# The Role of Sortition in Student Democracy

# The Role of Sortition in Student Democ...

- Welcome and introductions
  - Ricardo Visinho - Head of Student Voice at LSESU
  - Sinéad Gavin - Representation Manager at LSESU
  - Ben Borowiecki - Democracy Coordinator at LSESU
- A Brief Introduction to Sortition
- The Pros and Cons of Sortition
- Sortition in Students' Unions
- Sortition Exercise
- Questions?

# A Brief Introduction to Sortition

# A Brief Introduction to Sortition

- What do you think sortition is?

- Where do you think sortition originates?
  - Athens!

# A Brief Introduction to Sortition

- In 5th century BC Athens democracy meant <u>direct democracy</u> (rule by the people), whereas election was considered to be a form of oligarchy (rule by the few) or aristocracy (rule by the best)
- Any of its 30,000 eligible citizens could attend the *Ecclesia* (its general assembly meeting) to propose laws, bring public lawsuits or address its fellow citizens several times per month
- Where selection otherwise took placed, its positions/bodies primarily appointed by random lottery:
  - Jurors
  - Magistrates
  - The *Boule* – a 500 member agenda setting governing council
- Only positions which were felt to require expertise (such as appointment of generals) were elected

# A Brief Introduction to Sortition

- How representative do you think Athenian democracy was?
  - Only included 30,000 eligible citizens
  - Excluded several groups, including women, foreigners, slaves, children and others whose rights were otherwise revoked
  - It is estimated only 10-20% of the population were eligible for sortition
- Also used down the years in different ways in Lombardy, Florence, Venice, India and Switzerland

# A Brief Introduction to Sortition

- Examples where sortition is used today
  - Law court juries
    - *In some countries such as UK and US*
  - Deliberative poll
    - *Type of opinion poll designed to gauge how opinions might change when presented with more information and thoughtful discussion*
  - Citizens' assemblies or citizens' juries
    - *Grown in usage in recent decades*
    - *How students now pass policy at LSESU*

# What is a Citizens' Assembly

- *"A citizens' assembly brings together a broadly representative bunch of people, selected by lottery, to decide how we should live together."*
  - The Sortition Foundation
- Key word here is representative
- Different, therefore, to pure lottery systems in that they aim to create a microcosm of a particular public, community, group, society, etc.

# How do Citizens' Assemblies work?

You have **sortition process** and an **assembly process**

1. Sortition process
   a. <u>Invitation</u>
      i. Large number of invitations sent out to members of the public/community at random asking them to participate
   b. <u>Stratification</u>
      i. From those who respond positively, a second lottery takes place according to pre-defined criteria to select a cohort that is demographically representative
2. Assembly process
   a. Once selected, members of the citizens' assembly are provided with time, access to people with relevant viewpoints/expertise and other resources so that they can:
      i. <u>Learn</u> deeply about the issue
      ii. <u>Deliberate</u> about the issue
      iii. <u>Decide</u> and issue a shared set of recommendations

# Examples of Citizens' Assemblies

● Global Assembly
  a. *A 100 person citizens' assembly composed of people from around the world supported by the UN to discuss issues facing the entire world.*
  b. *First Global Assembly designed to coincide with the 2021 Glasgow COP and focused on issue of climate change*
● Ireland's Citizens' Assembly
  a. *Set up in 2016*
  b. *Played crucial role in shaping Ireland's policies on abortion, climate change, population ageing and fixed-term parliaments*
● Citizens' Assembly of British Columbia
  a. *Formed in 2004 and 2009*
  b. *Focused on electoral reform in provincial elections in Canada*
● French Citizens' Convention for Climate:
  a. *Set up in 2019 to propose greenhouse gas reduction measures*

# What are the pros of sortition?

9 minutes to discuss

**What are the pros of sortition?**

- Genuinely representative
- More egalitarian - breaks down systemic societal biases/barriers which disproportionately prevent marginalised demographics from accessing positions of power
- Counters over-representation of politically active groups
- Safeguards against factionalism
- Less corruptible
- Cognitive diversity (different ways of seeing the world and interpreting events within it are introduced)
- Greater efficiency (people are there for one purpose only)
- Less political (not voted in/linked to parties, etc.), so reduces negative aspects of politics such as *quid pro quos*
- More democratic (in original meaning of the word) - empowers and engages ordinary people

