Democracy in Norway

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Abstract

In international comparative studies, the Norwegian system is consistently at the top of the range in democratic quality. However, in a scrutiny against more absolute standards of “democraticness,” it has been found to perform less well. The strength of this system is less in lofty democratic idealism than in its down-to-earth solidity in the making of public policy, and its weakness more in democratic virtue than in public policy management. Strength is explained by historical factors, by a consistent experience of progress, and by solidity of public policy decision-making. Weakness is in what has been identified as a disruption in the democratic chain of command in constitutional institutions. Three general observations follow. First, the double set of observations—a robust democracy, comparatively, nevertheless with notable weaknesses in trends—suggests that the state of democracy in the world is far from impressive in qualitative terms. The democracies of the world, even the most established ones, are very different in quality, and democracy overall is and remains a fragile and endangered system of government. Second, is the significance of solidity in policy procedures. What other democracies can learn from the Norwegian case might primarily be the importance for democratic order and legitimacy of firm, stable, and established procedures and institutions in the system of government. Third, is the pervasive importance of the elusive quality of democratic culture. Democratic leaders have a duty not only to their voters but also to the needs of democratic systems for good governance.

Key words: Democracy, democratic quality, democratic culture, equality, governance, Norway.

The state or quality of democracy in Norway has been the subject of very careful scrutiny in a now well-established tradition of democratic audit. In international comparative studies, the Norwegian system is consistently at the

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top of the range, both in democratic quality and the efficiency of governance.\textsuperscript{1}
Indeed, Norwegian society, along with the other Nordic countries, compares
very favorably on most international indices, including on development and
quality of life.\textsuperscript{2}

However, Norwegian democracy also has been scrutinized on its own and
against more absolute standards of “democraticness” and has then been found
to perform less well. In a massive study of power and democracy, which was
conducted between 1998 and 2003 and which is probably the most careful
examination of a single democracy ever, the final conclusion was that the
chain of command in which governance is under the control of voters had
burst and that the very fabric of rule by popular consent was disintegrating.
The conclusion was not only that there are weak points in the chain but also
that a chain that was once solid has been falling apart.\textsuperscript{3}

Both these results are no doubt correct. We have here a democracy that
is solid in comparative terms, but we also see that even a comparatively good
democracy may fall short of reasonable theoretical standards.

\textbf{Backdrop}

The Norwegians are a small community of people (less than five million) who
live in a pretty large territory (about the size of Britain). They have a democratic
tradition that goes back to 1814, when the then radical constitution that still
prevails (with modifications) was adopted. Norway was then a non-nation,
having been subjected to Danish rule for three hundred years and reduced to
the status of a Danish province. After an abortive attempt at independence
following the Danish defeat in the Nordic extensions of the Napoleonic Wars,
Norway was forced into a nominal union under the Swedish crown but in
reality into another subjugation. The nineteenth century became a period for
the building of national awareness and institutions, and in 1905, Norway was
able to break free from the union with Sweden, peacefully, as it happened,
although there was military mobilization on both sides and for awhile real
danger of war.

\textsuperscript{2} See, for example, United Nations Development Program, \textit{Human Development Report} (New
\textsuperscript{3} The \textit{Norwegian Study of Power and Democracy}, www.sv.uio.no/mutr/english/index.html
(accessed December 20, 2010). See also, Øivind Østerud, Fredrik Engelstad og Per Selle, \textit{Makten
og demokratiet} [Power and democracy] (Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk, 2003). The study was
initiated by the Norwegian parliament and the job and a virtually unlimited budget put in the
hands of a committee of five professors, three in political science, one in sociology, and one in
cultural studies, three men and two women. They were able to mobilize much of the country’s
formidable social science community as well as strong forces in law, history, the humanities,
and other disciplines, and submitted their final report in August 2003. In five years, the study
produced fifty books, seventy-seven other reports, and a raft of articles in learned journals. For
an overview, see Ringen, \textit{What Democracy Is For}, appendix B.
Norway was able to retain much of its constitution and some self-rule during the years of union. The constitution was and remains the bedrock of the nation’s identity and is celebrated in every town and village on every May 17, constitution day. The country suffered five years of traumatic German occupation during the Second World War and that experience fortified an ideology of egalitarianism, freedom, and constitution.

