

## POLITICAL AGENCY AND BASIC EQUALITY

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**Abstract:** Advocates of liberal democracy believe that we should treat individual citizens equally in terms of certain political rights. They believe, first and foremost, that each person should have the same voting power. What is the basis of this equality? I suggest that if, as seems plausible, the reasons behind the political equality of individual citizens are not wholly instrumental, they must depend on certain features of the citizens themselves. In other words, individual capacities for political agency ground individuals' "basic equality" as citizens, in virtue of which they should enjoy certain equal political rights. A problem arises, however, when we consider that individuals' agential capacities are unequal: they are more or less competent in their political judgements and actions, more or less capable of perceiving and weighing their own and others' interests, and so on. However, the idea that we should respect individuals as beings that possess and exercise these capacities implies that we should treat them as equal insofar as they fall within a given range of capacities. Elsewhere, I have called this kind of respect "opacity respect", because it involves turning a blind eye to degrees of capacities above a minimum threshold. In order to defend the political equality of individual citizens, then, we need an account of the relevant capacities for individual political agency, and of why a state that respects its citizens as agents must turn a blind eye to the levels to which they possess those capacities above an undemanding minimum qualifying threshold. Such an account will give us a non-instrumental reason for rejecting recent flirtations with the ideas of plural voting and "epistocracy", which involve abandoning or significantly weakening citizens' basic equality.