so on. This is standardly understood as the failure of descriptive representation. It has been empirically documented that officials tend to have vastly more advantaged economic backgrounds (including family backgrounds and prior occupations) and that the working class tends to be descriptively underrepresented (Carnes and Lupu, 2016; Carnes and Lupu, 2023; Hahn, 2024; Carnes *et al.*, 2025; for lottocrats' attention to this trend, see Zakaras, 2010: 455–456; Guerrero, 2024: 107). Also, if we measure the descriptive representativeness of a social group in formal political processes of a country in terms of the degree to which the group's representation in a process is proportional to its share of the overall population of the country, virtually all countries fall short of descriptive representation of gender, ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups (Gerring *et al.*, 2024).

In the following subsections, I argue that the biased composition of officials under representative systems can be diagnosed in terms of social inequality and that lottocracy has a prima facie advantage over electoral democracy in addressing it. I begin with the diagnostic point, arguing that the biased composition of officials is problematic primarily because it reflects or expresses unmerited disparities of consideration, while also explaining how the Claim against Lesser Power figures in this diagnosis when such disparities affect individuals' prospects of occupying positions of greater political power (§4.1). I then argue that lottocracy has a prima facie advantage in preventing such disparities of consideration from shaping the selection of officials (§4.2). Finally, I address some anticipated objections (§4.3).

4.1. Biased composition and social inequality

Let us begin with the diagnostic point. Given our discussion in Section 2, whether the biased composition of officials gives rise to objectionable social inequality depends on whether it violates some individuals' claims against potential constituents of social inequality, namely unequal inescapable and final power and unmerited disparities of consideration. Among these constituents, I first discuss how the biased composition of officials (or the state's allowing it to continue) matters in terms of disparities of consideration, violating individuals' Claim against Lesser Consideration. I argue that the biased composition of officials violates that claim by *reflecting* and *expressing* disparities of consideration, and that this is particularly problematic for electoral-democratic settings in two ways. The first, narrower problem is biased voting. The other, more general problem is structural inequality of opportunities for entering electoral competition.

[11]Insofar as our concern is with group-based disparities of consideration, the relevant sense of a 'social group' is a 'protected class', namely, 'any group defined by a basing trait around which an untempered, unmerited disparity of regard has gathered (or threatens to gather)' (Kolodny, 2023: 186). The basing trait is one that 'serves as a focal point, which allows people and institutions across society to coordinate in giving greater regard to some than to others, depending on whether they have or lack the trait' (Kolodny, 2023: 185).

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First, election involves occasions for voter biases to be reflected in the selection of officials. Free voting allows each voter's choice to be *arbitrary* (Ingham, 2022: 694): it does not restrict the reasons on which voters form preferences and cast their votes. In electoral processes, such arbitrariness affects the selection of officials. By allowing voters to form preferences for candidates and vote arbitrarily, election '*intrinsically* permit[s]' voter discrimination against candidates based on their demographic characteristics (Abizadeh, 2021b: 797). Of course, empirical findings are mixed about whether and how often voters discriminate against candidates, and the results depend on the specific demographic characteristics studied. Some studies deny that voters discriminate outright against female candidates (Dolan, 2014)[12] or candidates from the working class (Carnes and Lupu, 2016). (This is why I said the problem of biased voting is 'narrower' than structurally unequal opportunities for electoral competition, which I discuss below.) Nevertheless, other studies show subtler forms of biased voting, for instance penalties against female candidates who are unmarried and without children (Teele *et al.*, 2018), against lesbian, gay, and transgender candidates (Magni and Reynolds, 2021), against candidates from minority ethnic and religious groups (Martin and Blinder, 2021), and so on. So, voter biases do seem to affect the relative electability of candidates to some degree, depending on their demographic characteristics.

