MO-03 Permanent citizens' assemblies and the follow-through problem

Introduction and Institutional Taxonomy

Deliberative democracy through sortition rests on the foundational claim that an assembly of randomly selected citizens, stratified across key socio-demographic axes, can approximate the counterfactual: what the public would think, prioritize, and decide if everyone possessed adequate time, balanced information, and structured spaces for civil deliberation[1]. Over the past three decades, hundreds of ad hoc mini-publics have convened worldwide. Yet across political systems, sortition bodies face a structural bottleneck termed the follow-through problem[3]. While mini-publics demonstrate high internal epistemic quality and interpersonal depolarization among their participants, their output—typically non-binding recommendations—regularly dissolves upon contact with electoral politics, bureaucratic inertia, and legislative gatekeeping[5].

Elected politicians frequently commission ad hoc citizens' assemblies as mechanisms of blame avoidance on politically toxic questions, as instruments to manufacture artificial public consensus for pre-ordained agendas, or as performative substitutes for substantive action[1]. Once recommendations are drafted, legacy institutions filter, dilute, or quietly shelve them without electoral penalty[6]. In response, constitutional designers and democratic theorists have sought to institutionalize sortition by embedding permanent or quasi-permanent bodies directly into the machinery of government[9].

Structural Type	Core Institutional Mechanism	Primary Historical and Contemporary Examples	Standing Agenda-Setting Authority	Legal Mandate and Policy Output
Permanent Dual-Tier Sortition Architecture	Standing agenda-setting citizens' council directing cyclical topical citizens' assemblies	Ostbelgien *Permanenter Bürgerdialog* (Bürgerrat and Bürgerversammlungen, 2019–present)[1][2]	Exclusive citizen council control over topics via civic petitions and legislative queries[12]	Mandatory parliamentary committee hearings, statutory duty of written justification (*Stellungnahme*), and one-year implementation audit[12]

Permanent Municipal Sortition Assembly	Standing municipal mini-public embedded in city council with direct right of legislative initiative	*Assemblée citoyenne de Paris* (2021–present); *Bürgerrat für Aachen* (2022–present)[15]	Hybrid: citizen workshops, signature petitions (e.g., 125 signatures in Aachen), and council referrals[15]	Advisory; statutory right to submit formal resolutions (*vœux*) directly to the municipal plenary for debate and vote[15]
Joint Mixed Parliamentary Committees	Parity or proportional co-deliberation of randomly selected citizens and sitting MPs	Brussels Deliberative Committees (*Commissions délibératives*, 2019–present)[18]	Joint: public petitions (1,000 signatures) or parliamentary bureau initiatives[5]	Consultative citizen vote via secret ballot; public roll-call MP vote; mandatory committee review within six months[18]
Mandatory Constitutional Deliberative Polling	Legally or constitutionally mandated sortition polling required prior to legislative votes	Mongolia (*Law on Deliberative Polling*, 2017; 2019 and 2023 constitutional amendments)[20]	Screened by independent Deliberative Council, but heavily steered by executive and parliamentary leadership[22]	Mandatory procedural condition precedent for constitutional amendments and municipal master plans[20]
Itinerant Sub-District Assemblies	Mobile, rotating deliberative sessions across municipal localities linked to district planning	Bogotá *Asamblea Itinerante Consultiva Ciudadana* (2020–2022)[24]	Executive-driven local development themes set by the mayoral administration[24]	Consultative recommendations submitted to the *Concejo de Bogotá* and district agencies; no statutory linkage[25]

One-Off National Conventions (Referendum-Coupled)	Ad hoc national assemblies coupled directly to mandatory constitutional referendums	Ireland (Convention on the Constitution 2012–14; Citizens' Assembly 2016–18)[1]	Prescribed by parliamentary resolution; narrow independent latitude[1]	Binding popular ratification via universal franchise ballot (Marriage Equality 2015, Abortion 2018)[1]
One-Off National Conventions (Pledge-Coupled)	Ad hoc national assemblies operating under an executive pledge of unmediated legislative transfer	France (*Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat*, 2019–2020)[27]	Executive framing (reduce greenhouse gases by 40% in social justice)[27]	Political pledge (*"sans filtre"*) systematically broken; extensive dilution in resulting *Loi Climat* (2021)[27]
One-Off National Parliamentary Mini-Publics	Ad hoc mini-publics directly commissioned by national parliament to advise legislative committees	Germany (*Bürgerrat Ernährung im Wandel*, 2023–2024); Scotland (2019–2021)[28]	Rigidly defined by the parliamentary commissioning decree[29]	Advisory *Bürgergutachten* referred to standing committees; non-binding; vulnerable to government collapse[28]

Permanent institutionalization attempts to bypass the follow-through bottleneck by replacing ad hoc political mandates with standing procedural hooks, continuous secretariats, legal duties of parliamentary response, and rolling member rotations[12]. However, institutional permanence introduces distinct systemic failure modes: bureaucratic capture, administrative steering, systemic decoupling from mass public awareness, and elite co-optation[7].

Comparative Architecture: Permanent and Quasi-Permanent Sortition Bodies

Ostbelgien: Bürgerrat and Bürgerversammlungen (2019–Present)

On 25 February 2019, the Parliament of the German-speaking Community of Belgium

(Ostbelgien, encompassing approximately 78,000 residents across nine municipalities) passed a decree establishing the *Permanenter Bürgerdialog* (Permanent Citizens' Dialogue)[12]. Designed by an international working group of sortition theorists and local parliamentarians convened by the G1000 foundation, Ostbelgien established the world's first permanent, legally entrenched sortition architecture with standing agenda-setting power[12].

The system bifurcates the deliberative cycle into two separate organs to prevent the monopolization of power[12]:

- **The Bürgerrat (Citizens' Council):** A standing steering body of 24 members serving 18-month rolling terms[12]. Every six months, one-third of the council (eight members) rotates off and is replaced[12]. To balance institutional continuity with fresh perspective, the council draws twelve members from citizens who completed a previous Bürgerversammlung and twelve members from the general population registry via stratified random selection[12]. The Bürgerrat holds the exclusive legal prerogative to determine the policy topics submitted to the deliberative assemblies[12]. It sources topics from public petitions (requiring a threshold of 100 signatures), parliamentary party requests, or its own internal deliberations[12].
- **The Bürgerversammlungen (Citizens' Assemblies):** Ad hoc deliberative assemblies of 25 to 50 citizens drawn by stratified random selection to deliberate on the specific mandate framed by the Bürgerrat[12]. These assemblies convene over three intensive weekends (typically 35 to 45 hours of structured deliberation) supported by professional neutral facilitators and independent academic experts[12].
- **Linkage and Follow-Through Mechanism:** The decree establishes strict procedural obligations[12]. Once an assembly adopts its final recommendations, the Parliamentary Bureau must refer them to the competent standing legislative committee[12]. Within six weeks, the committee must hold a public hearing with assembly delegates and the competent minister[12]. The committee is legally mandated to draft a formal justification (*Stellungnahme*) detailing which recommendations will be enacted, which will be modified, and which will be rejected, with explicit rationales required for any rejection[12]. Exactly one year later, a second public hearing must take place to audit the practical state of implementation[12].

Between 2019 and 2024, seven assemblies addressed core regional competencies: healthcare and eldercare working conditions (2019–2020), inclusive education (2020–2021), affordable housing (2021–2022), digital public services (2022–2023), and senior citizen social integration (2023–2024)[35]. While procedural compliance by the Ostbelgien Parliament has reached 100%, empirical evaluations by Christoph Niessen, Min Reuchamps, Hadrien Macq, and Vincent Jacquet demonstrate that substantive legislative translation is highly uneven[7]. Most accepted recommendations consist of soft administrative actions, public awareness campaigns, or incremental adjustments to existing ministerial budgets, whereas radical systemic overhauls proposed by citizens were consistently filtered out during committee deliberations[4].

Assemblée Citoyenne de Paris (2021–Present)

On 14 October 2021, the Council of Paris established the *Assemblée citoyenne de Paris*,

making the French capital the first global metropolis to institutionalize a permanent sortition chamber[15]. The body consists of 100 Parisian residents selected via a two-stage civic lottery stratified by borough (*arrondissement*), gender, age, and socio-economic category[15]. Members serve for a multi-year mandate, with the inaugural promotion serving from November 2021 to March 2023[16].

The Paris architecture divides the 100 citizens into three standing thematic workshops: social affairs and education, ecological transition, and public space[16]. The assembly possesses three formal mechanisms of institutional agency:

1. **Direct Right of Initiative (*Vœux*):** The assembly can draft and directly submit up to three formal resolutions (*vœux*) per year to the municipal plenary (the *Conseil de Paris*), which must be debated and voted on by elected city councillors alongside mayoral ordinances[15].
2. **Citizen Juries (*Jurys citoyens*):** The assembly can convene dedicated sortition juries of 17 to 25 citizens to conduct deep-dive inquiries into specific municipal policies[15].
3. **Audit and Accountability (*Droit de suite*):** The city executive is legally bound to provide an annual accounting of implementation progress regarding every accepted recommendation[16].

