



Tegen verkiezingen

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Onze representatieve democratie raakt steeds meer in het slop. De legitimiteit ervan wordt aangetast: steeds minder mensen gaan stemmen, kiezers worden grilliger in hun keuze, het ledenaantal van politieke partijen loopt dramatisch terug. Daarbij wordt de efficiëntie van de democratie minder: krachtadig besturen wordt problematisch, politici moeten hun beleid steeds vaker afstemmen op de volgende verkiezingen. Het leidt allemaal tot wat David Van Reybrouck in een dwingend betoog het democratisch vermoeidheidssyndroom noemt. Maar hoe komen we daarvan af? Pappen en nathouden – dat is wat er nu voornamelijk gebeurt. Er zijn hier en daar wat vernieuwingstendensen, al dan niet in georganiseerd verband. Van Reybrouck vreest dat dit soort marginale oplossingen niet meer voldoende is en dat het oprispingen zijn van een systeem dat steeds meer vastloopt. Zijn voorkeur gaat uit naar een oud democratisch principe dat vooral in het klassieke Athene werd gehanteerd: de loting. Tot aan de Franse Revolutie is dat democratische middel vaak aangewend, niet alleen in Athene, maar ook in bloeiende republieken als die van Venetië en Florence tijdens de renaissance. Na de Franse Revolutie leeft het alleen voort in de rechtspraak van sommige landen. David Van Reybrouck zet in een glashelder betoog uiteen dat loting een effectieve mogelijkheid is om onze machteloos geworden democratie weer pit en vaart te geven en de burgers weer te betrekken bij wat ons allen als samenleving aangaat.

Tegen verkiezingen Details

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From Reader Review Tegen verkiezingen for online ebook

BaseRateZero says

In this concise, well-written book, Flemish historian David van Reybrouck subjects the idea of elections as the centrepiece of a democracy to a close look. He points out that they were originally not intended to bring about true democracy, i.e. government by all people, but instead served to make sure that only a limited number of people (who thought themselves to be the only ones capable) served public office. Nowadays, instead of fostering participation and debate between all members of the population, elections bring about toxic, useless debates that are not shaped by the most pressing interests of the people (the most vivid illustration of this fact is evident if one only takes a glance at the terrible fiasco that is the American presidential election of 2016). Van Reybrouck passionately argues for a deliberative democracy with aleatoric elements: In this model, one (or several) legislative bodies are formed by a combination of drawing lots and self-selection. Citizens are no longer delegated to the sidelines, but instead, a representative sample of them is able to work on policy matters. The author fleshes out the details of several possible ways of implementing this change and powerfully demonstrates how each of them could help to reinvigorate public decision making by narrowing the divide between those governed and those governing and by reducing the amount of consideration that those in power have to expend on retaining it. Motivating and highly accessible, this book should be read by everyone who has ever wondered how to make politics more efficient and policies reflect the interests of the people.

Sivoj says

La "démocratie" représentative électorale présente de nombreux défauts :

- La durée limitée des mandats encourage les élus à prendre des mesures à court terme qui ont l'apparence de l'efficacité plutôt des mesures à long termes à l'efficacité réelle.
- La fin du mandat d'un élu est gaspillé car il fait campagne pour sa prochaine réélection.
- L'élection était considéré par Aristote et Montesquieu non comme un processus démocratique mais oligarchique, car il ne peut conduire qu'à favoriser les classes sociales les plus élevées. Ce processus a été choisi par ceux qui ont écrit la constitution dans la plupart des pays européens, c'est à dire la bourgeoisie. Faire de la politique demande du temps, de l'argent et de l'éducation, tout ce qui est hors de portée des pauvres. Aujourd'hui on constate bien qu'être politicien n'est pas être au service du peuple, mais au service de soi-même, car il s'agit d'une carrière professionnelle comme une autre, un moyen pour l'individu d'acquiescer de l'avancement après être sorti des grandes écoles, créant une caste à part qui, quelque soit leur parti, contrôle tous les pouvoirs et n'ont aucune raison de prendre des mesures qui iraient contre leurs intérêts personnels.
- De fait, les élus, souvent juristes, avocats, entrepreneurs, ou banquiers, ne sont pas représentatifs de leurs électeurs, donc peu légitimes mais aussi peu efficaces pour régler les problèmes des autres classes sociales dont ils ignorent l'existence ou se fichent complètement.
- Le pouvoir réel du peuple se limitant au vote, il redevient impuissant une fois l'élection passée.
- L'élection ne permet pas de sélectionner "le meilleur" candidat ; que faire quand tous sont aussi mauvais ?
- L'élection d'un candidat, d'un parti, ne permet pas aux électeurs d'exprimer leur pensée de manière nuancée ; être forcé d'accepter tout un paquet d'idées, plutôt que sélectionner précisément celles que l'on souhaite, nuit à l'efficacité du régime.
- Ce régime est facilement corruptible

Elle n'est plus adaptée à la société du 21ème siècle :

- Elle n'a jamais été conçu pour supporter des partis politiques. L'assemblée était censée être un espace de débat pour se mettre d'accord, or les partis ont pour effet de fanatiser leurs propres membres autour de

quelques idées fixes, sans pouvoir en débattre avec les partis adverses, transformant l'assemblée en espace de clivages plutôt que de débats, et empêchant les partis de faire évoluer leurs propres idées.

– Le battage médiatique, qui fait une montagne de quelque chose d'insignifiant et cherche plus le spectacle que l'information, mène les élus à se prêter au jeu et à se donner en spectacle en vue d'améliorer leur image pour la prochaine élection ; les politiciens se décrédibilisent chaque fois qu'ils ouvrent la bouche. Ils prennent des mesures spectaculaires pour nourrir le spectacle médiatique dans un but électoral, donc qu'on élise les "meilleurs" ou pas, l'inefficacité et la préférence aux intérêts personnels s'enracinent dans le paysage politique.

(Et à titre personnel je rajouterai que quand les grands médias, dont certains rachetés par des groupes financiers, diffusent le même genre de propagande libérale et influencent à la fois l'électeur et l'élus, on a un nouveau problème.)