Second, and more generally, the biased composition of officials may itself express the state's disparities of consideration as well. This is because, by implementing formal electoral processes, the state allows electoral campaign competitions to occur, in which socioeconomic advantages and disadvantages of candidates are converted into inequalities in the prospects for electoral success. One typical example is the relative lack of capacity among working-class individuals to bear their financial and networking burdens in electoral competitions. Candidates with more advantaged economic standing and backgrounds (e.g., greater wealth, more affluent family of origin, and more prestigious occupational history) tend to run and re-run more frequently and successfully (Carnes and Lupu, 2023; Carnes *et al.*, 2025). For another example, women tend to face thicker structural barriers, stemming from the gendered inequalities of opportunity in various socioeconomic contexts, that impede their effective entry into electoral competition. As Thomsen and King (2020) argue, women tend to lack access to 'pipelines to power,' such as lower-level public offices in municipalities, legal professions (e.g., lawyers and court judges), and media coverage (e.g., being named in newspapers as a promising candidate for the upper house). These positions and careers are 'pipelines' that often form pools of potential candidates for national-level representative offices, but because these pipelines tend to be male-dominated, women as ambitious as men in seeking political office often fail to find ways to enter electoral competition. Similar background inequalities of opportunity will also negatively affect the electoral prospects of racial/ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, religious minorities, and other disadvantaged social groups.

Does the Claim against Lesser Power also play a diagnostic role here? Some might doubt it, suggesting that unequal political power is diagnostically irrelevant in this context for two reasons. First, as we saw (§3), representative systems as such establish inescapable and final political inequality, which already seems to violate non-officials' Claim against Lesser Power (absent rather idealistic, egalitarian popular control). It is then unclear how that claim shows the biased composition of officials to be any more objectionable for social egalitarians than a representative system as such. Second, informal inequalities of political influence, such as the differential rent-seeking capacities of individuals or corporate entities relative to their financial or organizational power, may violate the Claim against Lesser Power of those lacking such power; yet this problem would haunt both electoral democracy and lottocracy (Kolodny, 2023: 383–384). Although there have been attempts to compare election and sortition in terms of their effectiveness in alleviating political capture (Guerrero, 2024: 62–64, 287–288; see also Abizadeh, 2021b: 797–798; Hutton Ferris, 2025: 388–391; Ingham *et al.*, 2025: 639–640), at present we seem to lack robust formal, experimental, or empirical base to settle the dispute.

[12]Compare, though, Bateson's (2020) finding that voters engage in 'strategic discrimination', hesitating to support female candidates out of concern that other voters will not support them.

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I suggest, however, that if we combine the Claims against Lesser Power and Consideration, we can provide a distinctive explanation of why the biased composition of officials in electoral democracy is particularly problematic for social equality. Granted, under both electoral democracy and lottocracy, officials hold positions that give them greater political power to influence the laws and policies binding on citizens at large. Hence, officials might potentially stand as socially superior to non-officials. However, I think it also matters for social equality which factors determine individuals' relative prospects of obtaining positions that potentially make their occupants socially superior. Voting behaviours that express voters' discriminatory or otherwise biased views of candidates based on their demographic characteristics, and background inequalities of opportunity between social groups, both amount to disparities of consideration that eventually affect *which demographic characteristics help one obtain greater political power*, where that power potentially makes officials socially superior to non-officials. Thus, when the selection of officials is biased, individuals who bear disadvantaged demographic characteristics tend to have their Claim against Lesser Power violated (due to their lower electability and greater tendency to be subordinated to officials) *because* they tend to have their Claim against Lesser Consideration violated (due to having their demographic characteristics tracked for lesser consideration). It is one thing that someone inevitably occupies more politically powerful, and thus potentially socially superior, positions; it is another thing that the 'someone' tends to display particular demographic characteristics and, for that reason, tends to enjoy a higher expectation of occupying those positions.[13]

4.2. Lottocracy's advantage in avoiding disparities of consideration

Lottocracy is prima facie more effective in avoiding the above problems by limiting the ways for disparities of consideration to be reflected and expressed in the composition of officials. First, since sortition disallows electoral voting, lottocracy intrinsically prevents voters' arbitrary reasons from influencing the selection outcomes, which suffices to prevent voter discrimination of whatever sort from biasing the composition of officials. Second, since lottocracy makes electoral competition unnecessary, it relieves individuals of concerns about whether they can effectively enter electoral competitions in the first place.