In March 2023, the first promotion concluded its cycle by submitting three *vœux* to the Conseil de Paris: an update to the municipal reading and literacy plan (*Plan Paris Lecture*), a framework to streamline thermal renovation subsidies for multi-family residential buildings, and the drafting of a Parisian Street Code (*Code de la rue*) to regulate micro-mobility and pedestrian safety[16]. All three were formally adopted by the elected council[16]. In April 2024, the city published its first formal *droit de suite* progress evaluation, demonstrating that while the Street Code was enacted as municipal regulation in late 2023, the thermal renovation program stalled within the municipal bureaucracy due to severe budgetary constraints and divided administrative jurisdiction between the city and the regional prefecture[16].

Brussels Deliberative Committees (2019–Present)

Adopted by regulatory amendment on 13 November 2019, the Parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region and the French-speaking Parliament of Brussels (*Parlement francophone bruxellois* - Cocof) created *Commissions délibératives* (Deliberative Committees)[18]. Unlike Ostbelgien's separation of citizens and politicians, Brussels established a permanent *mixed* design[8]:

- **Composition:** Each deliberative committee consists of 60 members: 45 randomly selected citizens and 15 elected members of parliament (a 3:1 citizen-to-politician ratio)[8].
- **Trigger and Agenda:** A committee can be triggered either by a direct citizen petition (gathering 1,000 valid signatures from Brussels residents aged 16 and over) or by a parliamentary bureau decision[5].
- **Three-Phase Process:** Deliberations occur across three phases: (1) a public information phase featuring balanced expert testimony; (2) a closed-door, small-group deliberative phase where citizens and MPs interact in facilitated working groups without cameras; and (3) a plenary debate with public voting[18].

- **The Constitutional Voting Asymmetry:** Because Article 33 and Article 42 of the Belgian Constitution prohibit delegating legislative sovereignty to unelected bodies, citizen votes are formally consultative, cast via secret ballot to prevent peer intimidation[18]. Elected MPs vote openly[18]. A recommendation is formally adopted only if it secures an absolute majority among the voting MPs, though the secret citizen tally is published alongside the parliamentary vote to create public accountability[18].
- **Follow-Through Rule:** The competent standing committee must review the recommendations within six months and issue an implementation report, followed by an annual audit hearing[8].

Committees have tackled controversial regional mandates, including the rollout of 5G telecommunications infrastructure, mobile home regulation, public space greening, and citizen training for digital public services. However, independent assessments by Julien Vrydagh, Min Reuchamps, and Vincent Jacquet reveal that while MPs frequently praise the deliberative atmosphere in closed sessions, parliamentary voting lines largely track pre-existing ruling coalition discipline, with MPs rejecting or defanging citizen recommendations that cross party-coalition agreements[8].

Milan: Assemblea Permanente dei Cittadini per il Clima (2022–Present)

By City Council Resolution No. 4 on 21 February 2022, Milan instituted the *Assemblea Permanente dei Cittadini per il Clima* (Permanent Citizens' Assembly on Climate) as an institutional pillar of its Air and Climate Plan (*Piano Aria e Clima*)[40].

- **Composition and Cadence:** Composed of 90 citizens drawn by civic lottery, stratified by age, gender, educational attainment, and municipal district (*Municipio*)[42]. The assembly convenes monthly from January through October of each operational year[44].
- **Remuneration Pathology:** Unlike Ostbelgien or Paris, the Milan municipal regulation explicitly prohibits remunerating citizens for their time, defining participation as civic volunteerism[42]. This structural choice produced severe sample attrition: civic lottery response rates dropped below 3%, skewing the final cohort heavily toward retired professionals, university students, and individuals with independent economic security, undermining descriptive representation[42].
- **Decision Rule and Policy Linkage:** Proposals must attain a two-thirds qualified majority to be incorporated into the annual report submitted to the City Council (*Consiglio Comunale*) and the Mayor[43]. The municipal executive is bound by regulation to issue a formal written reply (*Dossier di Risposta*) indicating acceptance, modification, or rejection[43].
- **Substantive Fate:** In its 2023–2024 cycles, the Milan assembly formulated aggressive recommendations regarding low-emission mobility zones (Area B and Area C expansions), pedestrianization around public schools, and photovoltaic retrofit mandates. While the Giunta Comunale formally accepted over 60% of recommendations in principle, independent monitoring by ActionAid Italy and the Italian Citizen Assembly Observatory documented that municipal implementation was delayed by legal

challenges from commercial transport associations and municipal administrative deadlock[43].

Aachen: Bürgerrat für Aachen (2022–Present)

On 30 March 2022, the City Council of Aachen became the first German municipality to formally embed a permanent citizens' assembly into its municipal code, directly inspired by the cross-border Ostbelgien model[15].

- **Scale and Selection:** Composed of 56 randomly selected residents aged 16 and over, drawn via a two-stage civic lottery (initial random draw from the population register followed by stratified balancing)[15].
- **Agenda-Setting Dynamics:** The agenda is open to civic initiation: any resident can propose a topic, provided it gathers at least 125 supporting signatures[15]. Alternatively, the city council, the municipal administration, or the outgoing assembly may table topics[15]. In its 2023 inaugural call, 58 proposals were submitted, with 17 clearing the 125-signature hurdle[15]. The Council selected the reallocation and management of public street space as its inaugural remit (*Straßenraum fair teilen*)[15].
- **Follow-Through Mechanism:** The assembly delivers a *Bürgergutachten* (Citizens' Report) to the City Council, which retains ultimate decision-making power[15]. If the Council approves the report, the administration is legally mandated to execute the measures[17]. However, lacking a dedicated independent oversight committee, tracking rests with the municipal citizen participation office, leading to protracted delays between deliberative outputs and council votes[17].

Bogotá: Asamblea Itinerante Consultiva Ciudadana (2020–2022)

Under the administration of Mayor Claudia López and institutionalized through regulatory proposals amending Agreement 741 of 2019 in the *Concejo de Bogotá*, the city established the *Asamblea Itinerante Consultiva Ciudadana*[24].

- **Spatial and Structural Design:** Rather than gathering a single fixed mini-public in the city center, Bogotá designed a mobile, itinerant deliberative model administered by the District Institute for Community Participation and Action (IDPAC)[24]. Sortition-drawn citizens gathered sequentially across the capital's 20 localities (including heavily marginalized localities such as Ciudad Bolívar, Bosa, Kennedy, and Suba)[24].
- **Mandate and Deficit:** The assemblies deliberated on local participatory budgets, post-pandemic economic recovery, and territorial development plans (*Planes de Desarrollo Local*)[24]. However, the institutional link between the itinerant mini-publics and the polarized *Concejo de Bogotá* remained structurally decoupled[25]. The assemblies operated purely as consultative instruments for the mayoral executive; lacking formal legislative referral hooks or mandatory response requirements, council members largely dismissed the assemblies' outputs as executive public-relations exercises[25].

Mongolia: Institutionalized Deliberative Polling (2017 Law & 2019/2023 Constitutional Reform)

Mongolia represents a globally unique constitutional configuration: it is the only sovereign state

to legally mandate deliberative sortition as a statutory prerequisite for amending its national constitution[20].