Mon résumé est grossier et j'en ai sûrement oublié ; le procès de la procédure électorale est chargé ; sa légitimité est douteuse et son efficacité aussi, non seulement aujourd'hui, dans la pratique, mais aussi sur le papier, avant même son existence. La croyance selon laquelle démocratie=élections est devenu un dogme ; on y réfléchit plus, on nous l'enseigne depuis tout petit ; un dogme qui se montre dangereux lorsqu'on l'exporte par la force dans des pays déstabilisés où il va amplifier les conflits.

Plus personne ne croit que voter change quoi que ce soit, mais beaucoup le font encore. L'école nous apprend que l'on a "des droits et des devoirs" ; évidemment, élire un aristocrate au service des riches fait partie des devoirs.

En solution à ces problèmes, l'auteur se penche sur la démocratie représentative par tirage au sort, qui a été utilisée avec succès à Athènes et à Florence pendant deux siècles consécutifs chacune. Quand on parle de tirage au sort, les gens ne veulent pas en entendre parler, ils croient qu'on va tirer le président au hasard ; ce n'est pas du tout ça. Il s'agit de réunir des centaines ou des milliers de citoyens pris au hasard, de manière à obtenir un échantillon représentatif de la population, en les rémunérant pour que les pauvres participent aussi, et en leur offrant un espace qui leur permet de débattre et de délibérer. Ce système offre à chacun les mêmes chances de peser sur la politique de son pays, et des mandats courts permettent de faire tourner une grande partie de la population ; les femmes participeraient autant que les hommes, et les nombreux pauvres pèseraient plus que les quelques riches. Je crois que ça pourrait même être le ciment d'une nouvelle cohésion sociale, plus efficace que le service militaire et moins malsain.

Seuls les postes nécessitant des compétences spécifiques seraient sujets à élection. La population serait plus investie dans la politique puisque elle y participerait vraiment. Ce régime serait plus légitime vis-à-vis du peuple, et moins corrompible. Quant à la compétence des sélectionnés, des expériences grandeur nature au Canada, en Islande, en Irlande, au Pays-Bas, montrent que celle-ci s'acquiert en débattant sur les sujets en question et qu'au besoin on peut former les jurés auprès de spécialistes. Lorsqu'on traite les gens en adultes capables de réflexion, au lieu d'une masse bête à laquelle il faut mentir pour son bien, ils se comportent en adultes qui réfléchissent et produisent des résultats concrets. Le tirage au sort est aujourd'hui utilisé pour sélectionner les jurés d'assises sans que cela pose problème ; pourquoi ne pas faire de même pour écrire et voter les lois ? Il ne s'agirait pas de copier le régime d'Athènes au Ve siècle avant notre ère, mais de s'en inspirer pour créer quelque chose d'adapté à notre besoin actuel de participation à notre propre démocratie. Des modèles qui utilisent le tirage au sort et qui fonctionnent, on pourrait en imaginer des dizaines ; la phase délicate serait plutôt la transition d'un modèle à l'autre, mais l'élection pourrait coexister avec le tirage au sort ou la participation volontaire.

Pour citer l'auteur lorsqu'il se résume brièvement :

– Il faut prendre conscience que les raisons invoquées aujourd'hui contre des citoyens tirés au sort sont souvent identiques à celles avancées autrefois contre le droit de vote pour les agriculteurs, les ouvriers ou les femmes. A l'époque aussi, ceux qui s'y opposaient prétendaient que c'en serait vraiment fini de la démocratie.

- Un Parlement élu dispose sans aucun doute de plus de compétences techniques que s’il était tiré au sort. En revanche, chacun est le spécialiste de sa propre vie. A quoi bon avoir un Parlement composé de juristes très qualifiés, si peu d’entre eux connaissent encore le prix du pain ? Avec le tirage au sort, on obtient un meilleur échantillon de la société au sein du corps législatif.
- Les élus ne sont pas toujours compétents non plus. Sinon, pourquoi auraient-ils des assistants, des chercheurs et des bureaux d’études à leur disposition ? Comment se fait-il que les ministres puissent du jour au lendemain changer de ministère ? Ne serait-ce pas uniquement parce qu’ils sont entourés d’une équipe professionnelle qui leur offre ses compétences techniques ?
- Une représentation nationale tirée au sort ne serait pas laissée à elle-même : elle pourrait inviter des spécialistes, compter sur des modérateurs et se renseigner auprès des citoyens. De plus, elle se verrait accorder un certain temps pour se familiariser avec son travail et une administration pour se documenter.
- Comme les citoyens tirés au sort n’ont pas à se préoccuper du fonctionnement d’un parti, à mener campagne et à intervenir dans les médias, ils disposent de plus de temps que leurs collègues élus dans l’autre chambre législative. Ils peuvent se consacrer pleinement à leurs travaux législatifs : acquérir une bonne connaissance des dossiers, entendre des spécialistes, délibérer entre eux. [...]
- Les jurys de citoyens tirés au sort pour se prononcer lors d’un procès montrent que, généralement, les gens prennent leur tâche très au sérieux. La crainte qu’un hémicycle se comporte de manière imprudente et irresponsable n’est pas fondée. Si nous sommes d’accord pour que douze personnes décident en leur âme et conscience de la liberté ou de l’incarcération d’un concitoyen, nous pouvons être convaincus qu’un plus grand nombre d’entre eux souhaite servir l’intérêt de la communauté de manière responsable et en soit capable.
- Toutes les expériences de forums de citoyens témoignent du dévouement et de l’approche constructive des participants tirés au sort et souvent de la finesse de leurs recommandations. Faut-il en déduire qu’elles ne présentent aucune faiblesse ? Bien sûr que non, mais un système de représentants élus a aussi ses faiblesses. Ses lois aussi ont parfois des défauts.
- Pourquoi acceptons-nous que des lobbys, des groupes de réflexion et toutes sortes de groupes d’intérêt exercent une influence sur la politique, alors que nous hésitons ne serait-ce qu’à donner voix au chapitre aux citoyens ordinaires, qui sont tout compte fait les premiers concernés ?
- En outre, une chambre composée de citoyens tirés au sort ne serait pas la seule. Durant cette phase de la démocratie, la législation serait justement le fruit d’une collaboration entre les représentants élus et ceux tirés au sort. Des pitres au pouvoir ? Si l’on veut, mais ils ne l’exerceraient pas seuls.