Modern Norway emerged from poverty. The land is barren so that land wealth was near non-existent. Not since the Viking age has there been a national aristocracy and the 1814 constitution blocked its reintroduction. The rural elites were traditionally self-owning farmers and the urban elites, high government officials and academics. Industrialization came only in the twentieth century, the bourgeoisie remains weak, and national leadership continues to be provided predominantly by the institutions of the state. In less than a century, the country was metamorphosed from utter destitution—from 1880 to 1920 a third of the population emigrated, driven out by poverty—to having become today near the richest people in the world. Wage levels are comparatively high, attracting a considerable inflow of migration from neighboring countries, in particular Sweden. Affluence has been used to expand education (more than half of the young cohorts now receive university-level education) and to put in place a redistributive welfare state that has all but eliminated poverty, provides generous economic support to families and children, and strives to engineer gender equity, for example, with parental leave provisions available on the condition that they are shared by the parents. In today’s world, this is a cohesive society of strong families and schools, weak social conflicts, high quality of life, and a content and optimistic population (as expressed, for example, in the near highest birth rates in Europe). By European standards, crime is low, the law lenient, and the prison population small. Governance is honest and benevolent, democratic institutions retain high legitimacy, and voter participation is comparatively high. Because of the petroleum economy, state finances are so solid that the government’s problem is the management of surplus. The post-2007 world economic crisis was obviously noticed, but with a comparatively modest impact. Unemployment has remained low and the labor market characterized by a high demand for labor and a shortfall of supply.

Political Stability

Norway has proved fertile ground for democracy. That is explained by historical factors, by a rather remarkable experience of progress that followed in the wake of independence, and by solidity of public policy decision-making.

This land is today a highly egalitarian society, but egalitarianism is not, as is often believed, a recent product of the welfare state. It is rather the country’s historical inheritance and a legacy that was not created but maintained by the welfare state. The historical basis of Norwegian egalitarianism, which sets it
apart from its Scandinavian neighbors, is the virtual absence of landed wealth. Here, there was never a class system with a landed aristocracy at the top and never a class of landowners exercising the customary conservatism of that class elsewhere in Europe. There were sharp class divisions in the countryside, but these were differences between self-owning farmers and dependent peasants. The properties that were those of the upper class a century ago are today modest family farms (and now farms that increasingly no longer provide a proper family wage). There were and are some serious concentrations of property in forest land and timber but not so as to constitute a class of land owners. The country came without the need for radical land reform, which elsewhere often was the make or break of democratization.4

The tradition of egalitarianism was fortified by what was seen as a joint quest for nation and nation-building during the nineteenth century. The first university was established in 1911 and gradually became an intellectual center in, for example, the building of national law and the writing of national history. National movements emerged in language, art, and literature. In social science and enlightenment, Eilert Sundt, one of the most significant European pioneers in ethnography, sociology, and demography, mapped out in great detail the conditions and conventions of both rural and emerging urban populations.5 A nation was created from a non-nation, and on a basis of egalitarianism.

The same tradition was fortified yet again by the experience of occupation during the Second World War. The occupation lasted five years and left the country physically worn down but morally strengthened in cohesion. Politics resumed after the war on the basis of what was known as “the common program,” which was ascribed to by all major political parties, including the communists who emerged strengthened by the war experience (but were rapidly reduced to a marginal force). This led to a period of Labor Party hegemony, underpinned by a spirit of national rebuilding. This hegemony was broken in the 1960s and followed by what might on first sight appear to be unstable political conditions of shifting coalition or minority governments, which persist to this day but which, in reality, have been a continuation of a high level of consensus politics.

Independence in 1905 coincided with the advent of rapid industrialization. This was triggered by technological breakthroughs in the production of hydro-electric energy, which turned abundant Norwegian waterfalls into highly valued assets and attracted foreign, in particular French, capital to their exploitation. Industries emerged in fertilizer, minerals, and eventually aluminum. Labor moved from rural areas to urban and growing industrial centers and to lifestyles

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of, in the experience of the day, rising affluence.