Of course, these two expected effects of lottocracy have often been observed in the literature, so this article's contribution is not merely in pointing them out. Instead, I am offering an explanation of why these effects are significant advances for social equality. Because lottocracy more directly prevents disparities of consideration from biasing the composition of officials, it is better positioned than electoral democracy to satisfy individuals' Claim against Lesser Consideration. Given the deontic interpretation of what social equality demands (§2.4), when such claims of individuals are recognizably violated in the political, social, and economic processes in society, the state or its government bears a duty to take measures to prevent the violation within the practicable range. Implementing lottocracy over electoral democracy can be an effective way for the government to discharge this duty.

To see how the above argument based on social equality is interesting, observe that it is different from the argument that lottocracy realizes a *fair* distribution of access to legislative office. If the justification for lottocracy were simply that it satisfies an ideally fair distribution, it would encounter an important objection by Umbers (2021). A fair, lottery-based distribution of a good is justified when (1) there are many persons, each having an independent claim to the good, (2) each person's claim is roughly of equal weight, and (3) there is no way to distribute the good equally among everyone with this claim (Umbers, 2021: 314). Umbers argues that, from a social egalitarian perspective, it is dubious

[13]This problem fits the characterization of indirectly discriminatory actions and institutions as having 'a disproportionately disadvantageous effect on a certain group because they possess a trait that constitutes prohibited ground of discrimination' (Moreau, 2019: 140). Moreau (2019: 132–134) finds objectionable in particular 'structural accommodation': environments designed to accommodate the needs, interests, or abilities of only some groups, setting structural barriers to the participation of others. Failure to remedy such environments is itself an object of discrimination complaint (cf. Kolodny, 2023: 188).

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that condition (1) is satisfied when the good in question is the access to political office. This good is inherently in tension with social equality between political officials and those coercively subjected to their greater political power (Umbers, 2021: 317). Although some lottocrats (e.g., Jakobi, 2019: 50; Abizadeh, 2021b: 797) seem to assume that individuals have an independent, positive claim to occupy such office, no one in fact has such a claim, so condition (1) fails. Therefore, Umbers concludes, the lottery-based fair distribution of access to political office is especially hard to justify if we have a concern for social equality.

My argument avoids Umbers's objection. I am not insisting that the biased composition of officials is unfair, nor that the virtue of lottocracy lies in its fairness in distributing the access to political office. Rather, my argument emphasizes the following idea. Given that the access to political office must be distributed somehow, it is an affront to social equality if the distribution tracks people's demographic characteristics in ways that reflect or express unmerited disparities of consideration. This argument does not deny that the good being distributed (i.e., the access to political office with greater political power) might inherently be in tension with social equality, nor does it insist that each person has an independent claim to that good.[14] Indeed, acknowledging this inherent problem with political office strengthens my case. If anyone must hold a position that potentially violates others' Claim against Lesser Power and thereby makes its occupant socially superior to those others, no individual's opportunity to access that position should be relatively worsened due to unmerited disparities of consideration that track their demographic characteristics.

In other words, the concern for social equality does not only count against establishing an inequality of inescapable and final power among individuals (which any representative system does); the same concern also serves as a second-order constraint on how the state should attempt to distribute positions of social inferiority and superiority among people with different demographic characteristics *in non-ideal circumstances where distributing those positions unequally is inevitable*. It is an affront to the Claim against Lesser Consideration that people with advantaged demographic characteristics, such as being richer, male, of a majority racial/ethnic group, of faith in a majority religion, and so on, enjoy disproportionately higher prospects of occupying potentially socially superior positions. The point of my argument is that when the state implements electoral democracy, the state tends to contribute to maintaining such disproportionality and thus violates the constraint; the state can at least avoid making such a contribution by implementing lottocracy instead.

4.3. Anticipated objections

Having thus clarified the point of my argument, I anticipate two important objections to it. One objection doubts lottocracy's capacity to mitigate selection bias, and the other purports to defend election by qualifying it with quotas and other countermajoritarian measures. I will address these objections below.