Chelsea says

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Eryn C says

Are elections necessary to democracy? This book delves into the history of elections in democracies (hint: not as old or egalitarian as you might think), questions common assumptions about elections, and asks if there is a different, better way.

The prose is a little dry and academic, but these are questions and ideas I've never thought about before so I think the content is well worth pushing through.

Matthias says

This isn't a review but a (very long) rant on the elections, taking inspiration and arguments from David Van Reybrouck's book. It won't be any better than the other half a million opinion pieces you see all over the internet right now. I am already imagining myself cringing as I read this in a couple of months, but I wrote it with the kind of idealistic conviction so typical for teenagers, a sort of conviction that I felt was long lost to me. So I'm posting this in the perhaps vain hope that this particular brand of naivety comes with a certain charm, and also because I already feel it fading. Not one week after what I called an apocalyptic event and I already feel myself slipping into the same complacency that would prevent me from writing anything about it under more normally abnormal circumstances. This complacency, the subtle but nagging feeling of "Don't worry so much about it" already got me to drop my initial five-star-rating fuelled with burning enthusiasm to a cooler 4-star assessment. But it's not just conviction and naivety that made me write this. It's also this really good book's fault for giving me the feeling I have an "informed opinion". But I might be wrong, so just for the record: I warmly welcome disagreements in the comments section.

My world is spinning. Last week Donald Trump has been elected as the leader of the free world. A couple of months ago the United Kingdom chose to leave the European Union. Left and right voices are rising up, encouraged by these examples, shouting that the time for a change has come. True change. The people want their country back. The people want their life back. The time is now.

Is the hangover that so many people are experiencing merely a reality check? After all, we can't expect to live in a democracy and to always be on the winning side. Opinions shift. Facts evolve. Zoom in on public opinion and the monolith becomes an intricate web of interests, feelings, reasons, problems, problems, problems. The idea that this whole system would converge into something that I personally feel happy about, or at least something I can live with, has proven to be a lie, and not for the first time either. I've woken up and smelt the roses, and boy, were they not roses.

In events like these, where everyone rushes to their Facebook status to either gloat or cry, I tend to curl up in a metaphorical ball (metaphorical because I have the agility of a plank) and let the mass hysteria pass before I poke my head out again. But this time it feels different. The time, it really feels like now, doesn't it? It doesn't happen often that you feel as if you're living in a history book, that you're part of a story future kids will be learning from. If we're lucky. In any case it doesn't feel like the time to be curling up in any kind of geometrical figure, but get out there and do something. But what?

People were unhappy. Now even more people seem unhappy. People were angry. Now even more people seem angry. Why did democracy let them all down? The democracy with which I was brought up was told to be stable. "The least bad system of governance" was just a modest way of saying it's the best. Checks kept everything in check, balances did the rest. Why does it feel as if the whole thing is collapsing right under my feet? And why am I not all that surprised about it either?

We can blame racism. We can blame Hillary for not trying enough. We can blame the DNC. We can blame corruption. We can blame Trump for exploiting gullibility. We can blame the FBI. We can blame sexism and glass ceilings. We can blame the media for being part of the problem, for helping cause the problem, for making things worse. We can blame Wikileaks. We can blame the independent parties. We can blame the Russians. We can blame the American election process. We can blame Trump's opponents for not adequately addressing the problems his voters are contending with. We can blame the Mexicans. We can blame the high and mighty establishment unaware of what goes on in the real world. We can blame the mockery and disdain towards Trump and those who voted for him. We can blame voters' ignorance, caused by the education system and fuelled by the media. We can blame people rushing to find people to blame. We can blame each other. We can blame humanity and its inherent evil, lose all faith and watch the world burn.

We can also hope. Hope that four years from now we'll all be laughing about how we threw a hissy fit over what ended up to be just business as usual. Hope that things won't be so bad. Not everyone liked Obama either, not when he first got elected, not when he got re-elected. People didn't like Bush either. People were devastated when Al Gore lost. But every time people on the losing side hung in there, hoping, knowing, they'd let their voice be heard later on.

There are so many people to blame and things to hope for it hardly seems sensible to blame it on any one thing in particular or to simply hope for a particular scenario to play out. Let's just agree to move on and contain the fire. But where are the hoses? Where's the water? Why do we feel so powerless? And why did some people let that powerlessness turn into frustration? Did frustration find an outlet in Brexit and Trump votes? Where will current frustrations with recent democratic outcomes find their own outlet during the next elections? It was while thinking about these questions I was reminded of David Van Reybrouck's pamphlet for a truer democracy: "**Against Elections**".

This thing we call "democracy", it feels to me like this big glass dome under which we're stuck. We're all pointing fingers at each other while the air gets staler by the minute. Our voices bounce back off the invisible walls and the only thing to comfort us are our own echoes. We can see the sky full of its promises, but something is holding us back. But how can democracy be the problem? It's the very thing that was designed to lift us up, make our voices heard, and make us stand together in the face of problems. The system where the power of the majority respects the minority is turning into a battleground rather than the garden in which we all hold hands and dance in a circle. One tyranny of a majority leads to new displeased majorities eager to start their own tyranny during the next cycle. And people get tired.

This feeling of being stuck under a dome, the feeling that it doesn't really matter how we vote or what we say, it's got a name. **Democratic Fatigue Syndrome**, which I'll be calling DFS from now on. I don't know about you, but I know I've got me a case of the DFS. And I'm pretty sure a lot of people who voted for Trump had DFS. And the Bernie supporters? They probably got it too. And the Hillary voters? If they didn't have it before, something tells me they have it now. Don't even get me started on the independents. But where the DFS is perhaps most obvious is in the percentage of people who simply don't show up to vote. According to the CNN, 45% of voters didn't live up to their name during the presidential elections. I live in a country where I HAVE TO go vote, but even here 10% don't show up or cast invalid votes.

