Concept Note, Vernon Hills, 2026.

Aretecracy as Qualified Democracy: Professionalizing Political Power.

Arrieta-López, Milton.

Concept Note

Aretecracy as Qualified Democracy: Professionalizing Political Power

Milton Arrieta-López
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3437-5025
Oakton College, Illinois, USA.
King Juan Carlos University, Madrid, Spain.

Overview

Aretecracy can be understood as a model of **qualified democracy**: a democratic system that preserves universal suffrage and free elections while introducing civic–ethical qualification requirements for those who seek to exercise political power. Rather than replacing democracy, aretecracy aims to strengthen it by treating political leadership as a professional activity with real responsibilities, enforceable standards, and meaningful consequences for misconduct. *In contemporary political theory, aretecracy is also referred to as a form of qualified democracy.*

Its central premise is simple yet demanding: political power is too consequential to be exercised without prior qualification, supervision, and accountability.

Conceptual Definition

Aretecracy derives from the Greek terms ἀρετή (*aretē*, virtue or excellence) and κράτος (*krátos*, power or rule). It refers to a democratic framework in which candidates for public office are subject to prior civic–ethical qualification processes before standing in universal elections.

Core Idea: Democracy Must Be Qualified

In contemporary democracies, virtually anyone may run for public office regardless of ethical record, civic competence, or independence from private interests. This absence of prior qualification has contributed to the rise of:

- populist actors who instrumentalize public frustration by offering simplistic solutions to complex structural problems;
- politicians financially dependent on private or corporate funding, thereby compromising their independence;
- and leaders whose primary loyalty is to personal ambition rather than to the electorate as a whole.

Aretecracy addresses this structural weakness by proposing that democratic choice should be informed and safeguarded, not left entirely exposed to manipulation, money, or demagogy.

Professionalizing Politics

Under an aretecratic framework, political office is treated as a regulated professional activity, comparable, though not identical to medicine, law, or engineering. This qualified democratic model includes:

- prior civic–ethical qualification before candidacy;
- independent supervisory and oversight bodies;
- and clear sanctions for ethical breaches, corruption, or abuse of power.

These mechanisms do not limit popular sovereignty; rather, they protect citizens from the harmful consequences of unqualified leadership. These professional standards require corresponding institutional arrangements capable of evaluation, supervision, and accountability over time.

Institutional Design (Conceptual Overview)

Within an aretecratic framework, the qualification stage is understood as a procedural safeguard rather than as a rigid or technocratic filter. Its purpose is to ensure that those who seek to exercise political power meet minimum standards of civic responsibility, ethical conduct, and constitutional understanding before becoming candidates in democratic elections.

This approach does not rely on a single fixed institutional model. Instead, the qualification process is conceived as institutionally adaptable. In some formulations, it may be overseen by centralized bodies specifically created for civic–ethical evaluation. In others, it may operate through decentralized arrangements, in which accredited external institutions—such as universities, professional associations, or independent civic bodies—carry out qualification tasks under a shared regulatory framework.

Across these possible configurations, certain core elements remain consistent: written and publicly accessible criteria, transparent procedures, mechanisms for review or appeal, and forms of external supervision or auditing. These elements are intended to balance institutional independence with accountability, reducing the risks of political capture or discretionary abuse.

Crucially, aretecratic institutional design treats political authorization as conditional and ongoing, rather than as a one-time certification. Qualification may therefore take the form of renewable credentials or licenses, subject to periodic evaluation. Where serious ethical breaches, corruption, or sustained violations of civic responsibility are demonstrated through due process, the same institutional bodies may suspend or revoke aretecratic credentials, without nullifying the underlying democratic order.

Importantly, this capacity for revocation is not conceived as a mechanism of political exclusion, but as a protective guarantee for the electorate. It ensures that democratic representation is exercised by individuals who continue to meet the ethical and civic standards required by the office they hold. In this sense, institutional design in aretecracy is oriented toward democratic quality assurance, aligning political authority with responsibility, supervision, and accountability over time.

