



Democracy and Disenfranchisement: The Morality of Electoral Exclusions

By Claudio López-Guerra

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The denial of voting rights to certain types of persons continues to be a moral problem of practical significance. The disenfranchisement of persons with mental impairments, minors, noncitizen residents, nonresident citizens, and criminal offenders is a matter of controversy in many countries. How should we think morally about electoral exclusions? What should we conclude about these particular cases? This book proposes a set of principles, called the Critical Suffrage Doctrine, that defies conventional beliefs on the legitimate denial of the franchise. According to the Critical Suffrage Doctrine, in some realistic circumstances it is morally acceptable to adopt an alternative to universal suffrage that would exclude the vast majority of sane adults for being largely uninformed. Thus, contrary to what most people believe, current controversies on the franchise are not about exploring the limits of a basic moral right. Regarding such controversies, the Critical Suffrage Doctrine establishes that, in polities with universal suffrage, the blanket disenfranchisement of minors and the mentally impaired cannot be justified; that noncitizen residents should be allowed to vote; that excluding nonresident citizens is permissible; and that criminal offenders should not be disenfranchised—although facilitating voting from prison is not required in all contexts. Political theorists have rarely submitted the franchise to serious scrutiny. Hence this study makes a contribution to a largely neglected and important subject.

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Editorial Review

Review

In Democracy and Disenfranchisement, Claudio López-Guerra challenges our conventional understanding of the vote as a fundamental right, and poses crucial questions about the scope of the franchise. Should expatriates or non-citizen residents have the right to vote? Should felons? Should children? Through rigorous analysis of the logic of institutional design, López-Guerra presses us to reconsider our views on some of the most important moral and political issues of our time. The book is a deeply impressive contribution to democratic theory. ***Melissa Schwartzberg, New York University***

López-Guerra analyzes the moral foundations of the right to vote with rigor and ingenuity. By shifting the focus to reasons for denying the right, he casts new light on reasons for granting it. Against the grain, he argues that the right is not fundamental and may be denied to some who now enjoy it. But he also shows why it should be granted to many who are now disenfranchised. Democracy and Disenfranchisement will challenge anyone who would think seriously about who should have the right to vote. ***Dennis F. Thompson, Harvard University***

"Claudio López-Guerra's Democracy and Disenfranchisement is a fascinating book that challenges most people's basic assumptions about who ought to have the right to vote. It's required reading for anyone working on democratic theory, voting ethics, and theories of political rights." ***Jason Brennan, Social Theory and Practice***

"In Democracy and Disenfranchisement, Claudio López-Guerra develops a case against what he calls the 'Conventional Suffrage Doctrine' (CSD) ... The book is well structured and well written, clearly setting up the scope of the problem and systematically working through the issues raised in each instance ... López-Guerra's arguments on each of the five components of his CSD are well developed and interesting ... This book is a good source for considerations of what modern Democratic theory takes for granted, and why we ought not to do so." ***-Nicholas Munn, Journal of Applied Philosophy***.

"In this provocative book, Claudio López-Guerra argues that many of our conventional beliefs about the franchise are entirely backward. ... As is evident, this is an ambitious book and there is much of interest ... [E]ven if some or all of [López-Guerra's arguments] are flawed, they are instructive insofar as they require us to reconsider the value of the franchise and the reasons for which it should be bestowed." ***-Ben Saunders, Political Theory***

"[López-Guerra's] ideas fit comfortably in the mode of arguing for extending the franchise to previously excluded groups -- following the pull of history... it seems we really do cling to the right to vote for everyone who is capable ... it is to López-Guerra's credit that parts of his tightly argued book (a welcome addition to the regrettably slim library on the subject) may move us to cling to this notion a little less firmly." ***-Chad Flanders, Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews***

"López-Guerra's theoretical contribution to the question of children's voting is definitely cutting edge, and his ideas about prisoners' voting are persuasive ... the author carries out a critical and systematic reading of all aspects of the universal suffrage principle by presenting interesting and thought-provoking ideas. This book should be considered both by those interested generally in the political philosophy of elections and those interested in reading a thoughtful and critical analysis of the many categories of exclusion/inclusion

that configure the rules of the franchise." **Pablo Marshall, Contemporary Political Theory**

"well written and accessible ... 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 ... 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." **Madeleine Pitkin, Intergenerational Justice Review**

From the Back Cover

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Lopez-Guerra analyzes the moral foundations of the right to vote with rigor and ingenuity. By shifting the focus to reasons for denying the right, he casts new light on reasons for granting it. Against the grain, he argues that the right is not fundamental and may be denied to some who now enjoy it. But he also shows why it should be granted to many who are now disenfranchised. Democracy and Disenfranchisement will challenge anyone who would think seriously about who should have the right to vote. **Dennis F. Thompson, Harvard University**

About the Author

Claudio Lopez-Guerra, *Research Professor, Department of Political Studies, Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (CIDE, Mexico City)*

Claudio Lopez-Guerra's work focuses on political ethics. He has published articles in academic journals such as *The Journal of Political Philosophy*; *Politics, Philosophy and Economics*; and *Social Theory and Practice*. He is Research Professor of Political Studies, Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (CIDE) in Mexico City.

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