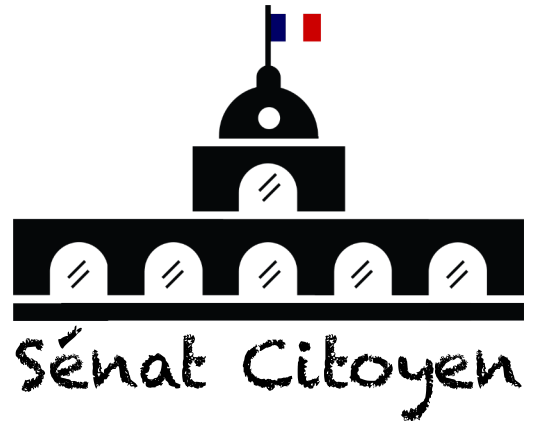


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A randomly-selected  
citizen chamber to  
save democracy?



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## How to address the issue representative democracies are facing: a growing disconnection between the elites and the people.

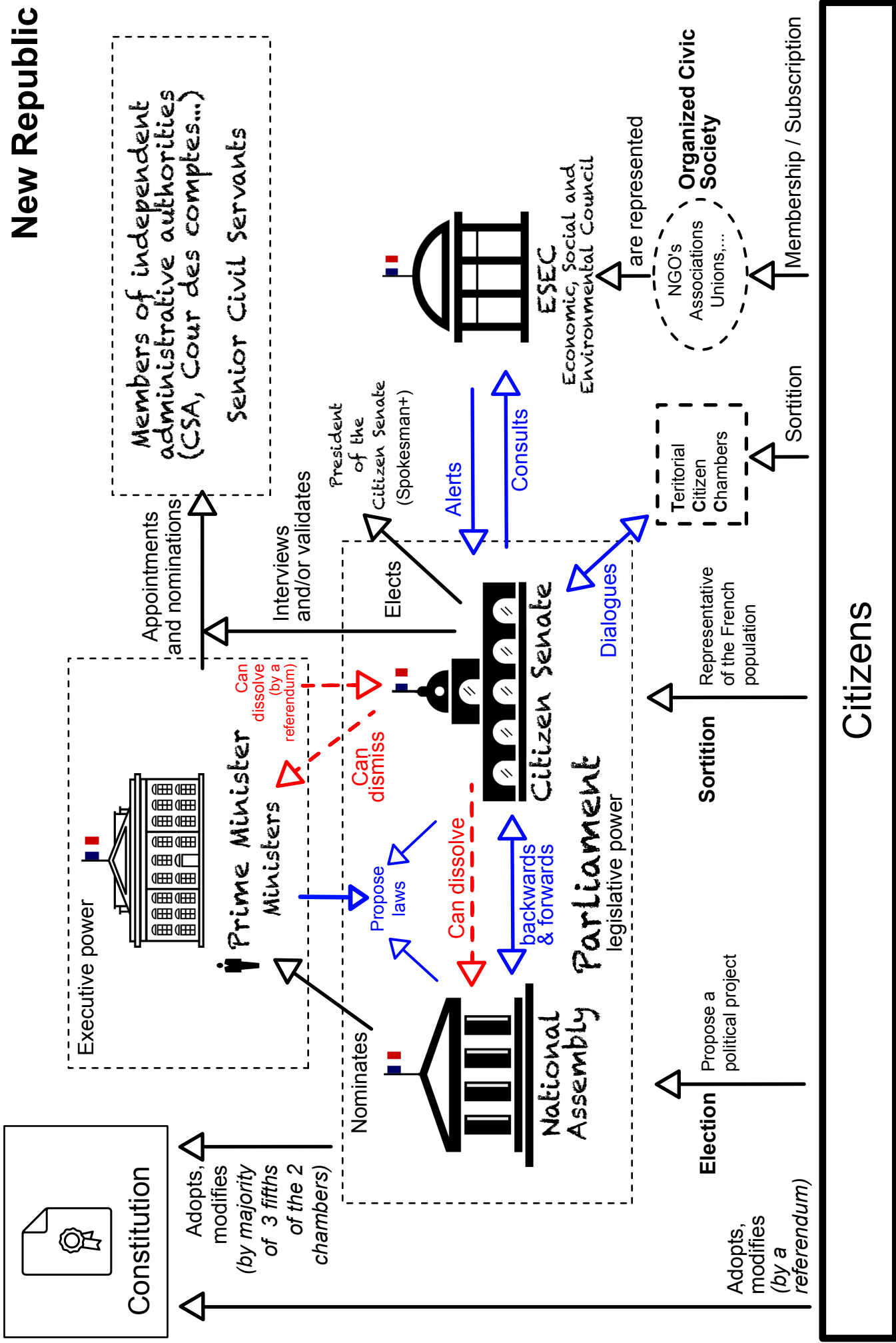
Modern democracies are all facing a growing disconnection between the elites and the people. How best can we address the issue leading to severe political tensions, if not worse ? Of course, the first answer could be to focus on changing the policies leading to economic, social, environmental and physical insecurity. But these issues are both well known and complex. The institutional frame for a rational dialogue within the entire society is missing. Furthermore, digital social networks tend to create "information bubbles" isolating people from adverse opinions. Instead of collective intelligence nourished by a wide diversity of points of views, we get a more and more superficial treatment of fundamental issues. Representative democracy, born a bit more than two centuries ago in poorly educated societies, has reached a limit. It is on the cliff edge.

