

## II. PRZEGLĄD PIŚMIENICTWA

Maurice Pope, *The Keys to Democracy: Sortition as a New Model for Citizen Power*, Imprint Academic, 2023, pp. 232.<sup>1</sup>

Comprising a preface, twelve chapters, and two appendices, the book *The Keys to Democracy: Sortition as a New Model for Citizen Power* by Maurice Pope, begins with a foreword written by Hélène Landemore and an introduction by Paul Cartledge. The individual chapters cover a wide range of issues, including an attempt to reconstruct a definition of democracy, a critique of representative democracy, a justification of the need for greater citizen participation, a characterization of public opinion polls, an explanation of the idea of juries, a description of ancient and medieval sortition practices, and a range of ideas about how these past experiences could change the contemporary face of democracy. However, the author's most significant proposal is a 'new' model of governance that involves replacing elected politicians with randomly selected assemblies ('panels').

This proposal is worth special attention, primarily because it was developed three decades ago, although Pope's book only saw the light of day in 2023! Even back then, Pope believed that reintroducing sortition offered a way out of gridlock, apathy, alienation, and polarization by giving citizens their voice back. It is difficult to imagine today that this forward-thinking book by a prominent professor was waiting somewhere on a publisher's shelf, with nobody willing to bring it to print. Interestingly, the book was published after the death of its author, Maurice Pope, who was a British linguist, a classicist, and one of the leading researchers of Cretan script Linear A. In addition to linguistics, Pope was also interested in archaeology, which is reflected in his book. He studied at Cambridge University, worked at the University of Cape Town – where he also served as Dean of the Faculty of Humanities – and later held a position at Oxford University.

*The Keys to Democracy*, although conceived thirty years ago, remains remarkably timely. And today, more than ever, it fits perfectly with contemporary political realities. The book contributes meaningfully to the ongoing global debate on possible ways to renew democracy, which is undeniably in crisis. Modern representative democracy is being undermined by negative phenomena such as corruption, clientelism, rule by closed circles of elites, ruthless power struggles, human rights violations, misappropriation of the principle of free media, manipulation of information, and buying the public with ineffective social projects. These trends do not bode well and suggest we are on a trajectory towards disaster, as seen in many countries around the world. Many are on a direct path to autocracy, despite continuing to hold so-called 'democratic' elections (Del Real & Menjivar 2024; Forgas & Lantos 2021; Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018). This provides evidence that systemic changes within the institution of elections are needed. I believe we can all agree that something must be done about it, even if we differ on what exactly that should be.

The book addresses this question by employing the arguments of deliberative democracy advocates (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Curato et al., 2021). It fits perfectly into the body of research on random selection and its possible applications in politics and decision-making processes (Landemore et al., 2018; Landemore & Bellamy 2011; Landemore & Bellamy 2014; Landemore & Bellamy 2016; Landemore & Bellamy 2018; Landemore & Bellamy 2020; Landemore & Bellamy 2022; Landemore & Bellamy 2023; Landemore & Bellamy 2024; Landemore & Bellamy 2025; Landemore & Bellamy 2026; Landemore & Bellamy 2027; Landemore & Bellamy 2028; Landemore & Bellamy 2029; Landemore & Bellamy 2030).

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<sup>1</sup> The review was presented, in a slightly different form, at the Political Studies Association of Ireland Annual Conference 2023, Queen's University Belfast, during the Roundtable: *Author Meets Critics: The Keys to Democracy* on 18–20 October 2023.

more, 2020; Podgórska-Rykała, 2025; Sintomer, 2023). Pope's contribution focuses primarily on providing historical evidence and philosophical arguments for the broader application of randomization. However, the author does not stop there; he proposes an innovative yet highly concrete governance model. For Pope is both a utopian and a realist. This masterful balancing act between the idea and its practical incarnations is a very strong point of his concept and sets it apart from other similar books.

What specifically does Pope propose? Referring to ancient democratic practices, he postulates that the key to democracy lies in the lottery. He argues that those who place their faith in electoral law are sorely mistaken. In his view, random selection based on statistical representation is sufficiently advanced that it can be used successfully on a large scale (p. 175). Pope goes further, proposing that randomization could also be used extensively outside the realm of politics: in universities, the judiciary, and even in sports (pp. 166–171). He also reflects very consciously on the technical possibilities of his time, proposing television as a medium – an idea that was forward-thinking when he wrote this book 30 years ago. It is, however, an amazing experience to juxtapose these proposals with the knowledge we have today.