Economic progress has not been uninterrupted—the 1930s saw depression and mass unemployment in Norway as elsewhere—but still survived as a constant melody in popular awareness. After the Second World War, reconstruction and further industrialization ushered in a long period of rapid economic growth, much helped initially by Marshall Plan assistance but also in large measure considered to be a result of deliberate planning and, hence, something that “we” created more than simply were given. As throughout much of Europe, population numbers surged as a result of the “baby boom” and improvements in individual and public health. Living standards continued to increase steadily.

Industrial growth persisted until overtaken, for this country, by the age of North Sea oil and gas. Shrewd and early foreign policy initiatives helped to establish principles in international law that gave a country like Norway, with its exceptionally long coast line, ownership over vast areas of sea bed and their mineral riches. The government took control of undersea resources and engineered a gradual process of exploitation, which continues to generate lavish flows of revenue into public coffers.

These revenues in various ways have trickled down to households, added new momentum to rising standards of living, and made Norway the richest country in the Nordic area, and by and large in all of Europe, as measured both in household living conditions and national wealth. There is criticism that this has happened at the cost of implicit subsidies of excessively high wages and, hence, the erosion of competitiveness in nonpetroleum industries. But at the same time, the management of very large public revenues in a small country generally has been seen to be prudent and restrained and to have avoided the temptation to excesses in consumption. Only moderate proportions of petroleum revenue have been channeled into public consumption and tax levels have been retained at a relatively high level. The bulk of petroleum revenue has been put into a sovereign fund for investments in equity, bonds, and property in international markets—a fund which has received much international praise for responsible investment behavior. This fund, now under the name of the Government Pension Fund-Global (Statens pensjonsfond—Utland), has gradually come to own about one per cent of global equity value. Whatever the merits of this investment behavior, the Norwegian people are able to see in their own society and political system both rising standards of living and responsible wealth management, something that again underpins their experience of and confidence in rationality and progress.

At the time of writing, the Storting (Parliament) is composed of seven political parties, the smallest one (the Liberals) with only two of 169 representatives. The government is a center-left coalition of three parties, with the Labor Party in the dominant position and its leader, Mr. Jens Stoltenberg, as prime minister, and the Socialist Left and Center parties as the junior members. This constellation has held power since 2005. The government before that,
from 2001 to 2005, was a minority coalition of the center, and before that again, from 2000 to 2001, a single party minority government of the Labor Party. (Only after that short experience of government did the Labor Party reluctantly accept for itself the principle of coalition government.) The two governments before that again served for three years and one year, respectively.

This might look like political instability, but that is only so in appearance. The reality has been a conspicuous continuity of governance through shifting governments. For example, in the crucial issue of the management of petroleum revenues, there has been a great deal of party political posturing, in particular over how much of the revenue should go into increasing public and private consumption, but in fact broad cross-party agreement on a line of relatively restrained husbandry. For example, during the minority government from 2001 to 2005, when the government lost control over the agenda and the Storting in large measure governed directly with indifference to the government, one might think that the conditions were in favor of populist generosity with “oil money,” yet there was no diversion from the firm line of restraint.

There are, of course, normal political disagreements and conflicts in this system, but governance is remarkably stable. That stability is down to a political culture which encourages collaborative governance and discourages excesses and rapid policy shifts. For example, during four years from 2005, the leader of the Socialist Left Party, Ms. Kristin Halvorsen, held the post of finance minister. This she did with great competence and pragmatism, including in the political management of the government’s huge sovereign investment fund, in a way that reflected steady management of state finances, with little visible influence of “socialist” ideology, and that caused no anxiety or turbulence in financial institutions or markets.

The stability of governance is down to firmly institutionalized conventions around public policy decision-making. Planning is deliberate, it takes the time it takes, and major decisions are usually given broad political grounding. The typical procedure is predictable and laid down in formal rules and accepted conventions. First, the government appoints an ad-hoc committee tasked with delivering a detailed report on a particular issue. Some of these committees are composed exclusively of experts, while others have a broader membership that includes politicians and representatives of interested parties such as unions, business confederations, and other nongovernmental organizations. For instance, a report to the Ministry of Finance would typically be drafted by high-profile academic economists, representatives of unions, employers, and the central bank. When this procedure leads to legislative action, a proposal is drafted and distributed to interested parties for “hearing,” who are invited to make comments and suggestions (a period of three months for comments is recommended, and six weeks is the minimum stipulated).

