

## Review: Claudio López-Guerra: Democracy and Disenfranchisement

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societal ageing, hence being more in line with how political actors frame ageing issues. Interestingly, at the very end, he writes: “elites of both worlds [also within politics] have been slow to adapt, hampered in their response by residual ageist assumptions and fear that in their respective markets that associating with ‘the elderly’ will terminally damage their brand” (174). Knowing that parties have to balance numerous considerations in their campaigning, perhaps the most relevant here being the balance of appealing to both young and old voting groups without repelling any one of them (“age-neutral campaigning”), it seems as if Davidson still wants the parties to do even more to adapt to the changing electoral markets and to attract the Grey Vote. Evidently, he does not perceive the rise of Grey Vote as a problem, merely as an inevitable development which the parties have to face in their strategies to remain electorally powerful. This stands as a vast contrast to other recent contributions, such as Willetts (2010) and Howker/Malik (2010), who portray the rise of the Grey Vote and growing power of the baby-boomer generations at the expense of the young and future generations as a profound problem – because the last group(s) are economically and politically marginalised. According to these latter contributions, political decision-makers should not pander to older voters; rather, they should take active measures to avoid the marginalisation of young voters and future generations and seek to establish more intergenerational justice. What seems to be evident is that subjects such as societal ageing and demographic changes – with reference to media framing, the marketing of politics and policy-making – have gained increased

importance in the literature during recent years, giving these issues the attention they deserve. However, the positions taken by media and political actors stand in strong contrast to each other – and new contributions in the coming years will and should continue to discuss and investigate how media and political actors, in theory and practice, relate to ageing issues.

In investigating issues that until now have not been studied together in such a context, Davidson makes a valuable contribution to the field of demographic changes and ageing in relation to the development of the media attitudes, political strategy and communication, and particularly the interplay between media and politics. This book undoubtedly lays the foundation for future studies. However, I have three criticisms. First, even though the language flows well in most parts of the book, I find it occasionally to be unnecessarily complicated and technical, particularly in the chapters outlining the theories of ageing, age as a political issue, and ageist stereotyping and discrimination. Secondly, Davidson has a tendency to repeat himself. Of course, keeping a narrative thread and consequently making sure that we are not lost in what the book is aiming to do or trying to explain is always a good thing. However, sometimes I find the repetition unnecessary, for instance when he outlines basically the same argument or gives the same explanation over and over again. Two examples are his justification for defining the Grey Vote as all voters aged 55+ instead of all voters aged 65+, and, especially, his reference to the disharmony between how the media in general have framed ageing issues and how the political parties have done it; this is, in various ways, repeated nu-

merous times in the last three chapters. Thirdly and lastly – and this is really an aesthetic criticism – the publishers, and perhaps Davidson himself, should have made the text easier on the eye. Except for chapter ten, which provides the background numbers and quantifies the Grey Vote, the book does not include many tables, figures or illustrations. Obviously, there is no point in including tables, figures or illustrations only for their own sake, but pages filled with text can be tiresome to read. At the very least, the text should have been split into more paragraphs in order to make it more comfortable for the reader.

*Scott Davidson (2012): Going Grey: The Mediation of Politics in an Ageing Society. Farnham: Ashgate. 195 pages. ISBN: 9781409433927. Price: £60.*

#### **Cited literature:**

Howker, Ed / Shiv, Malik (2010): *The Jilted Generation. How Britain has bankrupted its youth.* London: Icon Books.

Irwin, Sarah (1996): Age Related Distributive Justice Claims on Resources. In: *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 47 (1), 68-92.

Turner, Bryan (1989): Ageing, Status Politics and Sociological Theory. In: *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 40 (4), 771-781.

Wilkoszewski, Harald (2009): Age Trajectories of Social Policy Preferences. Support for Intergenerational Transfers from a Demographic Perspective. MPIDR Working Paper WP 2009-034. Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research.

Willetts, David (2010): *The Pinch. How the Baby Boomers Took their Children's Future, and Why they Should Give it Back.* London: Atlantic Books.

## Claudio López-Guerra: Democracy and Disenfranchisement

*Reviewed by Madeleine Pitkin*

Even though the topic of enfranchisement might not be considered a defining feature of the contemporary period, debates about whether certain groups of people – such as prisoners or teenagers – should be given the vote are currently taking place all over the

world. In 2011, a voting trial allowed sixteen and seventeen year olds from certain selected municipalities to vote in the local elections in Norway, and the United Kingdom continues to resist pressure from the European Court of Human Rights to allow its prisoners to vote.