- **The 2017 Legal Framework:** Following a successful municipal Deliberative Poll in Ulaanbaatar in December 2015 (317 participants rating 14 infrastructure projects, which were enacted into binding city plans by Resolution 174 of 2016)[22], Parliament member Gombojavyn Zandanshatar (a former Stanford visiting scholar working with James Fishkin) spearheaded national legislation[22]. On 9 February 2017, the *State Great Khural* (Mongolian Parliament) passed the **Law on Deliberative Polling**, accompanied by amendments to the Law on Constitutional Amendment Procedures[22]. The statute dictates that prior to any legislative second reading of a constitutional amendment bill, a nationwide Deliberative Poll consisting of a stratified random sample of the citizenry must be convened[22].
- **Institutional Architecture:** The law requires an independent eight-member Deliberative Council, drawn from academia, civil society, and research institutions, to oversee briefing documents, framing, and expert panels[22]. Sampling and execution must be performed by the independent National Statistics Office (NSO) using standardized scientific polling methodologies[22].
- **The 2017 Poll and the 2019 Amendments:** In April 2017, the first national constitutional poll convened 669 citizens at the State Palace in Ulaanbaatar (an 85% response rate among the 785 invited participants, drawn from across all 21 *aimags* and the capital)[2]. The deliberative results fundamentally shifted policy: participants rejected presidential system centralization and supported strengthening parliamentary checks, cabinet autonomy, and judicial independence[2]. In November 2019, the State Great Khural formally passed comprehensive constitutional amendments directly incorporating these findings: establishing a single non-renewable six-year presidential term, capping dual MP-minister mandates ("one-third rule"), and isolating the judiciary from political appointments[21].
- **The 2023 National Poll and Elite Instrumentalization:** In December 2022, massive public protests erupted in Ulaanbaatar following an explosive multi-billion-dollar coal-theft corruption scandal implicating state-owned mining entities and parliamentary elites[52]. To channel public fury and break parliamentary gridlock, the State Great Khural issued Resolution No. 80 on 22 December 2022, ordering an immediate national Deliberative Poll titled "Deliberate and Resolve" (*Let's Deliberate and Decide*) held on 14–15 February 2023[23]. 801 citizens deliberated at the State Palace across six themes: parliamentary democracy, electoral system design, state decentralization, sovereign wealth funds, economy, and citizen rights[53].
- **The 2023 Weakening and Circumvention:** Political science analyses revealed that while the 2017/2019 process was driven by consensus-building, the 2023 poll was rapidly instrumentalized by ruling Mongolian People's Party (MPP) elites to legitimize pre-packaged structural changes that protected incumbent power[22]. The parliamentary leadership framed the poll around expanding the legislature and introducing proportional representation[21]. Following the poll, on 31 May 2023, Parliament enacted the third major

constitutional amendment: expanding the State Great Khural from 76 to 126 members and adopting a mixed electoral system (78 majoritarian constituency seats, 48 proportional party-list seats) with mandatory female candidate quotas[21]. Critics pointed out that while this satisfied technical PR requirements, the process bypassed deeply demanded civic inquiries into state-mining corruption, demonstrating how a legally mandated deliberative mechanism can be deployed as an elite defusal valve during institutional crises[22].

Comparative Design Matrix: Permanent and Quasi-Permanent Sortition

Metric / Dimension	Ostbelgien Bürgerrat & Versammlungen	Paris Assemblée Citoyenne	Brussels Deliberative Committees	Milan Assemblea per il Clima	Aachen Bürgerrat	Mongolia Deliberative Polling
Legal Basis	Regional Parliamentary Decree (Feb 2019)[12]	Municipal Council Decree (Oct 2021)[15]	Regional Parliamentary Rules Modification (Nov 2019)[18]	Municipal Council Resolution No. 4 (Feb 2022)[40]	Municipal Council Decree (March 2022)[15]	National Law on Deliberative Polling (Feb 2017)[22]
Membership Size	Bürgerrat: 24; Assemblies: 25–50[12]	100 residents[16]	45 citizens + 15 Members of Parliament (60 total)[8]	90 residents[42]	56 residents[15]	650 to 800+ citizens (stratified national draw)[2]
Recruitment Method	Stratified random selection from municipal registers[12]	Two-stage civic lottery stratified by borough, age,	Civic lottery from regional register stratified by	Random sample from municipal registry (demographic	Civic lottery from municipal population register[15]	Multi-stage stratified national random sampling by NSO[22]

		gender, SES[15]	socio-demographics[18]	quotas)[42]		
Participant Remuneration	Daily attendance stipend (~€75/session) plus child- and eldercare[12]	Modest session attendance stipend[15]	Standard daily attendance compensation[18]	**Zero remuneration** (civic volunteerism by regulation)[42]	Standard municipal attendance allowance[17]	Travel, accommodation, meals, and per-diem allowance[2]
Duration & Tenure	Council: 18 months rolling; Assembly: 3 weekends[12]	Standing multi-year cohort (first promo: 18 months)[16]	Recurring standing commissions; 3 plenary phases per topic[18]	Standing annual cycle (monthly sessions, Jan–Oct)[44]	Annual cycle; assembly deliberates over 4–6 weekends[17]	2-day intensive national gathering following field pre-surveys[2]
Agenda-Setting Power	Sovereign citizens' council; public petition hook (100 signatures)[12]	Assembly workshops draft own topics; submits *vœux* [cite: 15, 16]	Joint: public petitions (1,000 signatures) or MP Bureau[5]	Constrained by executive Air and Climate Plan[42]	Mixed: civic petitions (125 signatures) or Council referral[15]	Executive and parliamentary leadership set poll framing[22]
Legal / Binding Force	Procedural mandate: mandatory debate, written justification[12]	Procedural: Council must debate/vote on *vœux*; *droit de*	Procedural: mandatory committee debate and response	Advisory: formal executive reply (*Dossier di Risposta*)[43]	Advisory: Council votes to direct administrative execution[17]	Mandatory procedural condition for constitutional

		suite [cite: 16]	[18]			revision[20]
Follow-Through Efficacy	High procedural compliance; policy changes modest/incremental[4]	Formal adoption of resolutions; administrative execution mixed[16]	Strong elite filtering; MP votes track coalition discipline[8]	Moderate; high attrition; recommendations stalled in administration[43]	Early stage; dependent on municipal bureaucratic buy-in[17]	High legislative translation (2019/2023 constitutional amendments)[21]

Ad Hoc National Conventions and Policy Fate: From Law to Shelf

To understand the specific strengths and failure modes of *permanent* bodies, they must be contrasted against *ad hoc national conventions*. One-off assemblies enjoy acute national media visibility and high political salience, yet suffer from catastrophic policy attrition once disbanded[4].

The divergence in policy outcomes between sortition assemblies that resulted in statutory change and those that were shelved reveals a fundamental governance dynamic. Deliberative mini-publics do not generate their own political enforcement mechanisms. Their capacity to overcome the follow-through bottleneck depends entirely on whether their institutional linkage bypasses legislative gatekeepers or aligns directly with the political survival incentives of the executive.

Ireland: Convention on the Constitution (2012–2014) and Citizens' Assembly (2016–2018)

The Irish model established the global benchmark for direct legislative impact via sortition[6]. The Convention on the Constitution (2012–2014) comprised 100 members: 66 citizens, 33 elected politicians (from both Ireland and Northern Ireland), and an independent chairperson[1]. The subsequent Citizens' Assembly (2016–2018) removed politicians, comprising 99 randomly selected citizens and a supreme court judge chair[1].

Ireland succeeded where other national conventions failed because its recommendations were channeled into a constitutionally mandated, legally binding direct-democracy mechanism[1]. Because Article 46 of the Irish Constitution (*Bunreacht na hÉireann*) requires a universal popular referendum for any constitutional revision, the assemblies operated not as final arbiters, but as trusted epistemic filters that provided political cover for risk-averse politicians[1]. The Convention on the Constitution led directly to the Thirty-fourth Amendment referendum (Marriage Equality, 2015), which passed by 62.1%[1]. The Citizens' Assembly tackled the Eighth

Amendment (constitutional abortion ban); its nuanced, liberalized recommendations formed the exact architecture of the Thirty-sixth Amendment (2018), passing by 66.4%[1].
However, the Irish model's aura of invulnerability collapsed on 8 March 2024 during the Thirty-ninth and Fortieth Amendment referendums (the Family and Care amendments), which originated from the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality (2020–2021)[15]. Government drafters systematically altered the precise constitutional wording formulated by the assembly, substituting vague language concerning state "striving" to support care. Both amendments were resoundingly defeated (Care rejected by 73.9%, Family rejected by 67.7%), demonstrating that when political elites dilute deliberative assembly proposals or decouple them from organic public understanding, sortition recommendations cannot guarantee democratic endorsement[47].

France: Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (2019–2020)

Established by President Emmanuel Macron in the wake of the *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vests) fuel tax insurrection, the CCC assembled 150 randomly selected citizens between October 2019 and June 2020 to define measures reducing France's greenhouse gas emissions by 40% (relative to 1990) "in a spirit of social justice"[27].
Macron made a public, theatrical commitment that the assembly's proposals would be submitted *"sans filtre"* (unfiltered) either to direct national referendums, executive ordinances, or straight to parliamentary votes[27]. The CCC delivered a 460-page final report containing 149 detailed legislative proposals spanning transportation, agriculture, housing, consumption, and corporate regulation[27].
The follow-through collapse was immediate. Macron almost immediately exercised three unilateral executive vetoes (the "three jokers"): rejecting a 4% tax on corporate dividends, rejecting the reduction of highway speed limits to 110 km/h, and refusing to alter the preamble of the French Constitution[27]. Subsequently, ministerial bureaucracies and corporate industrial lobbies gutted the remaining package[27]. The resulting *Loi Climat et Résilience* (enacted in August 2021) fully incorporated only 10% to 15% of the CCC's original proposals intact[27]. When the 150 citizens reconvened in February 2021 for an evaluation session, they assigned the French state an average grade of 2.8 out of 10 for substantive fidelity to their work, establishing the CCC as a textbook historical case of executive containment and participatory co-optation[27].