# What are the cons of sortition?

5 minutes to discuss

**What are the cons of sortition?**

- Are ordinary people competent enough to make big decisions on every issue?
- Might be less representative (if pool drawn from is too narrow)
- Less legitimate vs elections (less democratic in terms of how democracy is broadly understood today)
- Less accountability (people not subject to reelection or otherwise accountable for decisions taken)
- Less enthusiasm (being selected by lot means the exclusion of those who might passionately volunteer to engage in those debates and decisions by seeking election, for example)

# Sortition in Practice: LSESU

## Using Sortition in a Democracy Review

**2021/22 Democracy Review**
- 'Democracy Summit'
  - Gender
  - Ethnicity
  - Disability
  - Level of study
  - Fee status
  - In receipt of a bursary
  - Voting history in LSESU elections
- Met over 3 days to:
  - <u>Learn</u> – understanding context, challenges and other areas of innovation
  - <u>Deliberate</u> – discussing potential solutions
  - <u>Decide</u> – agreeing practical action and recommendations

- Informed by:
  - <u>People</u>
    - Experts and lived experience witnesses from across other SUs and outside HE sector altogether

  - <u>Data/research</u>
    - Focus groups and interviews with underrepresented students e.g. BME, commuting, disabled students

    - All student survey
      - 640 completions

● Summit members made 15 recommendations

● Provided blueprint for the democratic structure we have been implementing since last year

- Strong mandate for delivering these changes to LSESU democratic systems

- Recommendations influenced by *all* voices at LSE, not just the loudest and most confident in the room

- Student perspectives

# Sortition in Students' Unions: LSESU

# Using Sortition in Democratic Processes

- Democracy Summit members placed sortition at the heart of their recommendations for the new democratic system

- Previously:
  - Student proposes policy
  - Policy is discussed at the next Student Members' Meeting
  - Policy goes to all-student vote, open for 24 hours
  - 250 student quorum
  - Simple majority vote
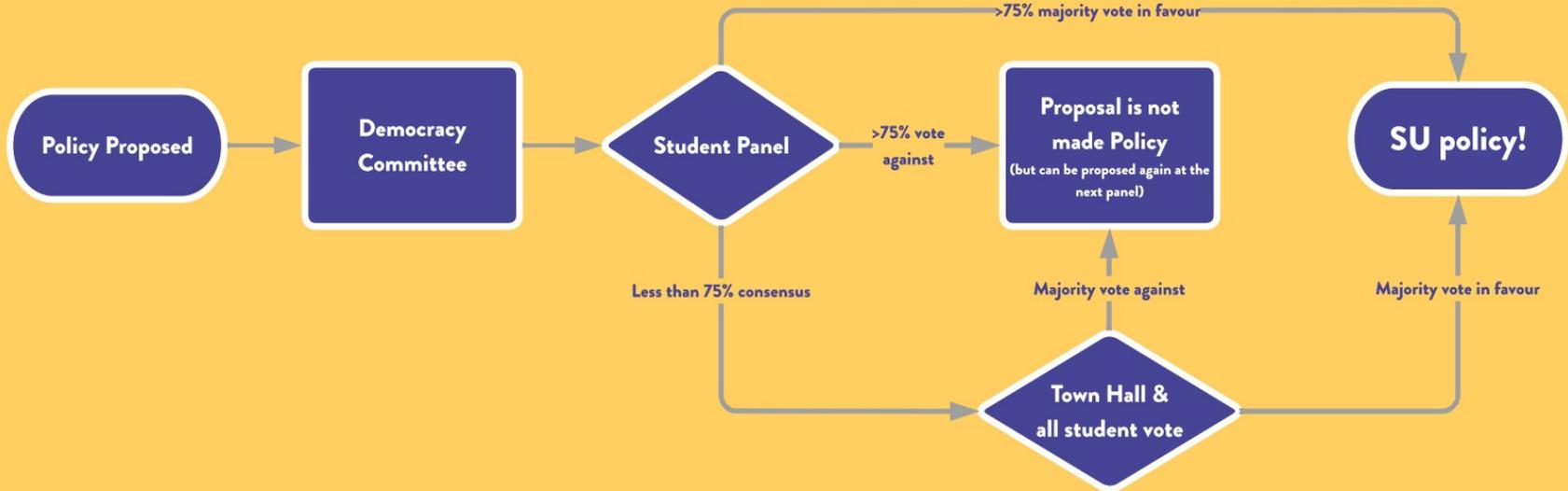
# The Old Way: Problems