In order to get rid of this DFS, we run in circles. First, we think it's the people who are the problem: the politicians. The political professionals who only take their own interests to heart, who only care about getting re-elected, their careers coming before the general interest. But the distrust is mutual. Politicians don't trust their electorate to do the right thing, to reach the right conclusions, they try to coat necessary policy in jibberjabber, they appear ever less in non-scripted debates, they don't admit to making mistakes unless they've become a publicly known fact. And who rises up in this atmosphere of distrust? The populist. The bomb thrown in the establishment. And afterwards? Chaos, uncertainty, more of the same, upheavals, who knows? In any case, a populist winning is rarely the end and even more rarely a happy ending. Promises are

broken, the populist becomes a politician himself and we're back to where we started.

Others are calling for a technocracy. Forget about politicians being an environment expert during one legislation and a finance expert for the next. Who can believe such people? We need REAL experts, who base their policies on facts, without having to care about public opinion and the next elections. They're doing the right thing because science and studies tell them they are. As someone with deep concerns for the climate this is a solution that often seemed very sensible to me. Their efficiency would foster their legitimacy when the results of their work are clear to the public. But we don't know everything do we? Science hasn't reached that point, where moral choices are guided by objective facts. The system has to turn to the public again and hear from them: what is the right thing to do?

So we end up with elections. The basis of our representative democracy. While in the beginning it was a means to reach the people, to hear what they think, elections now have become part and parcel of the argument that the politicians are working for us, with our approval and trust, and that countries are being run as per their peoples' vision. Short-term election cycle thinking and the party interests we started off with are back again. Voters' opinions, in great part formed by the media culture, are only loosely based on facts and more on incidents, be they of the pussy grabbing or email sending type. These voters might as well be uninformed, for all the good such opinions do to the general interest. Then we put some x's in some boxes next to some names and the fossil fuel that are elections keep the democracy engine running.

I don't feel empowered by elections. That's the bottom line. Even on the off-chance a politician I voted for gets an office I strongly care about I end up disappointed. Not because things don't go my way, mind you, but because I feel certain arguments aren't even being brought to the table. I do feel empowered by the idea of democracy, of both majority and minority having a say, but despite the growing role of civil society, we don't seem to quite get there. So what alternative is there in organising a democracy that doesn't leave the people feeling so powerless?

David Van Reybrouck found an answer in what is called the “**deliberative democracy**”, a Utopia (as of now, at least) where voters' opinions are informed and weighed and duly taken into account. The basis of this system is that of the lottery. Yes, you heard me, a **lottery**. The first time I read this the idea seemed utterly ludicrous to me, but as I said, my world is spinning and the case for why our democracy is failing so hard is being made so well, both in the book as well as in election results, it makes me consider the formulation of any alternative as a brave and necessary exercise. And frankly, on a second read, it's not so bad.

The proposed solution is a complicated one to explain in a review, so I'd have to urge you to read the book for that, but in a nutshell it gives everyone the same chance to participate actively and in an informed way. Six bodies of government would be set-up, out of which five would consist of citizens picked by a lottery and one by volunteers who feel strongly about certain topics, who studied them and are informed. What results is a robust albeit complicated structure of power where civilians are empowered to take decisions for themselves, for society, without career strategies and other personal considerations that objectively undermine the general interest, and everyone gets a fair shot and being in a position of power, of which there is very little given how it is dispersed.

I'm not a political scientist, but David Van Reybrouck's book presents the history of democracy, enumerates arguments of why and where things went wrong, and proposes a solution of how to move ahead in such a way even I could fathom it. Perhaps the presented solution has got something utopic about it, but all signs point to the system being seriously sick. Maybe the time really is now. Not to reach to tried-and-failed solutions of populism, but time for something more radical. The time to fully acknowledge the weaknesses of our current democratic systems and to dare put them into question. I don't know how much will come of this deliberative democracy in practical terms, but reading this felt like a crack in the democracy dome, a

breath of fresh air. I can only hope the ideas will keep coming and democracy will prove to be as flexible as its basic principles demand from it.

Andrea says

Considerando l'accoppiata titolo/copertina davo per scontato che si trattasse di un saggio che portasse avanti una visione reazionaria, sempre più comune da destra a sinistra, ma forse in particolare fra i finti liberali, quelli che: "Sono sinceramente democratico - finché il popolo vota quello che voglio io".

Niente di più sbagliato: dopo l'analisi dell'agonizzante stato della legittimità delle istituzioni politiche, passa al vaglio di diverse alternative, fino alla motivata scelta di un metodo che viene niente meno dall'antica Atene, quello di un'alternanza governati/governanti basato sul caso, coadiuvato eventualmente (soprattutto all'inizio) da un'istituzione di votati che lavori in sinergia.

L'attuale meccanismo rappresentativo sarebbe nei fatti stato definito democrazia aristocratica da Montesquieu, ma si instaurò ovunque in seguito alle rivoluzioni americana e francese e dopo la redazione della costituzione belga del 1831, presa a modello da molte nazioni nel periodo dei moti rivoluzionari, mandando definitivamente in soffitta il modello aleatorio.

Considerando che i rischi di un sistema aleatorio sono già realtà nel modello attuale: incompetenza (persino fra i "tecnici" - se non malafede, che sarebbe ben peggio - vedere governo Monti), alta possibilità di condizionamenti da parte di media o appunto di gruppi di "tecnici" prezzolati o incompetenti che assisterebbero i cittadini, possibilità di truccare l'estrazione, avrebbe però degli indubbi lati positivi, come una maggiore legittimazione rispetto all'ormai comunemente detestato sistema partitico e una più rapida azione, oltretutto non vincolata dalla paura della scadenza elettorale.