Scotland: Citizens' Assembly of Scotland (2019–2021)

Composed of 100 randomly selected residents, the Scottish assembly convened between October 2019 and December 2020 under an exceptionally broad remit: "What kind of country are we seeking to build, how can we best overcome challenges including Brexit, and what work should be done to give citizens the detail to make informed choices?"[30].
In January 2021, the assembly published *Doing Politics Differently*, detailing 60 recommendations across eight policy areas, including universal basic income trials, NHS working conditions, systemic tax reform, and a 4-day work week[30]. In November 2021, the Scottish Government published its formal response[59]. While rhetorically praising the process, the government mechanically mapped existing Scottish National Party (SNP) ministerial

programs onto the assembly's points, committing to almost no new legislative action outside policies already underway[30]. The vast majority of structural proposals (such as comprehensive tax overhauls or devolution expansions) were dismissed as outside current executive competencies or deferred indefinitely, resulting in rhetorical absorption rather than policy change[30].

Germany: Bürgerrat Ernährung im Wandel (2023–2024)

Authorized by the German Bundestag on 10 May 2023, the *Bürgerrat Ernährung im Wandel: Zwischen Privatangelegenheit und staatlichen Aufgaben* (Nutrition in Transition) was the first citizens' assembly directly commissioned, organized, and funded by the federal parliament[29]. The body brought together 160 citizens selected via a two-stage stratified random draw from 84 sample municipalities across Germany, stratified by state, municipality size, age, gender, educational attainment, and dietary habit (including meat-eaters, vegetarians, and vegans)[29]. Participants met over three in-person weekends in Berlin and six virtual evening sessions between September 2023 and January 2024, receiving an expense allowance of €75 per meeting day plus travel, lodging, and childcare[29].

On 20 February 2024, the assembly formally handed its *Bürgergutachten* (Citizens' Expert Opinion) to Bundestag President Bärbel Bas[28]. The report contained nine prioritized policy recommendations (plus one overarching recommendation on consumer education), led by free, healthy, and organic lunch for all children in schools and daycares; mandatory state-administered animal welfare labeling; exemption of basic healthy foods from Value Added Tax (VAT 0%), offset by increased taxation on sugary products; and mandatory food donation obligations for large grocery retail chains[28].

On 14 March 2024, the Bürgergutachten was debated in federal parliamentary plenary (*Kernzeit* debate) and referred to the Committee on Food and Agriculture (*Ausschuss für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft*, Bundestagsdrucksache 20/10300) alongside four advisory committees[28]. The committee organized four public expert hearings throughout mid-2024[28]. Scientific evaluations published in August 2024 by the Institute for Democracy and Participation Research (IDPF Wuppertal, Sack et al.) verified high internal deliberative legitimacy[28]. However, when evaluated against legislative enactment, the recommendations met decisive institutional resistance: the Free Democratic Party (FDP) finance ministry categorically rejected the VAT 0% proposal, and the collapse of the traffic-light governing coalition in late 2024 led to the dissolution of parliament, leaving the Bürgergutachten formally unpassed and effectively shelved[28].

National Assembly	Mandate & Remit	Number of Participants	Political Coupling	Legislative Output & Policy Fate
Ireland Convention	Constitutional reform	66 citizens, 33 politicians, 1	Mandatory constitutional	**Direct Constitutional**

on the Constitution (2012–14)	(presidential term, electoral reform, marriage equality)[1]	independent chair[1]	referendum requirement[1]	**Amendment**: 34th Amendment enacted via national referendum (62.1% Yes)[1].
Ireland Citizens' Assembly (2016–18)	Eighth Amendment (Abortion), aging population, climate change[1]	99 citizens, 1 judicial chair[1]	Mandatory constitutional referendum requirement[1]	**Direct Constitutional Amendment**: 36th Amendment enacted via national referendum (66.4% Yes)[1].
France Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (2019–20)	Reduce national greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030 in social justice[27]	150 citizens[27]	Executive commitment (*"sans filtre"*) by President Macron[27]	**Severe Attrition**: 3 executive vetoes; legislative filtering left 10–15% intact in *Loi Climat* (2021)[27].
Scotland Citizens' Assembly (2019–21)	Broad future vision: post-Brexit Scotland, tax, welfare, governance[30]	~100 citizens[30]	Consultative to Scottish Government and Holyrood[30]	**Rhetorical Absorption**: SNP Government mapped existing policies; no new structural statutes enacted[30].
Germany Bürgerrat Ernährung	Dietary transition: animal welfare,	160 citizens[29]	Commissioned by Bundestag; referred to	**Procedural Shelving**: Plenary debate

(2023–24)	school meals, food pricing, waste[28]		parliamentary committees[28]	held; fiscal vetoes by Finance Ministry followed by coalition collapse[28].

Empirical Evaluations: What Works, What Fails, and What Replicates

The OECD Empirical Corpus (2020, 2021)

The OECD report *Catching the Deliberative Wave: Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions* (2020) and its 2021 evaluation framework examined 282 representative deliberative mini-publics across democratic nations[57]. When evaluating follow-through across 55 cases where systematic implementation data was traceable, the authors reported that in 76% of cases (42 out of 55), public authorities implemented over half of the assembly's recommendations; in 36% of cases (20 out of 55), authorities claimed to have implemented all recommendations; and only in 11% of cases (6 out of 55) were none of the recommendations implemented[66].

These headline percentages, frequently cited by sortition advocates, mask profound methodological distortions. The OECD dataset exhibits severe selection and reporting bias: public authorities self-report implementation data, and jurisdictions that shelve mini-public recommendations rarely fund post-hoc academic evaluations or submit data to international repositories[6]. Furthermore, the definition of "implementation" in the OECD dataset includes soft administrative acknowledgments, commissioning feasibility studies, and incorporating recommendations into non-binding white papers[4]. When measured against the strict legal standard of substantive legislative enactment, policy attrition across modern sortition experiments exceeds 70%[4].

Macq and Jacquet: Institutionalization versus Embeddedness (2021, 2023)

Hadrien Macq and Vincent Jacquet establish an essential analytical distinction between the institutionalization of a deliberative body and its embeddedness within the broader political regime[10]. Institutionalization denotes the formal codification of the mini-public into statutory law, executive regulations, parliamentary rules of procedure, and dedicated administrative line-items[10]. Embeddedness denotes the sociological, cultural, and behavioral acceptance of the body by legacy political actors, including MPs, political parties, ministerial civil servants, media editors, and organized interest groups[10].

An assembly can achieve near-perfect institutionalization while remaining almost completely unembedded[10]. Longitudinal analyses of Ostbelgien and French mini-publics reveal a persistent front-stage versus back-stage dichotomy[69]. Front-stage, elected politicians universally praise

sortition bodies as triumphs of inclusive democracy, attending ribbon-cutting plenaries and accepting leather-bound reports[12]. Back-stage, civil servants and parliamentary whips treat the mini-public as an irritating external interference that disrupts legislative calendars, introduces technically crude statutory language, and threatens the constitutional monopoly of elected representatives[5]. Unless institutionalization creates hard procedural costs for non-compliance, back-stage resistance inevitably neutralizes front-stage promises[12].

Niessen and Reuchamps: The Bureaucratic Absorption Paradox (2020, 2024)

Christoph Niessen and Min Reuchamps' field evaluations of the Ostbelgien *Permanenter Bürgerdialog* reveal what they define as the "bureaucratic absorption paradox"[7]. Because Ostbelgien established a constitutionally airtight procedural follow-up mechanism, the regional parliament could not legally ignore the Bürgerversammlungen[12]. Instead, legacy institutions neutralized potential disruption via procedural compliance:

First, parliamentary committees engaged in scope narrowing: broad, radical proposals—such as regional minimum staffing mandates for nursing homes—were split by parliamentary committees into technical sub-competencies, deferring elements that crossed inter-communal or federal jurisdictions[7]. Second, standing committees tasked the ministerial bureaucracy with drafting the formal response (*Stellungnahme*), allowing bureaucrats to systematically reframe citizen recommendations into alignment with preexisting departmental multi-year plans, transforming civic critique into administrative self-justification[7]. Third, the mandatory one-year audit hearing produced audit fatigue: the administration presented complex regulatory updates demonstrating that "steps are underway," satisfying the legal procedural bar while fundamentally muting systemic change[12].