- Motions repeatedly failing to hit 250 quorum

- Large onus on proposer to personally campaign
  - Not accessible, few proposers

- Policy passing dependent on proposer's circle - not representative of wider student body

- Attempts to incentivise students to vote = unconsidered voting

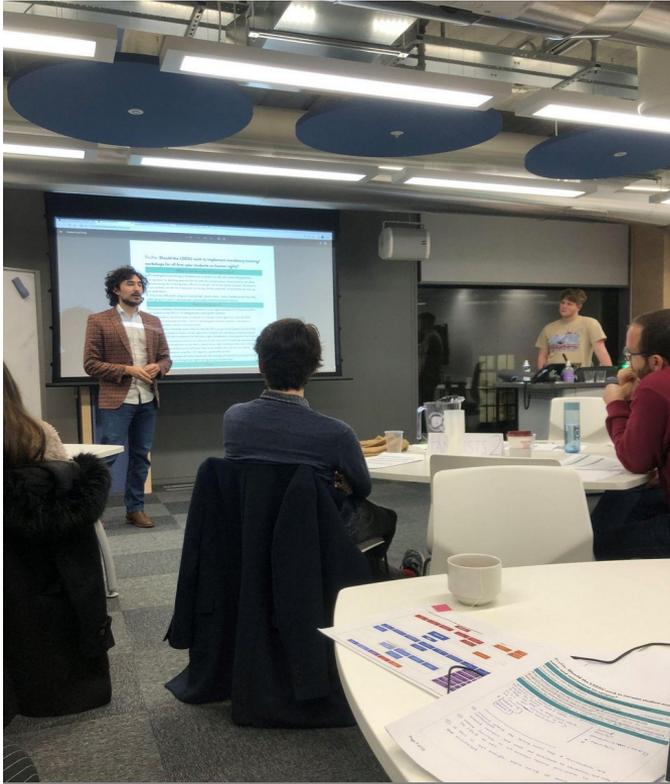# Democracy with Sortition

- New system:
  - ○ Student proposes policy
  - ○ Proposal presented at a Student Panel
    - ■ 20 students selected by sortition
    - ■ Proposers, opposers, and invited "Expert Witnesses"
    - ■ Deliberation, and vote

# How to Make a Policy at LSESU

LSE STUDENTS' UNION

Policy Proposed → Democracy Committee → Student Panel

Student Panel —>75% vote against→ Proposal is not made Policy (but can be proposed again at the next panel)

Student Panel — Less than 75% consensus → Town Hall & all student vote

>75% majority vote in favour → SU policy!

Town Hall & all student vote — Majority vote against → Proposal is not made Policy (but can be proposed again at the next panel)

Town Hall & all student vote — Majority vote in favour → SU policy!

# Sortition in Students' Unions: LSESU

# The New Way: Benefits

- Removes onus of campaigning from proposers

- Students voting have a thorough understanding of the issue

- Students voting are representative of student body

- Brings students in to democratic process = engagement

# Student Feedback on Student Panels

- 100% of panellists felt supported by staff

- 100% felt that the panels were open, fair and inclusive

- 100% would recommend joining a future panel to a friend

# Student Feedback on Student Panels

"I loved the opportunity to represent students and their views in front of the SU as I truly believed that I was making a change. I would also love to be part of more of these panels"

"Go democracy!"

"I think the panel was a great way to communicate student's issues and encourage a democratic movement"

## The New Way: Issues

● <u>Much</u> more time intensive

● More associated costs

● Some push back from students - disenfranchisement of the rest of the student body?