Claudio López-Guerra finds that most of these debates take for granted that suffrage is a fundamental individual entitlement. In his seven-chapter-long book, the author first contests this largely accepted notion and presents a system in which most of a population would be randomly excluded as a

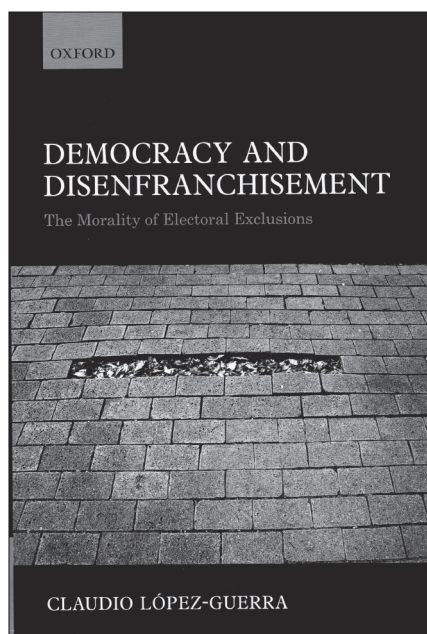
morally acceptable alternative to universal suffrage, before contesting normal conceptions about who may or may not vote and for what reasons.

In the introduction, López-Guerra describes the book's purpose. He intends for it "to shed light on [...] the choice of rules that determine membership of the electorate" (11). He introduces the readers to the "Conventional Suffrage Doctrine" accepted in most countries. The doctrine is composed of the notions that excluding sane residents and citizens residing in another country cannot be justified, whereas excluding minors, the mentally impaired, resident non-citizens and those convicted of felony charges can be (3). He states his intention to reverse these normal ideas; the negative thesis of the book is that the doctrine should be rejected.

In the second part of the introduction, the author defends his plan to achieve his goal through a problem-driven study, by presenting its advantages over a traditional theory-driven study. For example, a problem-driven study draws its information from relevant and ethical resources, rather than relying on abstract theories and principles. Also, unlike a theory-driven study, a problem-driven inquiry does not presuppose that a solution is canned inside a particular philosophical framework.

López-Guerra presents his *enfranchisement lottery* in the next section of the book, by which, before each election, the majority of a population would be randomly excluded, leaving a smaller but demographically identical electorate to that which would exist if a country were to employ the method of universal suffrage. These remaining electors would be required to take part in a competence-building process before being allowed to cast their votes.

The competence-building process is not intended to ensure that all voters have the minimum voting ability to be able to cast a vote; rather, it is intended to give voters "optimal voting competence". By this, the author means that the electors are optimally informed about the choices on the ballot. He rejects the deep-seated idea that it is never acceptable to prevent sane adults from voting, because he holds the belief that optimally-informed voters would make "better" choices and "bad" outcomes would thus be less likely. He presents six potential objections to the lottery. Having rejected each objection, he concludes that the lottery is morally acceptable in certain contexts. We are not required to adopt the enfranchise-



ment lottery in these favourable contexts, but it would be morally acceptable to do so. Chapter three deals with the enfranchisement of children and the mentally disabled. It is argued that we lack empirical evidence to support the notions that young people and the mentally impaired would be influenced by their guardians or that they lack sufficient interest in politics and that they would make random or poor choices at the ballot. Such evidence could be obtained by enfranchising these groups. López-Guerra's second argument in support of their enfranchisement is that, since many members of these groups have the minimum necessary moral and cognitive capacity to vote, fairness requires their inclusion.

The author considers some of the arguments against the enfranchisement of minors and the mentally disabled but finds them to be lacking. One such argument against the enfranchisement of children is that, since the treatment is universal (i.e. everyone is disenfranchised until adulthood), it is acceptable. López-Guerra disputes this claim: "That a certain (mis)treatment applies to everyone and eventually ends does not make it just" (70).

He argues that, although there is no argument to support such a claim, even if it is assumed for the sake of argument that the enfranchisement of minors would have a negative effect in the short term, it could aid democracy in the long term by "creating a more engaged and public-spirited citizenry" (67).

The fourth chapter is concerned with the issue of disenfranchisement of non-residents and non-citizens. The author reverses the

widely accepted idea that non-residents should be allowed to vote in their home country but that non-citizens may not vote in their country of residence. The distinction between resident and citizen is not clear-cut and, except that in the cases of taxation and military service, residents of a country are subject to its governance and laws whereas non-resident citizens are not. Non-citizen residents are thus more deserving of a vote. López-Guerra considers and contends several other arguments in support of the enfranchisement of non-resident citizens, concluding that we are not morally obliged to give them the right to vote.

He also considers the principle of affected interests, which prescribes the enfranchisement of everyone whose interests could be affected by the election of a political group. The author accepts the moral principle but rejects the institutional principle of enfranchising all affected interests. He contends the proposed cross-voting method, by which individuals could vote in any election which affects their interest, and instead promotes a model for federalisation. A higher authority could be democratically appointed to deal with common affairs.

In the next section, the author argues against the disenfranchisement of imprisoned convicts. They are, he argues, still a part of society and their basic interests are dependent on decisions made by elected bodies. Epistemic arguments, and arguments concerning respect, punishment and democratic identity are found to be lacking. A difference between being denied the right to vote and being denied the opportunity to vote is distinguished and, since conditions in many of the world's prisons are unsuitable for holding free and fair elections, the author admits that it may be appropriate to deny prisoners the opportunity to vote in many cases.