Participation Rates, Effect Sizes, and Replication Failures

Sortition scholarship relies on several quantitative baselines that consistently replicate across jurisdictions, alongside claims that systematically fail empirical replication:

In initial recruitment, stratified sortition does not recruit a purely representative random sample; it recruits from a small subset willing to participate[10]. Initial response rates to civic lottery invitations typically range between 1.5% and 9% in Western European polities (Ostbelgien recorded ~9%, the German Bürgerrat ~5%, and Milan <3%)[36]. Even with multi-stage stratified quotas balancing age, gender, education, and geography, participants systematically over-represent individuals with higher baseline civic efficacy, higher cognitive leisure time, and lower vulnerability to immediate economic dislocation[10].

Conversely, internal epistemic shifts replicate robustly. Across Deliberative Polling experiments documented by James Fishkin and Alice Siu spanning over 100 experiments across 30 nations, deliberation consistently induces statistically significant attitude changes with medium-to-large effect sizes ($d = 0.35 \text{ to } 0.70, p < 0.001$)[55]. Participants reliably discard extreme, conspiratorial, or technically unviable positions when exposed to structured, balanced counter-arguments[2].

However, macro-spillover claims systematically fail to replicate. Proponents argue that

mini-publics transmit epistemic trust and depolarization to the broader, non-participating electorate[70]. Empirical studies of mass public awareness systematically refute this claim[73]. In the German Bürgerrat Ernährung, post-assembly polling revealed that fewer than 8% of the German electorate were aware the assembly had taken place[28]. In Ostbelgien, despite saturation in local media, public awareness of Bürgerrat debates hovered below 25%[7]. Without direct linkages to a mass direct-democracy vote, citizens' assemblies remain epistemic enclaves whose internal enlightenment fails to diffuse into mass society[1].

The Tripartite Divergence: Emic Claims, Empirical Records, and Modern Inferences

A critical methodology requires rigorously disentangling three separate registers of truth: what the actors within the institutions claimed to be doing, what the hard administrative and legislative record proves occurred, and what contemporary social science infers.

Case / Dimension	(1) What the Arrangement's People Said It Did (Emic Claim)	(2) What the Administrative Record Shows It Did (Empirical Fact)	(3) What Modern Scholarship Infers (Theoretical Interpretation)
Ostbelgien Model (2019–Present)	"A revolutionary re-centering of power placing ordinary citizens at the steering wheel of the legislative agenda on equal footing with MPs"[12].	High procedural compliance (100% committee hearings held); zero structural laws rewritten against government majority wills; approved outputs consist of modest budget tweaks and working groups[7].	Institutionalization without embeddedness; the permanent secretariat acts as an unacknowledged cognitive filter; administrative absorption replaces direct political conflict[7].
Mongolia Deliberative Polling (2017/2023)	"Restoring sovereign constituent power to nomadic and urban citizens alike to democratize the 1992 democratic constitution"[22].	2017 poll stopped presidential aggrandizement; 2023 poll was rushed during the coal corruption crisis to legitimize parliamentary	A legal instrument deployed by parliamentary elites as a risk-defusal mechanism to quiet civil unrest, manufacture plebiscitary

		expansion (76 to 126 MPs) and mixed PR[21].	legitimacy, and entrench party dominance[22].
France: Convention Citoyenne Climat (2019–20)	"Direct co-construction of the ecological transition without administrative filter, creating a blueprint for systemic carbon reduction"[27].	Macron unilaterally exercised three executive vetoes; ministerial editing excised 85% of proposals; resulting 2021 Climate Law fell short of national climate targets[27].	Performative co-optation (*window dressing*); the executive utilized sortition to defuse the *Gilets Jaunes* crisis while retaining sovereign veto over distributive consequences[7].
Brussels Deliberative Committees (2019–Present)	"A historic institutional bridge breaking down the barrier between citizens and elected MPs through joint, equal-power deliberation"[8].	Citizens' votes are constitutionally non-binding; closed-door sessions allow MPs to subtly steer non-politicians; plenary committee votes follow strict coalition party lines[8].	An elite containment design: mixed participation co-opts citizen dissatisfaction into parliamentary norms while preventing autonomous civic counter-power from challenging coalition deals[5].
Germany: Bürgerrat Ernährung (2023–24)	"Bridging social divides to draft a non-partisan, common-sense national food consensus directly for the federal legislature"[28].	Bürgergutachten formally received and debated in 1 plenary session; all fiscal/regulatory recommendations deadlocked in committee and extinguished by early election[28].	Epistemic exercise without institutional traction; legacy parliamentary committees treat ad hoc sortition as an external consultative annoyance lacking political leverage[6].
Athenian Boule /	"Equal speech	500-member Boule	Sortition functions

Nomothetai (Classical Antiquity)	(*isegoria*) and equal political power (*isonomia*) through the lot, preventing elite oligarchy and tyrant rule."	operated effectively for two centuries; twice captured and overthrown by oligarchic conspiracies (411 BC and 404 BC); systematically excluded women, metics, and slaves.	effectively only when embedded in intense face-to-face civic vigilance backed by lethal accountability mechanisms (ostracism, *eisangelia*, *graphe paranomon*).

The Scale Ledger: From Household to Planet

Sortition-based deliberative governance exhibits distinct mechanical behaviors, structural limits, and failure modes across different demographic and spatial rungs.

Household Rung (4 to 10 People)

Sortition has never operated at the household scale and remains completely unviable. Allocating governance roles or domestic responsibilities via random selection within a primary domestic unit is mechanically dysfunctional. Kin and cooperative micro-units function on reciprocal altruism, age-graded competency, affective bonds, and negotiated division of labor. Introducing lottery draws to allocate decision-making authority over household food storage, childcare, or resource rationing destroys relational reciprocity, introduces statistical absurdity due to an unviable sample size (N), and provokes immediate rebellion or physical enforcement.

Hamlet or Band Rung (30 to 50 People)

While lotteries have appeared historically at this scale for the rotational distribution of scarce physical resources—such as the seasonal allocation of alpine grazing parcels or communal woodland clearing strips in medieval open-field systems—sortition has never been successfully deployed for political governance or executive command. At the band scale, every individual's cognitive capacity, physical reliability, emotional volatility, and psychopathic tendencies are known intimately to the entire group. Selecting a leader or decision-maker by lottery replaces high-resolution interpersonal knowledge with statistical randomness. Direct consensus, elder arbitration, or informal assemblies naturally displace sortition.

Village Rung (150 to 500 People)

Historically, villages frequently utilized rotation and lot for specific administrative assignments, such as Swiss mountain irrigation monitors (*Getrenntschaften*), Renaissance Italian rural syndics, and medieval English field-reeves. However, modern sortition mini-publics are rarely instituted at this scale because direct assembly democracy (the Swiss *Landsgemeinde* or New England town meeting) is mechanically viable. At a population of 300, a sortition council of 30 citizens constitutes an enormous 10% sample of the entire polity. While internal epistemic gains are high, face-to-face social friction is intense: sortition participants cannot maintain cognitive

or political anonymity. An unpopular decision regarding water rights or land boundaries produces immediate social ostracism, gossip warfare, and physical intimidation outside the council hall. Consequently, sortition participants tend to defer to dominant local lineage heads.

Parish or District Rung (1,500 to 5,000 People)

This rung represents the lower operational sweet spot for sortition-based governance, as demonstrated in Classical Greek demes (local sortition officials for deme administration) and Italian rural communes. At this scale, personal anonymity begins, yet common geographical and ecological dependencies remain immediate (watershed management, communal grazing rights, local road upkeep). Sortition bodies of 35 to 50 individuals achieve genuine demographic reflection and are small enough to deliberate without complex telecommunications, yet large enough to insulate individual members from direct domestic retaliation. Follow-through fails only if the district is subordinate to higher-level administrative hierarchies that annul local decisions.

Town or Watershed Rung (15,000 to 50,000 People)

This rung represents the historical and structural optimal scale for sortition governance. It encompasses Classical Athens (a citizen body of 30,000 to 40,000 adult males selecting the Boule of 500 by lot) and early modern Italian city-republics (Venetian and Florentine multi-stage sortition for nominating electoral slates). Stratified sortition operates with exceptional mathematical efficiency at this scale ($N \approx 50 \text{ to } 100$). The civic body shares a contiguous economy and infrastructure. Athenian historical stability proved that a permanent 500-person sortition council (with rotating 50-member monthly executive committees, the *prytaneis*) could administer a complex maritime economy, frame the assembly agenda, and conduct foreign diplomacy for two centuries.

Region or Bioregion Rung (500,000 to 5 Million People)

This rung encompasses the primary modern experiments with permanent sortition: Ostbelgien (78,000 population, bridging watershed and region)[12], the Brussels-Capital Region (1.2 million population)[18], Paris (2.1 million population)[15], Milan (1.4 million population)[44], and Bogotá's localities (sub-units of ~400,000 within an 8-million metropolis)[24]. This scale represents the critical follow-through chasm[3]. At the regional scale, complex administrative bureaucracies, professionalized party apparatuses, and entrenched corporate stakeholder networks dominate governance[8]. Permanent sortition councils can sustain procedural existence, but their substantive output is relentlessly filtered and absorbed by legacy party elites unless directly linked to binding direct-democracy instruments[7].