La fattibilità è più che altro improbabile, perché le attuali istituzioni vanno decisamente verso l'autoreferenzialità e ad una sempre maggiore diminuzione degli spazi democratici, specie nell'Unione Europea (che un pugno di burocrati del Consiglio europeo - l'unico che conti veramente, e che infatti non viene eletto - decida di cambiare le regole nel senso auspicato dal libro appare semplicemente fantascienza).

Alex Borghgraef says

Fishkin's "When the people speak" had mij al overtuigd dat deliberatieve democratie een waardevol idee is, maar toch biedt "Tegen Verkiezingen" absoluut een meerwaarde. In het eerste deel van het boek geeft Van Reybrouck een boeiend historisch overzicht van loting als een democratisch instrument, en hoe het oorspronkelijk aristocratisch geïnspireerde (en in essentie anti-democratische) concept van verkiezingen onder invloed van de elites van de Amerikaanse en Franse revoluties in de geesten van de mensen de plaats in nam van democratische loting als enige "faire" staatsbestel.

De tweede helft van het boek toont aan hoe democratie door loting ook in een moderne staat zou kunnen functioneren, en daar ook absoluut superieur is aan het huidige partitocratische representatieve systeem. Waar het boek echt schittert is in de uiteenzetting van het multibody sortition systeem van Bouricius, een absoluut briljant concept dat de inzet van experts, vrijwilligers en uigelote burgers combineert om de voordelen van elk uit te spelen, en de nadelen op te heffen. Van Reybrouck houdt tenslotte een pleidooi om in deze tijd van populistische verkiezingsoverwinningen en destructieve referenda onze democratie over een andere boeg te gooien, en de kracht van directe inspraak door uitgelote burgers ten volle te benutten. Ik ben alvast

overtuigd.

'Izzat Radzi says

long review later Sunday

"It would appear that the fundamental cause of Democratic Fatigue Syndrome lies in the fact that we have all become electoral fundamentalists, despising those elected but venerating elections. Electoral fundamentalism is an unshakeable belief in the idea that democracy is inconceivable without elections and elections are a necessary and fundamental precondition when speaking of democracy. Electoral fundamentalist refuse to regard elections as a means of taking part in democracy, seeing them instead as an end in themselves, as a holy doctrine with an intrinsic, inalienable value."

Part II: Diagnoses; Its the fault of electoral-representative democracy: A new diagnosis

Reading this book fills me with mixed ideas and thoughts.

Should one pursue ideals, or stick to pragmatic realities? How far should one go with 'utopian' vision, given current societal id? Should we, in our walk through history, become succumbed in historical romanticism? Both luckily and unfortunately, I read this after Judith Suissa's Anarchism and Education (hence the unfortunate, cause I didn't base this book review by itself), which she, in the Preface said the following: *".. So it comes as no surprise to have been accused, by some readers of the book, of being 'romantic' or 'utopian'. Yet, annoying though these accusations are, I am not entirely uncomfortable with the label. As I tried to show in the book, engaging with anarchist theory and, particularly with anarchist educational ideas and practice, can help to rescue the word 'utopian' from its pejorative connotations and reclaim it as an urgent and committed form of social hope. This project seems particularly timely in our current political climate. Ideas matter, and at a time when we are surrounded by pronouncements about 'death of ideology' and politicians talking about 'what works', they matter more, not less, than ever."*

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The idea proposed is ground-breaking, at least for me, in a way of abolishing the typical electoral mandate in modern government by means of ballot and choosing a representative for each designated areas/parliaments/states. The author suggested a more radical but forgotten form of democracy: selection by sortition of random selection, followed by self-selection and again sortition. No wonder in statistical science class we were repeatedly taught of it(!), only now I can see it practical uses outside in finance and insurance of course.

The idea is that, with random selection, all people are in a neutral position. No one is in a better position to be chosen (and even if one does, it only last a year). It typifies like those citizens chosen to become a jury in court-of law, they're presented with a case after random selection, they'll seat together and discuss and consider all information given to them.

But, for today form of democracy, it's mostly outright idiosyncratic. Consider the following excerpt from Tocqueville 1830's Democracy in America on election:

"the wheels of government cease to act, as it were, of their own accord at the approach of an election, and even for some time previous to that event... At the approach of an election the head of the executive government is wholly occupied by the coming struggle; his future plans are doubtful; he can undertake nothing new, and he will only prosecute with indifference those designs which another will perhaps terminate... the eyes of the nation are centred on a single point; all are watching the gradual birth of so important an event.. the period which immediately precedes an election and the moment of its duration must always be considered as a national crisis... For a long while before the appointed time is at hand the election becomes the most important and the all-engrossing topic of discussion. The ardor of faction is redoubled;

and all the artificial passions which the imagination can create in the bosom of a happy and peaceful land are agitated and brought to light. The President, on the other hand, is absorbed by the cares of self-defence. He no longer governs for the interest of the State, but for that of his re-election; he does homage to the majority, and instead of checking its passions, as his duty commands him to do, he frequently courts its worst caprices. As the election draws near, the activity of intrigue and the agitation of the populace increase; the citizens are divided into hostile camps, each of which assumes the name of its favorite candidate; the whole nation glows with feverish excitement; the election is the daily theme of the public papers, the subject of private conversation, the end of every thought and every action, the sole interest of the present. As soon as the choice is determined, this ardor is dispelled; and as a calmer season returns, the current of the State, which had nearly broken its banks, sinks to its usual level: but who can refrain from astonishment at the causes of the storm.”

He gave a brief account of how current election came to be, when in the 19th-century, “*political parties arose, universal suffrage was introduced, organised civil society grew, commercial media drowned out the public arena and social media added their voices to the clamour.*”. The practiced form of government now originated from after Belgium 1830 independence, where ballot to choose electorate started.

Of course we can agreed how this ‘festival of democracy’ in election are celebrated as much. But rarely do we consider, is not this form of democracy are only to keeps our hands away from power? If one is chosen, is he/his coalition really competent enough? If so, how is it possible that one change ministries post one year to the next? I shared the same scepticism with the author, which he said:

“Those elected are not always particularly competent either. If they were, why would they need to have staffs, researchers and human resources departments at their disposal, and why are ministers able to move to a different ministry from one day to the next? Surely they can do so only because they’re surrounded by a professional staff that can supply technical expertise.”