● Limit to the number of policies that can be discussed

# Sortition in the Wider SU Sector

# Sortition at other SUs

- **Leeds University Union**
  - Better Forums
    - Student panel = 16 students selected via sortition
    - Students present policy ideas to student panel to be voted on

- **Liverpool Guild**
  - Guild Summit
    - 50 students selected by sortition
    - Summit members discuss student ideas

# Sortition Time!

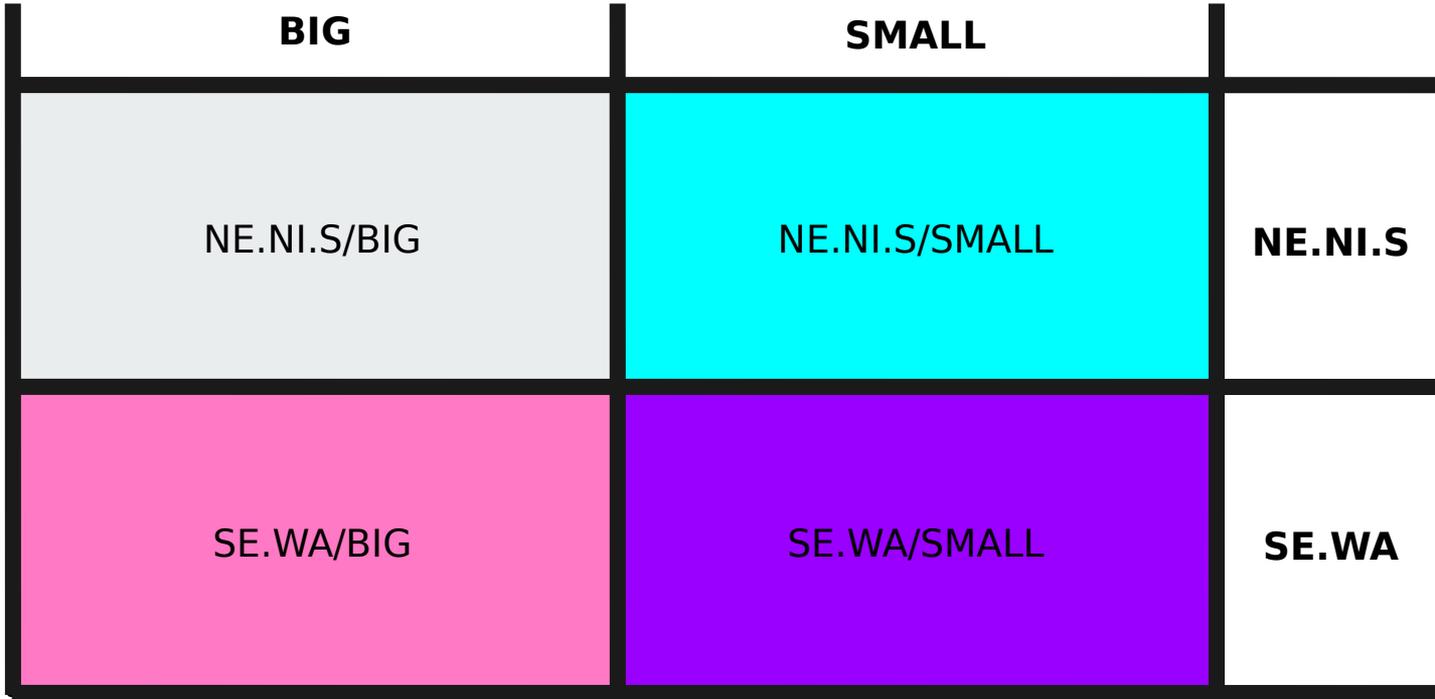# *Your* Institution's Sortition Criteria

- Where does your institution fit?   (self-identifying)

  ○ Geographic Criteria:

    ■ Northern England, Scotland and Northern Ireland

    ■ Southern England and Wales

  ○ Size:

    ■ Big

    ■ Small

Median University size in the UK is approx. 14,000 students

# Four Quadrants



|  | BIG | SMALL |  |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | NE.NI.S/BIG | NE.NI.S/SMALL | **NE.NI.S** |
|  | SE.WA/BIG | SE.WA/SMALL | **SE.WA** |

# Chat about Sortition

- Choose a topic from the bucket!
  - How could sortition be used for your topic?
    - Should it be used for your topic?
- What do you like about sortition?
  - What do you dislike?
- How might sortition affect fairness, accessibility, representation, expertise, lived experience, accountability?

# Questions?

# THANK YOU!

If you have any questions or wait to connect subsequently, you can contact us at:

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