Nation or Continent Rung (50 to 500 Million People)

Operating at this scale are the ad hoc national conventions of France, Ireland, Germany, and Scotland[1], as well as Mongolia's constitutionally mandated Deliberative Polling[22]. Permanent national sortition bodies have never been successfully sustained at this scale. National sortition bodies face extreme legitimacy deficits from non-participating citizens[73]. Because only 100 to 200 citizens participate out of tens or hundreds of millions, the mass public views the mini-public as an arbitrary elite rather than an authentic expression of popular will[70].

Furthermore, national geopolitical, military, and macroeconomic shocks demand executive speed and decisive enforcement that deliberative sortition bodies cannot provide[73]. As shown in France and Germany, national elected executives easily bypass or shelve assemblies once the immediate media spectacle subsides[27].

Planet Rung (8 Billion People)

At the global scale, sortition has appeared only in experimental, symbolic exercises, such as the "Global Assembly" convened for COP26 in Glasgow (2021) comprising 100 citizens selected via a global lottery. Such arrangements exhibit complete institutional irrelevance. A planetary sortition assembly possesses zero coercive enforcement mechanisms, zero sovereign authority, and massive linguistic, cognitive, and cultural friction. Recommendations are purely symbolic, ignored by sovereign geopolitical powers, transnational corporations, and military blocs. Sortition at the global scale is an academic simulation, not an operational governance arrangement.

Scale Rung	Population Range	Operational Status in History	Functional Viability	Primary Bottleneck / Failure Mode
Household	4–10	Never attempted	Impossible	Statistical absurdity; destroys kin reciprocity; non-viable sample size.
Hamlet / Band	30–50	Used for resource division, not rule	Non-viable for governance	Disregards known interpersonal competencies; consensus/elder arbitration dominates.
Village	150–500	Common for task/resource rotation	Moderate	Absence of anonymity; social retaliation, gossip, and dominant-lineage capture.

Parish / District	1,500–5,000	Classical demes; modern communes	**High (Optimal Local)**	Subordination to higher administrative hierarchies that overrule local verdicts.
Town / Watershed	15,000–50,000	Classical Athens (*Boule*); Italian city-states	**High (Optimal Polity)**	External geopolitical shocks and military conflict demanding fast execution.
Region / Bioregion	500k–5M	Modern permanent sortition bodies	Moderate to Weak	**Follow-Through Chasm**: Bureaucratic absorption; party-coalition gatekeeping[7].
Nation / Continent	50M–500M	Ad hoc conventions; Mongolian DP	Weak (Consultative only)	Mass public illegitimacy ("blind deference"); executive bypass and shelving[27].
Planet	8 Billion	Symbolic experiments (Global Assembly)	Wholly Ineffective	Zero sovereignty; zero enforcement; severe linguistic-cultural fragmentation.

The Capture Test: Vulnerability to Dark-Triad Factions and Elite Predation

Any resilient governance architecture must withstand targeted subversion by individuals and

organized factions displaying Dark-Triad psychological traits: **narcissism** (seeking unrestrained dominance, adoration, and status), **Machiavellianism** (strategic deceit, instrumental manipulation, amoral exploitation of systemic vulnerabilities), and **psychopathy** (impulsivity, calloused disregard for interpersonal harm, parasitic exploitation of institutional trust).
Sortition advocates routinely assume that eliminating competitive elections automatically eliminates Dark-Triad predators[75]. While sortition cleanly extinguishes the *electoral* path to elite capture, it exposes three distinct structural vectors that predators exploit with devastating effectiveness[7].

Vector 1: Input and Agenda Capture (Machiavellian Gatekeeping)

In an ad hoc or permanent sortition body, ordinary citizens drawn by lot enter an unfamiliar, technically complex institutional landscape[7]. Because they do not possess personal policy staff, research bureaus, or legal drafters, they are almost entirely dependent on the secretariat, framing committee, and professional facilitators[7].
Rather than attempting to corrupt the randomly selected citizens, the predator captures the administrative secretariat, the steering committee, or the scientific advisory board[7]. By drafting the background informational dossiers, selecting which "experts" testify, framing the multiple-choice questions, and controlling the schedule, the predator tightly constrains the possible range of deliberative outputs before citizens even meet[7]. In Ostbelgien, political scientists observing the Bürgerrat noted that the Parliamentary Secretariat, despite acting with professional integrity, held immense, unchecked steering power over the citizen council[7]. Council members openly conceded in interviews that because they felt overwhelmed by administrative procedures, they routinely defaulted to the recommendations and framing presented by the Permanent Secretariat[7]. In the French CCC, the steering committee (*comité de gouvernance*) structured the initial sessions around highly technical presentations that framed ecological solutions within specific state-preferred technological trajectories, actively discouraging radical degrowth or anti-capitalist inquiries[27].

Vector 2: Within-Deliberation Psychological Domination (Narcissistic and Psychopathic Predation)

In the absence of established party hierarchies, sortition assemblies constitute unregulated micro-arenas of interpersonal influence. A charismatic, highly articulate sociopath or narcissist placed inside a small group uses asymmetrical epistemic intimidation, aggressive rhetoric, and emotional manipulation to silence dissent[7]. In mini-public breakout groups (typically 6 to 10 individuals), unassertive, less-educated, or socially deferent citizens rapidly defer to high-status, assertive, or rhetorically dominant members[7]. If voting is conducted openly (by show of hands or consensus-seeking rounds), interpersonal pressure forces conformist unanimity[18].
The historical vulnerability of sortition to internal terrorization is demonstrated by the overthrow of the Athenian Boule in 411 BC. The oligarchic faction led by Antiphon, Peisander, and Theramenes systematically subverted Athenian democratic institutions, culminating in the installation of the oligarchy of the Four Hundred. Knowing that the Boule of 500 (selected by lot) was the institutional bulwark of democracy, the oligarchs organized clandestine terror

cliques (*hetaireiai*). They assassinated vocal democratic bouleutai and intimidated ordinary drawn council members. When the Boule was convened, the oligarchs monopolized the speaking platforms, orchestrated intimidatory psychological atmospheres, and pressured the terrified, disorganized sortition members to vote for the formal suspension of the democratic constitution and surrender power to the oligarchic council.

Vector 3: Output Dilution and Blame Laundering (Executive Instrumentalization)

A ruling executive or monarch facing acute systemic crises—such as fiscal debt, infrastructure failure, or corruption scandals—routinely deploys a sortition body to launder responsibility[1]. The executive charges the assembly with resolving an intractable distributive zero-sum conflict (e.g., carbon taxes versus fuel subsidies, pension cuts versus debt default)[27]. If the assembly recommends unpopular sacrifices, the executive enacts them while pointing to "the will of the people"[1]. If the assembly recommends measures that threaten the predator's wealth or political allies, the executive praises the assembly's civic virtue, organizes a formal photo opportunity, refers the report to an administrative study commission, and shelves it indefinitely[27].

This dynamic appeared in Classical antiquity during the reign of the Thirty Tyrants in 404 BC. Following Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War, the Spartan-backed oligarch Critias utilized sortition bodies under direct duress. Critias appointed a hand-picked Council of Five Hundred through manipulated, coercive sortition, utilizing the body as an instrument to vote death warrants and property confiscations against wealthy democratic citizens and resident aliens (metics), cloaking tyrannical plunder in the procedural veneer of traditional council deliberation.

Structural Resilience Features That Resisted or Reversed Capture

Empirical evidence from both classical antiquity and modern institutional design proves that capture can be systematically mitigated through specific defensive mechanisms:

Vulnerability Vector	Predatory Playbook	Structural Defensive Countermeasure
Administrative Steering & Agenda Monopolization	Machiavellian capture of the permanent secretariat, briefing dossiers, and expert witness slates[7].	**Institutional Separation of Powers (The Ostbelgien Wall)**: Strict structural bifurcation where Council A sets the agenda and Assembly B deliberates; neither body controls both halves of the loop[12].
Micro-Group Psychological Domination	Charismatic narcissists and sociopaths intimidating unassertive peers in	**Mandatory Neutral Moderation and Pod Rotation**: Strict

	breakout tables[7].	speaking-token allocations and twice-daily randomized shuffling of deliberative pods to prevent clique consolidation[51].
Social Coercion & Intimidatory Voting	Predators forcing conformist unanimity via open show of hands or vocal consensus rounds[18].	**Compulsory Secret-Ballot Voting**: Formalization of secret voting (as deployed in the Brussels mixed committees) to completely insulate participants from interpersonal retaliation[18].
Executive Shelving & Blame Laundering	Machiavellian executives burying unfavorable outputs while cherry-picking convenient recommendations[1].	**Direct Direct-Democracy Coupling (The Irish Mechanism)**: Bypassing legislative vetoes entirely by binding assembly outputs directly to mandatory, unamended popular referendums[1].