Part IV: Remedies; Timely appeal for a bi-representative system

“Would it really be a good idea to have them all queue up at polling stations every four or five years with a bit of card in their hands and go into a dark booth to put a mark, not next to ideas but next to names on a list, names of people about whom restless reporting had been going on for months in a commercial environment that profits from restlessness? Would we still have the nerve to call what is in fact bizarre, archaic ritual a ‘festival of democracy’?”

Part II: Diagnoses; Its the fault of electoral-representative democracy: A new diagnosis

He summarized in his diagnosis, of four causes of Democratic Fatigue Syndrome

“.. it’s the fault of the politicians, it’s the fault of democracy, it’s the fault of representative democracy, and - one specific variant- it’s the fault of electoral-representative democracy.”

-Part II: Diagnoses

Of course, outside of the third world of Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America, other forms of participative or deliberative democracy are being practiced and continuously tinkered. Referendums, petitions and local council selection are already a norm. But, how far actually are we giving importance to the ‘voices of the people’?

“In more and more countries, anyone with reason to complain can go to an ombudsman, anyone who has an opinion can vote in a referendum from time to time and anyone who collects enough signatures can put an issue on the agenda as a citizen’s initiative. These are forms of participation that didn’t exist a few years ago, when a government would usually only enter into a dialogue with unions, councils, commissions and itself.

The new instruments are valuable, especially now that organised civil society has less of a say, but they still fall far short of what’s needed... (The ombudsman might be described as the government’s gardener,

sometimes chatting with the neighbours and listening to their concerns). New instruments certainly, but they still function as desperate ways of keeping citizen out. ”

- Conclusion

“Referendums and deliberative democracy are similar in the sense that they turn directly to the ordinary citizen to ask his or her opinion, but other than that, they are completely at odds with each other. In a referendum, you ask everyone to vote on a subject that usually only a few know anything about, whereas in a deliberative project, you ask a representative sample of people to consider a subject about which they are given all possible information. A referendum very often reveals people’s gut reactions; deliberations reveal enlightened public opinion.”

When seeing the work of the Scottish Independence Referendum (and early Brexit referendum) first hand as one statistical science student, one can see how the way of referendum work, as was taught by the teacher (in bias-ness of surveys and referendum; see Scottish independence: Does the wording of the question matter? and FT article The tale of the Brexit referendum question).

One of the six causes of failure in democratic renewal process, the author said, is:

“Referendums about complex proposals for reform will perhaps always work to the advantage of the No camp -if you don’t know, say No! In the case of the European Constitution it was sufficient for opponents to sow doubt so the Yes camp had to work harder and put more effort into communicating.”

Here again, lies the crux of author argument. *“Citizen participation is not just a matter of being allowed to demonstrate, to strike, to sign petitions or to take part in other accepted forms of mobilisation in a public space. It needs to be institutionally embedded.”*

-Part IV: Remedies; The Revival of sortition: Deliberative democracy (late twentieth century)

This is because, in modern cases (i.e Occupy), they have fallen prey into their own making. The felt comfortable being as a ‘check-and-balance’ of democracy, celebrating a naive-democracy outside the hands of power.

“When Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek spoke to the Occupiers in New York, he asked them not to fall in love with themselves, but unfortunately that is exactly what happened ... Occupy demonstrates the malaise more than it suggests any remedy. Its diagnosis of representative democracy was correct, but the alternative was weak... But how that process might be extrapolated to echelons that can truly make a difference was unfortunately never explored. Stéphane Hessel, the French diplomat and former resistance hero whose pamphlet Indignez-vous gave a name to the Indignados, stressed repeatedly that indignation without engagement is not enough and that real attempts to influence government are needed: ‘We must not become engaged at the margins but at the heart of power’.”

-Part II: Diagnoses; Its the fault of representative democracy: The diagnosis of direct democracy

However, considering all author argument, I disagree with his proposal, at least for current domestic political context. He for one, proposed a form of democracy (Athenian democracy) with six organs (as said before, comprising of sortition, self-selection and sortition) which are realistically only viable in two (of the following three) conditions:

(i) the Athenian form of democracy was also challenged, by Plato himself (see the death of Socrates);

(ii) Secondly, one of six things which are suitable for his form of deliberative democracy, which one is *“In all cases, these were geographically small, urbanized states (the city state, the civic republic) where only a limited segment of the population could participate in government.”*. How possible is this with large states/countries? Further thought and read have to be done on this.

(iii) lastly, in European Union (which he explicitly said), where In Canada, Netherlands, Iceland and Ireland.

“they all had a temporary mandate and considerable government financing and they all concerned an extremely important subject: reform of electoral law or even constitution.” and they are encouraged to improve on its practice of democracy to become more inclusive.

As this was a very Euro-centric historical and political proposal (and the neglect of other historical form of democracy, for instance India's democracy in Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity*; also will have to read Hamid Dabashi's *Can Non-Europeans Think?*), I am just in a dilemma of how, for example, in a third world country, if one (NGOs, civic bodies) wish to pursue this, are able to do it, when

(a) the current political coalition have been the authoritarian regime for decades, and people are unable to change them from time to time (in elections ballot, unlike in Europe); have thought of it as 'gods', the provider of foods and sustenance and are asked to be grateful; or otherwise ungrateful (as like the Pharaoh to its citizens described in the Quran);

(b) The state-apparatus, comprising of electoral commission with rife **gerrymandering** and **malapportionment**, in addition to of course, state-control mainstream media dictating the thought of the citizen, forever keeping those echelons in power;

makes one to wonder, is there such thing as this (deliberative democracy, where just and equal citizen can live) in this world?

Will have to definitely read:

Of the People, By the People: A New History of Democracy for other forms of democracy in history.

Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy for a more in-depth cover of practical deliberative democracy.