The first objection is that insofar as lottocracy is to respect a liberal constraint, it will fail to solve the problem of selection bias. If lottocracy is to be compatible with individual freedom, it must grant people randomly selected for office an option to decline the offer. But this option creates room for biased demographic compositions of the lottocratic legislature through *attrition*. That is, some invitees, especially those from disadvantaged social groups, will tend to be less willing to accept the invitation to serve in political office, due to the fear of being denigrated, greater responsibilities for unpaid labour and caring burdens, greater susceptibility to chronic illness resulting from lesser access to medical care, and so on. Indeed, Lever and Destri (2024: 96–97) suggest that such worries can be supported as an extrapolation from similar observations in analogous contexts such as jury trials and deliberative mini-publics (e.g., Jacquet, 2017; Collins and Gialopsos, 2021).

[14]Here, my argument diverges from Yamaguchi's (2025: 56–57) similar response to Umbers, in which he assumes that each person has an equal right to take part, positively, in the collective process of political decision-making. My argument does not hinge on that assumption.

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In response, I grant that lottocracy will not fully eliminate the factors giving rise to differential willingness to serve, so some failure of descriptive representation is to be expected. Even so, the prima facie advantage of lottocracy over electoral democracy stands. The factors described in the previous paragraph affect willingness to serve under both electoral democracy and lottocracy, although what they affect differs: under electoral democracy, willingness to run for office; under lottocracy, willingness to accept the randomly issued invitation to serve. Either way, the problem of differential willingness to serve in office is, as such, not a decisive consideration in favour of election over sortition.[15] The particular problem with election is that it exacerbates the biased composition of officials that reflects and expresses disparities of consideration. For instance, voters tend to disapprove of female candidates who do not have traditional household profiles such as being married with children; they tend to favour female candidates who do. Thus, 'female candidates without families—who could better afford the time to invest in political careers—may face greater degrees of voter disapproval, while women in more demanding family roles have less time for political work' (Teele *et al.*, 2018: 526). Election thus undermines the electability of even those willing to run and to serve if elected. Because lottocracy avoids this problem more effectively by undermining the effect of biased voting, it is prima facie better positioned to satisfy the Claim against Lesser Consideration held by those potentially willing to serve in office.

The second anticipated objection is that electoral democracy can also address the biased composition of officials by adopting countermajoritarian mechanisms. Critical democratic theorists have discussed various such measures, including 'quotas in electoral lists, proportional representation, reserved seats, the drawing of boundaries for electoral jurisdictions' (Young, 2000: 141; see also Guinier, 1994: chap. 5; Phillips, 1995: chaps. 3–4; Young, 2000: 148–151). Such measures could help prevent the demographic composition of officials from deviating too much from an unbiased composition. Moreover, one might suggest a further progressive potential of such measures. Purely random selection would make numerical minorities in the general population, such as minority ethnic groups (accounting for, say, 5–20% of the general population), also numerical minorities in the legislature. By contrast, the measures suggested here might increase the proportion of representatives for a social group even more than would be guaranteed by random selection, thus further closing the intergroup power gap within the legislature (Lever, 2024: 142–143).[16] If so, why should we pursue lottocracy to advance social equality?

In response, I agree that such countermajoritarian measures, duly designed, can mitigate the biased composition of elected officials. Indeed, where some social groups have been persistently excluded or marginalized, the concern for social equality would require an electoral system with quotas, reserved seats, and other mechanisms of group representation *if* it is compared with an electoral system without them. However, the problem is that these measures primarily aim at correcting the demographic composition of the resulting elected body. They do not fully remove the ways in which electoral competition converts certain demographic characteristics into unequal prospects of obtaining office. Even when quotas are in place, individuals must still pass through processes of candidate emergence, party recruitment, party nomination, campaign financing, media exposure, and voter evaluation. Each of these processes may remain affected by background inequalities of opportunity and unmerited

[15]Moreover, where attrition is socially patterned, the relevant obstacles – compensation, caregiving, employment protection, disability access, and so on – are visible objects of institutional design for lottocracy.