The Strongest Case Against: Epistemic, Democratic, and Accountability Critiques

A rigorous foundation document must confront the most devastating intellectual critiques advanced against sortition governance by leading political theorists and institutional economists.

Cristina Lafont: The Disenfranchisement of the Mass Public and "Blind Deference"

In *Democracy without Shortcuts: A Deliberative Defense of the Public Sphere* (Oxford University Press, 2019), Cristina Lafont formulates the definitive democratic critique of sortition mini-publics[73]. Lafont argues that empowering citizens' assemblies to make binding political decisions or bypass elected parliaments is fundamentally anti-democratic[73]. Deliberative democrats seek a "shortcut" around the grinding, difficult task of convincing the mass public[73]. By taking a tiny group of 100 citizens, subjecting them to intense expert education, and giving them sovereign authority, sortition creates an unchosen cognitive aristocracy[73].

For the millions of citizens who did not participate in the assembly, the recommendations of the mini-public are completely external[73]. Asking the mass public to obey or defer to 100 randomly selected peers who underwent a transformative epistemic experience that the rest of society

did not share is demanding "blind deference"[73]. It alienates the broader citizenry, eviscerates democratic self-determination, and produces intense populist backlash whenever the assembly's enlightened conclusions clash with the raw sentiments of the broader population, as demonstrated in the collapse of the 2024 Irish Care referendum[47].

Ian Shapiro: The Elimination of Political Accountability and Partisan Conflict

In *Politics Against Deliberation* (2002) and *The State of Democratic Theory* (Princeton University Press, 2003), Ian Shapiro attacks the naive deliberative premise that "consensus" is superior to adversarial party politics. Sortition members cannot be punished or rewarded at the ballot box[7]. If an elected politician enacts a catastrophic agricultural or fiscal policy, voters can throw them out of office at the next election. A sortition assembly disbands the day its report is delivered; its members return to private life, completely immune to the societal wreckage caused by their policy recommendations[7]. Sortition entirely destroys the single most reliable historical mechanism of democratic discipline: retrospective electoral accountability[75]. Furthermore, Shapiro demonstrates that politics is fundamentally about zero-sum distributive conflict over scarce resources, power, and prestige. Deliberation naively assumes that good-faith dialogue reveals a harmonious common good. Forcing citizens into artificial consensus-seeking assemblies depoliticizes legitimate conflicts, suppresses class antagonism, and creates fragile technocratic compromises that ignore the fundamental structural fissures of society.

Guido Pincione and Fernando Tesón: Epistemic Fragility and Rational Ignorance

In *Rational Choice and Democratic Deliberation: A Theory of Discourse Failure* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), Pincione and Tesón demonstrate through rational choice economics that deliberation does not reliably track truth. Citizens participate in political discourse not to discover scientific or economic reality, but to signal moral virtues, tribal affiliations, and emotional solidarity (expressive voting)[70]. Non-expert citizens are systematically vulnerable to economically illiterate but emotionally vivid narratives, such as simplistic protectionism, zero-price ceilings on essential goods, and punitive sumptuary laws. Deliberative assemblies do not transform ordinary people into economic scientists; they merely turn them into confident amateurs who are easily misled by persuasive orators utilizing vivid rhetoric, vivid anecdotes, and fallacious causal models.

Jason Brennan: Epistocratic Incompetence and the Illusion of Representativeness

In *Against Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2016), Jason Brennan directly challenges the epistemic pretensions of sortition. Random selection guarantees demographic representation, not cognitive, technical, or administrative competence. High-stakes modern governance requires specialized technical fluency in epidemiology, macroeconomic accounting, energy grid mechanics, and jurisprudence. Because randomly selected citizens lack technical fluency, they cannot evaluate complex econometric models or legal trade-offs independently.

Consequently, they become intellectual puppets of the unelected technocrats, civil servants, and facilitators who write the briefing materials and moderate the sessions[7]. Sortition does not eliminate technocracy; it simply disguises technocratic rule behind a human shield of randomly chosen grandmothers and schoolteachers[7].

Demolishing the Naturalistic Fallacy and the Romance of the Primitive

Sortition advocates frequently commit the naturalistic fallacy—the erroneous belief that because an institutional mechanism is ancient, ancestral, or operates in small tribal groups, it is inherently just, balanced, or non-oppressive.

Athenian sortition was embedded in an exclusionary, patriarchal society where adult male citizens comprised no more than 15% to 20% of the total population; women, metics (resident foreigners), and an immense class of enslaved human beings were completely disenfranchised. The Athenian Boule presided over aggressive imperialist wars, executed brutal colonial crackdowns (such as the slaughter and enslavement of the Melians in 416 BC), and repeatedly executed military generals following mob panics.

Similarly, anthropological and ethnographic scholarship (e.g., Napoleon Chagnon on the Yanomami; Joseph Henrich on ancestral lineage networks) demonstrates that small-scale, pre-industrial assemblies are not egalitarian deliberative paradises. Traditional band and village assemblies are notoriously dominated by elder male lineage heads, charismatic shamans, and fierce warrior cliques. Decisions are enforced not through Habermasian reasoned consensus, but through intense social shaming, fear of ancestral curses, peer intimidation, domestic abuse, and the ever-present threat of physical violence or banishment. Old is not good; small is not fair.

Robust Findings

1. Sortition assemblies reliably induce statistically significant internal attitude changes, epistemic learning, and interpersonal depolarization among their active participants across diverse political systems[2].
2. Civic lotteries face severe initial self-selection attrition, with invitation acceptance rates consistently falling between 1.5% and 9% in modern polities[36].
3. Ad hoc citizens' assemblies without institutionalized, legally mandated delivery vectors suffer policy attrition exceeding 70%, with structural proposals filtered out by legacy bodies[4].
4. Sortition mini-publics achieve durable statutory and constitutional change almost exclusively when their recommendations are channeled directly into mandatory popular referendums[1].
5. Permanent sortition councils enforce procedural compliance on parliaments, but legacy bureaucracies systematically absorb and neuter structural proposals through scope narrowing and administrative translation[7].
6. Mixed assemblies combining citizens and elected MPs reduce parliamentary hostility but introduce informal elite steering and enforce ruling-coalition voting discipline[8].
7. The internal enlightenment and consensus generated inside a mini-public does not spontaneously diffuse to the non-participating mass public, leaving the broader citizenry

indifferent or skeptical[28].

8. Sortition processes are highly vulnerable to Dark-Triad manipulation at the input phase through administrative monopolization of the secretariat, briefing dossiers, and expert witnesses[7].
9. Executive politicians routinely deploy citizens' assemblies as blame-avoidance shields, crisis defusal valves, or performative window-dressing rather than genuine power sharing[1].
10. Above the watershed and regional scales, sortition bodies cannot sustain sovereign executive authority due to the absence of retrospective electoral accountability and acute mass legitimacy deficits[7].

Contested and Open Questions

1. **The Binding Mandate Dilemma:** Can a sortition body be granted legally binding legislative authority without violating foundational constitutional principles of universal suffrage, equal franchise, and direct accountability to non-participating citizens[73]?
2. **The Mass Legitimacy Gap:** Can institutionalized mini-publics ever achieve broad public trust and embedded cultural legitimacy without being coupled to universal popular referendums[68]?
3. **Remuneration versus Civic Duty:** Does providing professionalized daily attendance stipends fundamentally alter participants' civic identity and turn them into short-term bureaucrats, or is compensation the only mechanism to eliminate the extreme class skew observed in volunteer assemblies like Milan[42]?
4. **Bicameral Sortition Chambers:** Would replacing an elected upper house (e.g., the UK House of Lords or Canadian Senate) with a permanent sortition chamber create a resilient counterweight to executive power, or would it paralyze legislative action through endless technocratic deadlock[5]?
5. **Elite Capture of Sortition Secretariats:** What institutional architecture can completely prevent a permanent civil service secretariat from covertly steering, manipulating, and filtering the information provided to rotating, non-expert citizen bodies[7]?