David Graeber's critique of Occupy in *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement*

And lastly, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*,

Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age; two books suggested by the author.

A good read overall.

6/10 (for now).

Ken-ichi says

Easily the most interesting book I've read in a year if not more, though you might chalk that up to my extremely naive view of politics and complete lack of education in political science.

Thumbnail, since this book didn't exactly get the NPR treatment: modern democracies are both failing to get stuff done and losing the faith of their constituencies; democracy does not require elections; Athenians were very suspicious of elections and structured their democracy around randomly chosen groups of people like modern juries (a process called sortition or allotment); modern American and French governments were designed to be aristocratic; modern democracies should incorporate sortition at all levels of government to restore trust and get more done.

Reybrouck's initial framing is useful: "every political system has to achieve balance between two

fundamental criteria, efficiency and legitimacy" (p. 5). Authoritarian governments are really efficient: one person says "do something" and it gets done, simple. But they suffer from decreased legitimacy: why does this guy get to boss us around? Usually efficiency and legitimacy and inversely proportional: the more buy-in you get from a large group of people, the harder it is to make decisions and take action... something that should be obvious to anyone who's tried to go out to dinner with one person vs. 10 people.

Historically, electoral democracies try to achieve a balance. They're not perfectly legitimate, b/c there will always be minorities who lose out in elections, and they're not perfectly efficient b/c there must be deliberation among representatives, but usually they're sort of legitimate and they get enough stuff done. Reybrouck describes our current crisis as a failure of both legitimacy and efficiency, i.e. there's isn't a tradeoff anymore. Almost no American thinks our legislature represents us very well, and their ability to pass laws is pretty laughable at this point. Apparently we're not alone in this.

The history of democracy in Athens and Renaissance city states was super interesting too, though probably very selective. I would have liked to hear more about non-Western political structures, or really any other democratic forms than election, sortition, or consensus-based deliberation.

And then, of course, the idea of sortition! I'd honestly never considered juries as a way to make any kind of governmental decision, but I like the idea a lot (again, I am naive... and apparently not above punning). Simply removing the mania around elections would be a huge win. And the Bouricius model of a whole, multi-bodied form of government composed entirely of juries was super interesting.

One thing he didn't address was how to prevent established powers from influencing allotted bodies. In our current juries for criminal court cases, they make their judgements in private, theoretically isolated from corporate and/or political forces that might seek to influence them, but Reybrouck actually describes that privacy as a problem when the stakeholders include the entire citizenry, particularly in real-world examples from Canada where an allotted group had to reach a decision but their proposal had to be approved by referendum: voters had no insight into their deliberations so they voted with their guts (like we always do, hence the problem with voting). But if information must flow into and out of these bodies, what's to stop entrenched powers from influencing their decisions? Maybe they pay off a juror, or engage in single-person advertising (it's free speech!).

Another problem is there's no discussion of execution. If a bunch of allotted bodies check each other, how does the government guard against a rogue executive (something on all of our minds at present) and how are executives chosen? Theoretically executives need to be very efficient, which might argue for the kind of concentration of power we see in the American executive branch, but which leads to the problems with said power we're now experiencing (you could argue these problems extend back to Bush 2 (Iraq war) and run through Obama (tons of executive orders when legislature failed to act)). Can you solve that with sortition?

And, how random is random? What if you have to make a decision about abortion and all the randomly-chosen people are white Christian men? Some of the systems Reybrouck describes attempt to deal with this with cycles of election and sortition (randomly choose 500 people, vote to narrow that down to 100 people, randomly choose again, etc) but unfair outcomes always seem like a possibility.

All that being said, I thought this entire idea was fascinating and would love to see it enacted in private online communities, almost all of which are autocracies masquerading as oligarchies masquerading as ad-hoc democracies (this certainly describes the online social network I run, anyway). I think sortition could be useful without completely overturning the autocracy, though. What if Goodreads was still operated by the staff and owned by Amazon (the autocrats), but moderation decisions about appropriate behavior weren't made by professional moderation staff or volunteer users (oligarchs) but by councils of randomly-chosen Goodreads users? Or, slightly more radical, what if some parts of functionality were decided by allotted bodies like this? We often hear that AI is the tech-scale solution to these kinds of issues, but AI also suffers

from poor legitimacy. On the one hand it's supposed to be an impartial arbiter, but computer learning systems tend to be really biased by their training data... and people choose the training data, so again, the AI is sort of like a benevolent dictator controlled by a hidden oligarchy. Juries could be way more legitimate, and with the help of tech to form them and execute their decisions, perhaps almost as efficient. Anyway, something I've been thinking about a lot as moderation becomes an ever-greater issue on iNaturalist.

Also, many thanks to the staff of Green Apple Books in San Francisco. I'm sure I never would have read this if I hadn't seen it on the "staff picks" shelf.

Addenda

* This interview with Reybrouck in the Irish Times addresses by question about choosing an executive by lottery: "No, that seems crazy."

* Irish Times podcast with Reybrouck: <https://soundcloud.com/the-irish-time...>

* <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/d...> is the most considered critique I've read so far, and also raises the problem of entrenched interests and the legitimacy of allotted bodies. However, I think Fuller unfairly depicts Reybrouck as an elitist who "repeatedly suggests that most people are ignorant and that only in small deliberation groups advised by 'experts' can 'enlightened' opinion be had." I'd say Reybrouck thinks all people are equally ignorant about most things, including experts, who are only knowledgeable about their area of expertise, and we all need help to make considered decisions about subjects we don't know much about. I think the points about Athenian allotted bodies being too big to corrupt are interesting, though.

Simon Vandereecken says

"Sans une réforme drastique, ce système n'en a plus pour longtemps. Quand on voit la montée de l'abstentionnisme, la désertion des militants et le mépris qui frappe les politiciens, quand on voit la difficile gestation des gouvernements, leur manque d'efficacité et la dureté de la "correction" infligée par l'électeur à l'issue de leur mandat, quand on voit la rapidité du succès du populisme, de la technocratie et de l'antiparlementarisme, quand on voit le nombre croissant de citoyens qui aspirent à plus de participation, et la vitesse à laquelle cette aspiration peut se muer en frustration, on se dit : il est moins une. Notre temps est compté."