Pope was well aware of both the possibilities and limitations associated with the proposed model. He presented his idea lucidly, referring to substantial evidence and evoking images that engage the imagination. As a result, his narrative draws you in, and the vision of such a democracy encourages you to reach for more. Pope's idea of describing the fictional situation of the post-disaster world is particularly effective. We move with the author to another reality and begin to feel like members of this surviving community. Its members are faced with the task of power-sharing and wonder whether sortition could be a good idea to distribute it fairly. As we follow their journey, we find ourselves asking: *What would I do in such a situation? What decision would I make? Which solution would I support?* It is an incredibly interesting experience because it is further proof – perhaps this was intended, perhaps not – that all of us, whatever our expert credentials, have the right and, above all, the desire to have a voice in shaping society. After all, who among us would not want to be the president of ancient Athens, even if only for 24 hours? As Pope (p. 39) argued, citing the fable of Protagoras, while a single doctor may suffice to heal an entire community of non-doctors, the management of public affairs cannot simply be entrusted to experts.

Despite the passage of years, Pope's narrative and arguments remain highly relevant – perhaps even more so than ever. Central to his analysis is the assumption that the existence of a ruling (included) class determines the existence of a non-ruling (excluded) class (p. 26). This obvious fact contradicts the very essence of democracy, but somehow democrats generally try to pretend they do not see the problem. In this context, Pope's claim that participation is a democratic approach to life (p. 37) takes on fundamental importance. Participation as an idea is noble and inspiring, but when we come down to its concrete manifestations – problems begin. After all, people are generally ill-informed, reluctant to hold views that deviate from the general climate of public opinion. Opinions, on the other hand, change very quickly, and a day is too short for everyone to participate in everything (pp. 68–69, 70). To this must be added the pervasive problem of conflict of interest. No, the recipe for effective, reasonable, and fair participation is not easy. This makes it all the more important to appreciate the not-inconsiderable contribution of Pope – a linguist and specialist in classical studies and antiquity, who also shows a keen interest in archaeology – to this debate as a non-political scientist. This is significant because it demonstrates the importance of blending scientific disciplines and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of social reality and democracy.

What appealed to me most in Pope's narrative is the thesis expressed in Chapter 9: that innovation cannot be initiated by experts because, by definition, innovation is something new. An expert, by definition, is experienced in something, and that gives him or her the right to be called an expert. So, can we truly be 'innovation experts'? This question gave me pause for thought. Experts know about what is already known, but they do not know about what is new. Therefore, experts can be wrong. Moreover, there are issues where expert knowledge is not the basis for decision-making, but rather values or subjective priorities. In such cases, there are no universally 'right' solutions; there are only solutions chosen by certain people. This is often the case in politics. Then there is also no 'right' court; the only court can be society as a whole.

Not only in antiquity but also in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, random selection methods were relied upon in politics. However, these concepts were eventually discarded and never seriously revisited thereafter. Yet, the lack of historical continuity of institutions derived from randomization does not preclude the success of this project today. What Pope called the 'panel' has taken root in both Anglo-Saxon countries and Continental Europe as various forms of democratic innovations. Citizens' assemblies are active in many countries and are developing dynamically, with the idea becoming increasingly adapted to changing contexts (Reuchamps et al., 2023; Setälä 2017; Fishkin, 1996, 1997; 2009; Smith, 2009, 2024; Warren, 2009; Farrell et al., 2019; Escobar & Elstub, 2017; Curato et al. 2021; Podgórska-Rykała, 2020, 2024; Podgórska-Rykała & Pospieszna, 2024). Random selection methods are being improved by scientists from various scientific disciplines, who are working together to provide better and fairer algorithms. Politicians are slowly recognizing that institutions derived from random selection can make important contributions to public policy. Ordinary citizens are both willing and able to deliberate (Fung, 2003, p. 361). Today, it is already possible to speak of more than two thousand realized democratic innovations worldwide, including approximately eight hundred deliberative processes (Paulis et al. 2020; OECD, 2020; Curato et al., 2021). Citing this data, the OECD (2020) even refers to a 'deliberative wave'. Maurice Pope would be surely be pleased to appear in our reality for a moment and catch a glimpse of what is happening today in the area he studied so passionately.

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