Finally, democratic theory related to the topic is explored. Democracy's prescriptions are very general and give no guidance as to who should make decisions. The author concludes that democratic theory is not helpful in settling the controversial issues dealt with in the book.

The book is well written and accessible. The relevant topic and the approach to the topic mean that the book is of interest and comprehensible not just to philosophers and political scientists, but also to individuals with less background knowledge of the theme of suffrage. The author's register, and particularly his choice of vocabulary, also promotes ease of reading. Topic-specific concepts and

vocabulary are explicitly explained. However, López-Guerra does sometimes fail to clarify terms. Throughout the book, he refers to “good” and “bad” electoral choices and outcomes. For example, on page 32 it is stated that “a well-informed electorate would make the incidence of bad electoral results less likely.” What is meant by a “bad electoral result” is not explained. The reader is left to wonder whether he is referring to an outcome that is morally or democratically “bad”, such as a dictatorial party gaining power, or simply an outcome ill-suited to the interests of the majority of the population. Two more examples are from page 64: “make bad choices” and “the best option on the ballot”. The best option on the ballot could be the option that would most represent the electors’ individual interests, the interests of their age cohort, or the interests of the population, depending on from which concern we consider the term “best”. Alternatively, it could also be the least corrupt option.

Occasionally, some clarification of these ambiguities is offered. When considering the

potential voting tendencies of children, López-Guerra suggests that a poor choice from a minor might be “inappropriate from the perspective of an uncontroversial normative standard”. Yet he also argues that even a choice which is inappropriate on these grounds is not “dismissible ex ante as clearly unacceptable”, without explaining why.

A further criticism is that the book’s proposals sometimes lack detail. This is deliberate: the author states on page 25 that if he were to “present a detailed version of the lottery, chances are few people would accept it.” His goal is only to convince his readers that the enfranchisement lottery is morally acceptable, not to implement it, so it is understandable that he does not want to dissuade people on the basis of the finer points. This deliberate vagueness, however, can be frustrating. Some of the important issues not tackled are the size of the group of electors, the method of gathering a random sample of the population, and what the competence-building process would involve. López-Guerra asks us to consider the en-

franchisement lottery under the most favourable conditions, but it might be helpful to know how and if it is possible that these conditions could come to exist.

López-Guerra argues his case passionately; his arguments are balanced. He considers objections to all of his proposals and arguments and admits to their failings. In chapter two, for example, he admits that potential undesirable corruptive effects may be strong enough to reject the lottery, and that the enfranchisement lottery is less transparent than the current system of universal suffrage. The book incorporates literature from around the world and from many different disciplines, including history, philosophy and political science. However, the referencing is clumsy, and there are some mistakes in the bibliography (Beckmann, Calvino, Daniels, Hariss, Holyoake, Kahneman).

*Claudio López-Guerra (2014): Democracy and Disenfranchisement: The Morality of Electoral Exclusions. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 189 pages. ISBN: 978-0198705789. Price: £50.*

## Hélène Landemore: Democratic Reason

*Reviewed by Madeleine Pitkin*

Landemore’s new book argues that democracy, the form of rule in Western nations, is valuable based on the idea of collective intelligence. It presents arguments supporting the collective intelligence of the people, which Landemore calls “Democratic Reason”. The book aims to convince readers, including those who may not share Western faith in democracy, that democracy epistemically outperforms any form of non-democratic rule. The book has eight chapters, a conclusion, an index and a bibliography.

In the introductory chapter, Landemore introduces the very concept of democracy, which she defines as “an inclusive decision making procedure” (10). The author discusses the originality of her book, which stems from her original argument that explicitly connects the epistemic properties of a liberal society and those of democratic de-

cision-making procedures. Landemore states her intention to defend “collective intelligence” in favour of democracy, on the basis that with collective intelligence comes “cognitive diversity” (the existence of different ways of seeing the world (5)), a property which she attributes to good political decisions. She illustrates her epistemic argument for democracy with an applied maze model. Chapter two illustrates the notion of the only-recent acceptance of democracy in the Western world. It considers the deep-seated anti-democratic prejudice shared by many contemporary political philosophers against the rule of the “dumb many”, and provides four positive and four epistemic reproaches to such prejudice. The positive reproaches are that citizens are irrational, citizens are apathetic, citizens are ignorant, and democratic decisions are impossible and meaningless. Turning now to the normative approaches,

Landemore considers the elitist theories of democracy, the participatory theories of democracy, the deliberative theories of democracy, and finally epistemic theories. Also in chapter two, the author carries out a critical literature survey focusing on work by José Luis Martí (2006) and David Estlund (2008), among other democratic theorists. The author continues to think critically about other work in the third chapter, which is dedicated to a history of ideas about collective intelligence. Landemore distinguishes two mechanisms for the production of collective intelligence: deliberation and aggregation. She separates the historical thinkers into two groups according to these mechanisms: “talkers”, who have deduced that democratic reason is a function of individual reason, and “counters”, who focus on the epistemic properties of judgement aggregation involving large numbers of people.