A l'heure où nos démocraties vont de plus en plus mal, cet ouvrage est un des premiers que je découvre qui ose remettre profondément en question notre système, ses problèmes, les défis qui s'annoncent et qui s'attache justement à proposer des solutions novatrices porteuses d'espoir. Quand une portion de plus en plus importante d'électeurs se désintéresse totalement de la politique (où n'y accorde plus aucune confiance), et où la peur domine tous les débats (par le détachement de plus en plus important entre gouvernants et gouvernés), la proposition de David Van Reybrouck de "redémocratiser la démocratie" apparaît bien plus que sensée, plausible et pouvant fonctionner. Une énorme bouffée d'espoir que j'espère voir mise en place rapidement, pour notre bien à tous.

Tycho Van Hauwaert says

Iedereen in onze samenleving merkt het wel op één of andere manier. Politici zijn niet meer democratisch bezig en vertegenwoordigen het volk minder en minder. De burger komt niet meer aan te pas, ideeën van de

burgers worden matig tot weinig geapprecieerd, maar ondertussen springen burgerbewegingen als paddenstoelen uit de grond. Politici zien democratie als het hoogste goed, maar is dat anno 2018 nog wel zo?

David Van Reybrouck ziet ook veel problemen en schrijft in zijn essay "Tegen verkiezingen" alternatieven voor een democratie. Tegenwoordig is de opkomst van kiezers bij verkiezingen magerder, je kan bovendien niet rechtstreeks kiezen wie je zal vertegenwoordigen, maar volgens politici is er geen enkel probleem. Van Reybrouck onderzocht dit in een klein boekje en overtuigt ons van meer burgerparticipatie en een (gedeeltelijk) parlement volgens loting. Voor mensen die dit wegzetten als een utopie, foei!, Dit bestond vroeger al bij de Oude Grieken. Interessante opinie en klaar om in praktijk gebracht te worden!

Vikas Datta says

Eloquently and persuasively argued... worth serious consideration

Jurjen Van says

Eens in de vijf a tien jaar lees je een boek dat kan bevrijden. 'Tegen verkiezingen' is zo'n boek. David van Reybrouck's stelling is zo logisch en helder dat het je doet verwonderen waarom je zo iets niet veel eerder gehoord hebt. Ons huidige democratische bestel verliest aan legitimiteit en effectiviteit. Nog nooit waren er zoveel mensen politiek geïnteresseerd, op allerlei fora tonen mensen zich betrokken in steeds heftigere en emotionele taal, maar tegelijk ook zo sterk teleurgesteld in de politiek: het aantal leden van politieke partijen is nog nooit zo laag geweest, nog nooit gingen zo weinig mensen stemmen, regeringsdeelname werd nog nooit zo sterk electoraal bestraft, en kiezers lopen van de ene dag op de andere massaal over naar een andere partij. Een gevaarlijke combinatie. Maar dat wisten we al een beetje. 'We zijn onze democratie kapot aan het maken door haar te beperken tot verkiezingen, en dat terwijl verkiezingen nooit als democratisch instrument zijn bedacht', vat van Reybrouck het eerste deel van zijn boek samen. Prikkelend en buitengewoon interessant. De oplossing ziet van Reybrouck, samen met een aantal bestuurlijke denkers, ligt in de vorm die in het oude Griekenland werd uitgevonden: loting. In het besluitende hoofdstuk wordt het concrete voorstel van Bouricius, een gewezen vertegenwoordiger uit Amerika uitgelegd. Kern van het idee is dat mensen uit alle lagen van de bevolking zich kandidaat kunnen stellen om deel te nemen in de besluitvorming, maar gekozen worden, niet door kiezers, maar door het lot. Deze vertegenwoordigers worden, onder leiding van experts over het betreffende onderwerp, geloot onder alle lagen van de bevolking. Deze vertegenwoordigers kunnen hun besluiten baseren op alle belangen die er spelen onder hen. Zij hoeven zich niet druk te maken over impopulaire keuzes, hun termijn zit er na een aantal jaar gewoon op. Zo kunnen besluiten een stuk efficiënter gemaakt worden en zijn tegelijk legitiem.

Dit is niet een aanrader. Deze verandering is essentieel om onze democratie werkzaam te houden en tegelijk onze vrijheid te behouden.

Jacopo says

Nos démocraties électorales par représentation sont en bout de course. Les citoyens veulent se réapproprier une partie du pouvoir de décision qu'ils ont pour l'instant l'habitude de déléguer... une solution serait qu'une partie des décideurs soient tirés au sort ! Si au début l'idée semble saugrenue, elle est en réalité d'une innovation positive fracassante. #mustread #politics

Lazaros Karavasilis says

Κλασσικ? βιβλ?ο 'α γ?νεται κ?τι αυτ? τη στιγμ? στο κ?σμο. Κ?τσε να μ?σω 10 βιβλ?α για πρ?γματα που δεν ?χω ιδ?α να τα β?λω στο μπλ?ντερ και να γ?νω μεγ?λος ινφλουενσερ. Θα με καλο?ν και σε TEDx'. 1 αστερ?κι για κ?ποια καλ? points σχετικ? με τη δημοκρατ?α π?ρα απ? την αντιπροσωπευτικ? της μορφ?. Τ?ποτα ?λλο. Δι?βασε φ?λε, κ?νε ?ρευνα, ναι θα π?ρει χρ?νο, αλλ? στο τ?λος ε?τε καλ? ε?τε κακ? θα ?χεις κ?τι αξιοσ?βαστο. Με το να μας λες για δημοκρατ?ες στις Αμερικ?ς και πως εξελ?γη ο Περικλ?ς δεν προσφ?ρεις κ?τι. Μας τα παν και ?λλοι αυτ?. Πρ?πει να σταματ?σω να σπαταλ?ω το χρ?νο μου με τ?τοια βιβλ?α.