Core Sources to Read in Full

1. **Macq, Hadrien, and Vincent Jacquet (2023).** *"Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Procedures: The Origins of the First Permanent Citizens' Assembly."* *European Journal of Political Research*, 62(1), 156–173[11].
   - *Core Contribution:* The definitive empirical examination of how the Ostbelgien model was designed, negotiated, and legally entrenched, establishing the crucial theoretical framework distinguishing formal institutionalization from cultural embeddedness[10].
2. **Niessen, Christoph, and Min Reuchamps (2020).** *"Institutionalising Citizen Deliberation in Parliament: The Permanent Citizens' Dialogue in the German-Speaking Community of Belgium."* *Parliamentary Affairs*, 75(1), 1–19[5].
   - *Core Contribution:* Provides the primary administrative analysis of the Ostbelgien Bürgerrat and Bürgerversammlungen, tracking how parliamentary standing committees

receive, debate, and absorb citizen recommendations[11].

3. **OECD (2020).** *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*. Paris: OECD Publishing[57].
   - *Core Contribution:* The most comprehensive global quantitative dataset of mini-publics ever assembled, documenting institutional patterns, participant scales, design variants, and follow-through metrics across 282 cases[64].
4. **Lafont, Cristina (2019).** *Democracy without Shortcuts: A Deliberative Defense of the Public Sphere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press[73].
   - *Core Contribution:* The foremost philosophical and democratic critique of sortition mini-publics, detailing why empowering citizens' assemblies without mass public participation constitutes an anti-democratic shortcut demanding "blind deference"[73].
5. **Fishkin, James S. (2018).** *Democracy When the People Speak: The Theory and Practice of Deliberative Democracy and Deliberative Polling*. Oxford: Oxford University Press[51].
   - *Core Contribution:* The essential methodology text detailing the mechanics, statistical sampling rigors, and cognitive attitude shifts demonstrated across three decades of Deliberative Polling worldwide, including the foundational Mongolian constitutional cases[20].
6. **Pincione, Guido, and Fernando R. Tesón (2006).** *Rational Choice and Democratic Deliberation: A Theory of Discourse Failure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
   - *Core Contribution:* An unsparing public-choice critique demonstrating why face-to-face deliberation frequently fails to track truth and remains systematically vulnerable to cognitive bias, expressive signaling, and economic fallacies.
7. **Sack, Detlef, et al. (2024).** *Wissenschaftlicher Evaluationsbericht: Bürgerrat Ernährung im Wandel*. Wuppertal: Institut für Demokratie- und Partizipationsforschung (IDPF) / Deutscher Bundestag[28].
   - *Core Contribution:* The primary empirical evaluation of Germany's first federal parliamentary citizens' assembly, detailing recruitment dynamics, internal deliberation metrics, and the administrative fate of the Bürgergutachten in the Bundestag[28].

Implementability after the Fall

In a post-collapse environment characterized by the total and permanent loss of industrial supply chains, electronic microprocessors, telecommunication grids, and national state reach, complex legal decrees and algorithmic stratified sampling are impossible. If a surviving human settlement seeks to deploy sortition to prevent the return of warlordism or hereditary tyranny, it must construct a minimum viable version adapted to low-energy, physicalized constraints.

The Minimum Viable Model Across Scales

At the household scale (4 to 10 people), sortition must not be attempted. Governance must rely on direct customary consensus and task specialization. Sortition applied within a single domestic or foraging unit creates immediate operational paralysis and invites internal violence. At the village scale (300 people), the settlement should establish a rotational sortition council termed the Village Twenty. Every adult residing within the settlement (aged 16 and over, barring demonstrated incapacitating psychosis) is represented by a physical wooden or fired clay

token. A council of 20 members is drawn publicly by lot from an urn on the seasonal equinox, serving for a non-renewable term of six months (two agricultural quarters). The Twenty holds administrative authority over communal grain storehouses, defensive watch rosters, irrigation ditch maintenance, and initial dispute arbitration. To resolve the follow-through and legitimacy bottleneck, the Twenty possesses no sovereign legislative or capital power; any structural rule—such as changing land tenure boundaries, expelling an individual, or declaring hostilities against a neighboring band—must be framed by the Twenty and submitted to a mandatory plenary assembly of all 300 villagers (the ancient direct *Landsgemeinde* model). The sortition council frames the problem and executes daily logistics, while the mass direct assembly retains the final veto.

At the district scale (3,000 people across 10 villages), governance is organized as a bicameral District Ward. Each of the ten constituent villages selects two delegates via sortition from its outgoing village councils, forming a 20-member sortition body. This civilian ward is paired with a Council of Militia Captains (functionally chosen defense leaders). The Sortition Ward holds sole authority over auditing regional storehouses, verifying grain tax weights, inspecting boundary markers, and organizing mutual-defense signal networks. If the Sortition Ward and the Militia Captains deadlock on a district-wide policy, the dispute is referred down to the ten village assemblies for a simultaneous, synchronized physical tally vote.

Prerequisites to Start

To prevent a post-collapse sortition body from collapsing into an easily manipulated theater for local sociopaths, four physical artifacts must exist prior to convening:

First, the community requires a universal physical registry consisting of tangible records. In the absence of digital databases, names must be carved onto durable materials—such as fired clay tiles, slate, or hardwood rods—and stored in a publicly visible, triple-locked chest in the settlement's central storehouse. The physical lottery must take place in broad daylight before the gathered population, with tokens drawn by an unvested member of the community (such as a child under ten years of age) to eliminate sleight-of-hand manipulation.

Second, the polity needs a shared solar and lunar calendar. The dates of sortition draws, assembly debates, and audit deadlines must be physically anchored to immutable celestial markers—such as the solstices, equinoxes, or new moons—carved into a central post or stone monument. This prevents sitting officials from manipulating the calendar or unilaterally extending their terms of office.

Third, basic scribe literacy and physical ledger-keeping must be distributed. At least three independent individuals in the community must be literate and numerate to record assembly decisions, storehouse weights, and voting outcomes in a permanent, ink-and-parchment or clay-etched civic ledger (*The Book of Decisions*). If literacy is monopolized by a single priest or scribe, agenda capture is instantaneous.

Fourth, the settlement requires a dedicated, acoustic meeting place. A physical space protected from weather—such as a large timber hall, a stone barn, or a sheltered natural amphitheater—must be constructed to allow unamplified human speech to be heard clearly by 50 to 300 people simultaneously. Without acoustic equality, back-bench participants cannot hear arguments or detect covert intimidations.

The First Failure to Expect and Containment Strategy

The earliest, most predictable failure mode after collapse is immediate administrative sabotage by the captains of physical force (warlord drift). The individuals who command physical violence—the settlement's defensive militia, weapon-smiths, and physically dominant fighters—will ignore the sortition council the moment it issues a verdict that restricts their rations, commands their labor, or disciplines their kin. The fighters will treat the randomly chosen citizens as weak, unarmed meddlers whose clay tokens possess no coercive power. To contain this failure, the sortition council must never be given direct command of the militia, nor should the militia be allowed to govern. Instead, the settlement must institute a strict physical hostage and logistics split. Weapons must be stored separately from food supplies, and the sortition council must be established as the exclusive physical key-holders of survival logistics. The sortition council controls the distribution of daily grain rations, seed-stock, and salt, while the fighters control perimeter defense. If the fighters attempt a coup against the council, the council's kin networks trigger an immediate physical embargo of the storehouses. Survival depends on hard, physicalized checks and balances: force without calories starves, and calories without force perish.

Principles

1. An advisory sortition assembly lacking a statutory procedural link to legacy institutions will have over two-thirds of its substantive recommendations ignored, diluted, or shelved by governing political elites[4].
2. Sortition-based mini-publics achieve durable constitutional and legislative impact only when their recommendations are directly channeled into binding, popular referendums of the entire electorate[1].
3. Decoupling the agenda-setting body from the deliberative assembly systematically reduces executive manipulation and prevents factions from simultaneously framing the problem and determining the policy outcome[7].
4. An institutionalized sortition body embedded in a parliamentary democracy will see its radical distributive proposals absorbed and neutralized by ministerial bureaucracies unless strict written justification mandates are enforced[7].
5. Mini-publics that combine randomly selected citizens with sitting elected politicians increase short-term legislative responsiveness at the expense of importing party-line voting discipline and back-stage elite steering[8].
6. Sortition assemblies that do not provide comprehensive participant remuneration systematically fail to achieve descriptive demographic representation due to severe economic self-selection attrition[42].
7. The internal epistemic enlightenment and depolarization achieved within a mini-public does not spontaneously diffuse to the non-participating mass public without an external institutional translation mechanism[28].
8. Secret-ballot voting within deliberative mini-publics is an indispensable structural safeguard against psychological intimidation, rhetorical bullying, and informal factional capture[18].

9. The susceptibility of a sortition body to administrative capture is directly proportional to the complexity of the informational dossiers and procedural rules controlled by its unelected secretariat[7].
10. At population scales exceeding the bioregion, sortition bodies cannot legitimately replace elected legislatures without generating severe mass-public alienation and populist revolt against the unchosen assembly[7].

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