Ethical Foundations

Within aretecratic theory, political qualification is grounded in a structured ethical framework articulated around three interrelated principles: freedom, equality, and solidarity. These principles are not treated as abstract moral values, but as normative categories whose concrete expression is found in the different generations of human rights.

In this framework, freedom is understood primarily through the defense and effective realization of civil and political rights. These rights secure individual autonomy, political participation, freedom of expression, due process, and democratic accountability, forming the ethical foundation of political agency within aretecracy.

Equality is extended beyond formal political equality to encompass economic, social, and cultural rights. This dimension of aretecratic ethics recognizes that meaningful democratic participation requires material conditions that reduce structural disadvantage and social exclusion, ensuring equal dignity and opportunity within the political community.

Solidarity, in turn, corresponds to individual and collective human rights whose realization exceeds the capacity of any single state, regardless of its power or resources. This includes rights related to peace, sustainable development, a healthy environment, and the use of scientific and technological advances for the benefit of humanity as a whole. These rights presuppose international cooperation and shared responsibility, making solidarity an essential ethical principle of aretecracy in a globalized world.

Taken together, this ethical framework situates aretecracy as fully compatible with human rights of the first, second, and third generations. Rather than introducing a separate moral system, aretecratic ethics seeks to align political authority and qualification with the normative evolution of human rights law, integrating liberty, equality, and solidarity into a coherent ethical foundation for qualified democratic governance.

Safeguarding the Electorate

Political representatives wield extraordinary power: a single individual may speak and decide on behalf of millions. When such power is exercised irresponsibly, the resulting harm is collective and often irreversible. Aretecracy responds to this asymmetry by placing the protection of voters at the center of democratic design.

Citizens suffer not only when elections are stolen, but also when their elected representatives no longer represent them—because they serve corporate sponsors, ideological extremes, or personal interests. Qualified democracy seeks to prevent this distortion before it occurs, rather than merely punishing it after the fact.

Presence in Reference Works

The concept of aretecracy appears in a number of open encyclopedic, thematic, and lexical reference platforms. These entries reflect the use of the term in reference contexts and illustrate its presence across different domains of public and academic knowledge. Representative examples include:

- **Justapedia – Aretecracy**

  https://justapedia.org/wiki/Aretecracy

- **HandWiki – Social: Aretecracy**

  https://handwiki.org/wiki/Social:Aretecracy

- **Governance Theory Wiki (Miraheze) – Aretecracy**

  https://governancetheory.miraheze.org/wiki/Aretecracy

- **EverybodyWiki – Aretecracy**

  https://en.everybodywiki.com/Aretecracy

- **WikiGenius – Aretecracy**

  https://wikigenius.org/wiki/Aretecracy

- **Grokipedia – Aretecracy**

  https://grokipedia.com/page/aretecracy

- **Wiktionary –** *aretecracy* **(lexical entry)**

  https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/aretecracy

In addition, the term appears in informal lexical registries, reflecting its broader circulation beyond academic contexts:

- **Urban Dictionary / UrbanUp –** *aretecracy*

  http://aretecracy.urbanup.com/18588921

Institutional References and Contextual Mentions

Beyond its presence in academic literature and reference works, the concept of aretecracy has also appeared in institutional and policy-related contexts. These references do not constitute formal adoption of the model but indicate its circulation within broader normative, juridical, and governance-related discussions.

In 2020, the term was referenced in a written submission by a non-governmental organization holding consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), presented during the High-Level Segment discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals. The reference appeared

within a wider normative reflection on democratic quality, ethical governance, and institutional responsibility (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2020).

In 2021, aretecracy was mentioned in a report issued by the Constitution and Regulations Committee of the Congress of the Republic of Peru, in the context of parliamentary deliberations on proposed amendments to the Organic Law of the Executive Branch. The discussion addressed ethical and managerial requirements for ministers of state, situating the concept within debates on institutional integrity and public accountability (Congreso de la República del Perú, Comisión de Constitución y Reglamento, 2021).