We need a new democratic principle: **for each executive power or elected chamber there must be a citizen chamber selected by lots that questions and controls it.**

The control of the government only by professional politicians lacks efficiency. This new democratic principle will get us another step closer to the idealistic definition of democracy coined by Abraham Lincoln as "government of the people, by the people, for the people".

This new democratic principle will apply differently to each nation and their institutional histories. We are presenting here what could be France's future institutions according to this principle, as worked out by our Citizen Think Tank called "Sénat Citoyen", the name of the expected new institution. We mainly applied a "what if" approach.

# New Republic



## Introducing sortition efficiently in the political system

It is not in itself a democratic procedure but an impartial procedure. Sortition has been used for a democratic purpose in ancient Greece but also to manage oligarchies in the late Middle Ages in Italian Republics. Instead of making war between clans, they were choosing the ruling one thanks to sortition.

Choosing citizens by sortition to be representatives of the population makes it a sort of reduced society. It is thus possible to give some institutional

power to these citizens. They have not chosen to have this power and cannot be suspected of wanting this power for their own interest or for the interest of a particular group. Still, they are human beings and corruption is a risk. Controls must be made to prevent it. They will receive comfortable indemnities (at the same level as the members of the deputy chamber they question and control) and so they will risk fines or prison if they are unable to explain extra sources of revenues, even years after the end of their mandate.

### Which chamber should be selected by sortition ?

In France on the national level, the Senate is the more obvious chamber to convert into a citizen chamber: the Upper Chamber is criticized for its uselessness, its high cost and its ever conservative colour, some propose to get rid of it (mainly on the liberal side). We are almost the only ones to see a great future to the "Sénat" but of course turned into a "Sénat Citoyen", "Citizen Senate" in English. In a bicameral system the High Chamber is a good candidate to become a citizen chamber.

### Representativeness

Citizens will be randomly selected so that the Citizen Senate is a representative cross-section of the population (3 criteria: gender age and geographical distribution). The territorial characteristic of the French Senate is kept intact, there will be as many citizens picked from each region as there are senators elected from these regions. The two other criteria are quite

straightforward: absolute gender equality will be respected as well as age according to the population.

Women and young people will benefit the most of a citizen chamber in terms of representativeness.

### Powers of the citizen chamber

The Citizen Senate will be fully involved in legislative work and therefore vote laws and the budget. To ensure check and balances it will not have the last word against the National Assembly, the Lower Chamber, but will have the power to dissolve the lower chamber and to dismiss the government, with a majority of 60%.

To make use of this power, the Citizen Senate must express a motive for destitution or dissolution. There is no restriction about this motive. But there is a possibility for the executive power to call a referendum to re-draw it by lots, a sort of dissolution. This referendum procedure is pre-defined and requires 3 questions: must we re-draw the citizen chamber? must we

destitute the government ? must we dissolve the Lower Chamber (National Assembly) ? It is a heavy procedure that should remain exceptional. But the citizen chamber must be aware they have to make sure their decisions are understood by the population. They mustn't create another insulated bubble besides the elites and the people.

### A two-year mandate

The randomly selected citizens will receive video training and some weekend training during the 6 months between the drawing of the lots and the 1st day of their mandate. This will leave them time to organize their new temporary life. A two-year mandate with a renewal of the citizen chamber by half every year seems optimal. If shorter, there would be an efficiency issue, as one needs to understand the job. If longer there could be a personal and professional life issue, as one needs to stay connected with one's environment. The job is full time, the Citizen Senators must be able to deliberate and consult experts. The goal is to co-construct policies with the elected politicians for the good of the nation.

### Expertise by the Civil Society Chamber

In France the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (ESEC) is where the organized civil society is represented. Associations, NGOs, Unions and Employers' association deal with the issues that seem important to them. It's only a consultative chamber but it will have the right to alert the Citizen Senate if some law is presenting any kind of risk it should be aware of. Being only consultative there is no risk of contesting the legitimacy of their members. Being a natural interlocutor of the Citizen Senate, it gains power indirectly.

### Territorial Citizen Chambers

The new democratic principle applies at all levels. Each region and city has its own Citizen Chamber. They build a network of citizens drawn by lots that can dialogue with the Citizen Senate. They must make sure the local levels are not forgotten by the national level. According to the role of these chambers they may not be working full time.

### Restoring trust within society and in political institutions

The elites might think they control the system and society. They try to do what seems to be done on the short run and live in the illusion they are good at it. They are in reality in a sort of "Marie Antoinette Syndrome", disconnected from the reality lived by the people shouting for bread. Let's not forget that the French queen, although not responsible for the nation's policy, ended decapitated.

The cost of an inefficient political system is huge on the long run. The proposed citizen sortation chamber included in a check and balance system is aiming to bring collective intelligence at a higher level in the political institutions. Co-construction of the policies between elected politicians and drawn-by-lots citizens is the main goal.