[16]This is how Phillips (1995: 47) characterizes Young's case for group representation: 'it is an argument for more representation than is strictly proportional to one's numbers'. Note, though, that Young (2000: 149) accepts the lottery as a possible mechanism for group representation, and analogous proposals may be available within lottocracy; a lottocratic legislature could use weighted or stratified sampling so that numerical minority groups receive greater-than-proportional shares of seats. Lever (2024: 143–146) objects that stratified sampling is incompatible with the lottocratic aim of perfectly fair descriptive representation. That objection has less force if the case for lottocracy rests not on fairness in descriptive representation but on the Claim against Lesser Consideration, as I argue here; from that perspective, non-proportional stratification could be justified, at least in non-ideal circumstances, as a way to counteract the continuing effects of historically entrenched lesser consideration in political representation.

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disparities of consideration. For example, gender quotas may increase the number of women in office, but they need not eliminate the gendered pipelines through which some women rather than others become viable candidates (given the findings by Thomsen and King, 2020), nor do they eliminate voter penalties against candidates whose family status, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, disability, or other characteristics make them appear less conventionally credible or electable. Similarly, reserved seats for one protected group may leave untouched inequalities within that group or across other unrecognized groups.

To be sure, some of these concerns might be addressed by using more fine-grained conditions for quotas or reserved seats.[17] For instance, we could reserve seats not for 'women' but for 'women with/without marital status, with/without children, more/less affluent women', and so on. This is also a possible institutional design. However, I doubt that its possibility counts in favour of election over sortition. As the conditions become more fine-grained, devices for special representation will face increasing problems of contestable classification and administrative complexity. By contrast, sortition does not need to specify ex ante every socially salient group whose members might be disadvantaged by electoral competition. It reduces reliance on the electoral-competitive filters that generate such disadvantage in the first place.

Thus, although the availability of electoral reforms might weaken the worry about descriptive representation in electoral democracy, it does not defeat the more specific social egalitarian claim defended here. The relevant complaint is not merely that some groups receive too few seats, but that unequal accessibility to positions of greater political power tends to track demographic characteristics in ways that reflect or express unmerited disparities of consideration. Electoral reforms might reduce this tracking at the level of aggregate outcomes (e.g., using quotas or reserved seats), but they usually leave intact the fact that unequal electability stems from electoral competitions. Sortition more directly prevents advantages in wealth, social networking, personal or ideological fit with a political party, favourable appearance and performance on the media and campaign, and voter approval from functioning as advantages in obtaining office. In other words, sortition functions not as an *ex post facto* corrective device for the distribution of seats but as an *ex ante* mechanism to prevent the tracking of demographic characteristics; at the initial selection stage of lottocracy, no one is made less likely to receive the chance to hold office because voters, parties, donors, media actors, or social or economic organizations give them lesser consideration. That is why sortition makes the selection of political officials less of an occasion for social inequality than election does, even if later stages, such as acceptance of the offer and actual service in office, require further institutional safeguards.

5. Conclusion

Electoral democracy and lottocracy are often thought to be on a par with respect to political equality; the former equalizes everyone's voting power in elections, and the latter equalizes everyone's chance to be selected for office. However, the comparative evaluation between electoral democracy and lottocracy from an egalitarian standpoint is more complex. In this paper, I have offered a social egalitarian perspective on how to diagnose the problems of political inequality inherent in representative political systems, including the vertical inequality of political power and the biased composition of officials. I have then argued that, given the lack of individual citizen control over officials and the problem of informal inequality of political influence, electoral democracy is not obviously superior to lottocracy in meeting individuals' Claim against Lesser Power, and that lottocracy is prima facie more effective than electoral democracy in realizing a less biased composition of officials and satisfying individuals' Claim against Lesser Consideration.

To reiterate, the arguments offered in this paper are of prima facie character. Depending on how further comparative-evaluative arguments unfold (with more rigorous formal, experimental, or empirical studies), it might turn out that electoral democracy better satisfies those claims against social

[17]I thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to address this potential reply.

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inequality. Even so, my arguments allow us to see what conditions electoral democracy must satisfy to be compatible with social equality: effectively egalitarian popular control over officials, measures to equalize the informal influence of individuals and organizations, fine-grained systems of group representation, and so on. Thus, a further implication of my arguments is that the concern for social equality also constrains the range of justifiable institutional conceptions of electoral democracy.

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