In 2023, the concept was cited in an institutional publication of the Colombian Senate produced by its legislative research body. There, aretecracy appeared within a broader juridico-political analysis on democracy and education in Latin America, alongside references to risks of democratic degradation commonly described in the literature as plutocracy or ochlocracy (Senado de la República de Colombia, Centro de Investigaciones y Altos Estudios Legislativos CAEL, 2023).

These contextual mentions illustrate the presence of the concept beyond strictly academic settings, particularly within discussions concerned with democratic quality, ethical leadership, and the professional exercise of political power.

Purpose and Relevance

As democratic systems worldwide face declining trust, polarization, and the erosion of institutional credibility, aretecracy offers a normative framework to rethink political leadership without abandoning democracy itself. It proposes not less democracy, but better-qualified democracy, capable of resisting corruption, populist manipulation, and the privatization of public power.

Keywords

Aretecracy; qualified democracy; political ethics; professionalization of politics; democratic accountability

References

Scholarly sources

Arrieta-López, M. (2024). Beyond Populism and Plutocracy: Aretecracy as a New Democratic Paradigm. JURIDICAS CUC, 20(1), 404–435. https://doi.org/10.17981/juridcuc.20.1.2024.19

Arrieta-López, M. (2019). De la democracia a la Aretecracia: origen, evolución y universalización [From Democracy to the Aretecracy: Origin, Evolution and Universalization]. Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana, 24, 115-132. Recuperado de https://produccioncientificaluz.org/index.php/utopia/article/view/29689

Arrieta López, M. (2018). La Aretedemocracia o Virtudemocracia: Un sistema de gobierno calificado contra las deformaciones de la democracia [Aretedemocracy or Virtuedemocracy: A system of qualified

government against deformations of democracy]. Justicia, 23(34), 539-554. https://doi.org/10.17081/just.23.34.3406

Institutional documents

Congreso de la República del Perú, Comisión de Constitución y Reglamento. (2021). *Dictamen recaído en los proyectos de ley 0048/2021-CR, 0051/2021-DP, 0055/2021-CR y 0184/2021-CR que modifica la Ley 29158, Ley Orgánica del Poder Ejecutivo, para fortalecer las capacidades de gestión de los ministros de Estado* [*Report on Bills 0048/2021-CR, 0051/2021-DP, 0055/2021-CR and 0184/2021-CR amending Law 29158, Organic Law of the Executive Branch, to strengthen the management capacities of Ministers of State*]. https://archive.org/details/congreso-peru-dictamen-0048-2021

United Nations Economic and Social Council. (2020). *Statements submitted by NGOs in consultative status (High-Level Segment), E/2020/NGO/1*. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26614Written_Statements_NGO.pdf

Senado de la República de Colombia, Centro de Investigaciones y Altos Estudios Legislativos (CAEL). (2023). *Plan de desarrollo social: La educación como pilar de transformación* [*Social Development Plan: Education as a Pillar of Transformation*]. *Serie Estudios Legislativos*. https://archive.org/details/plan-de-desarrollo-social-senado-de-la-republica-2023

Reference platforms

EverybodyWiki. (2026). Aretecracy. https://en.everybodywiki.com/Aretecracy

Governance Theory Wiki. (2026). Aretecracy. Miraheze. https://governancetheory.miraheze.org/wiki/Aretecracy

Grokipedia. (2026). Aretecracy. https://grokipedia.com/page/aretecracy

HandWiki. (2026). Aretecracy. Social sciences. https://handwiki.org/wiki/Social:Aretecracy

Justapedia. (2026). Aretecracy. https://justapedia.org/wiki/Aretecracy

Urban Dictionary. (2026). Aretecracy. UrbanUp. http://aretecracy.urbanup.com/18588921

WikiGenius. (2026). Aretecracy. https://wikigenius.org/wiki/Aretecracy

Wiktionary. (2026). Aretecracy. https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/aretecracy