Only after comments have been received will the government prepare a proposal for parliament (sometimes in the form of a parliamentary act, but usually initially in the form of a white paper). Governments deviate from this
procedure only in rare cases, and any attempt to circumvent it would normally lead to public criticism.

This convention of careful, deliberate, consensual, and slow decision-making has served the country well. Numerous processes of this kind are operating at any point in time and are exceptionally interrupted only for political reasons, for example, following elections and a change of government. The procedure leading to the 2009 pension reform is a case in point. The crux of the reform was to improve the sustainability of the pension system by introducing more choice and flexibility on retirement and mechanisms of demographic over-time adjustments. A major intention, in addition to improving financial sustainability, was to carefully redesign contribution and benefit rules in the direction of encouraging employment and discouraging early retirement. This reform was prepared in the customary careful way, starting with the appointment of a cross-party pension commission in 2001, which reported in 2004, leading to a five-year process of political implementation. This process included first a broad round of hearings on the basis of the report prepared by the commission and then a white paper from the government on major principles. The white paper was considered in the Storting, first by the relevant committee and then on the basis of that committee’s report in a plenary debate. The case then went back to the government to prepare a “proposition” (act), which was again considered for legislation in the Storting, in both committee and plenary sessions. This process, on the complicated and controversial issue of pension reform, was started under one government (minority Labor), taken forward under a second one (minority coalition of center parties), and completed under a third one (majority center-left coalition) in a broadly accepted reform.

This procedure does not make the Norwegian system immune to mistaken public policy. A conspicuous case is that of a radical overhaul of the public hospital system in 2001, when ownership was transferred to the central government from regional governments and new “health-care regions” were created. This proved expensive and conflictive, and has resulted in what appears to be never-ending and evermore complicated reorganization in a gradually more exhausted system. Uncharacteristically, however, this policy was driven by party political ambitions and was pushed through in a way that circumvented established and more cumbersome procedures. For the most part, deliberate planning results in sound decision-making.

These three influences—tradition, progress, and solidity—no doubt reinforce each other in the spirit of an observation by Robert Dahl (who may well have had the Norwegian or Scandinavian experience in mind) on democratic culture:

The prospects for stable democracy in a country are improved if its citizens and leaders strongly support democratic ideas, values, and practices. The most reliable support comes when these beliefs and predispositions are embedded in the
country’s culture and are transmitted, in large part, from one generation to the next. In other words, the country possesses a democratic political culture. Lucky the country whose history has led to these happy results!

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

The strength of the Norwegian system is less in lofty democratic idealism than in its down-to-earth solidity in the making of public policy. That solidity is confirmed in an extensive comparative study of “sustainable governance,” conducted in two rounds as of 2009 and 2011, by the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Germany. This study compares the OECD countries in an elaborate system of 151 indicators, both statistical and qualitative, based on expert assessment. The indicators cover the quality of democracy, political performance in economic and social affairs, executive and decision-making capacity, and system accountability to the legislature and society more broadly. This information is pulled together into an “index of sustainable governance,” which in both rounds has given Norway the highest rank.

That result, in part, should be attributed to luck, in particular, the good fortune of this country in petroleum affluence, which has freed it from the normal problems of governance that result from budget restraints, but not only to good luck. There is also, in terms of petroleum wealth again, the record of cautious management, and behind that again the institutionalized system of careful deliberation in public policy decision-making. What emerges from this study is, on the one hand and not surprisingly, that solidity of decision-making is highly conducive to political legitimacy, and, on the other hand, that the secret of such solidity is not a particular virtue in the population or its leaders but the institutionalization of procedures and mechanism of cautious deliberation in decision-making. It is not that Norwegian leaders are smarter than others—on the whole, they are rather ordinary and bland—but that the established conventions and procedures of the system in which leaders come and go are firmly institutionalized and supportive of deliberate decision-making.

The weaknesses in a system that stands proud in the world for its efficiency are more in democratic virtue than public policy management. Here, we should turn again to the Norwegian Study of Power and Democracy and to its finding that, if the state of democracy in Norway is robust, the trend is toward a weakening of democratic procedures and institutions. It is worth rehearsing its findings in some detail because they have much to say about the standing of

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democracy, in general, in the world of established democracies.

The chain of command of which the study speaks is the one that makes constitutional procedures democratic. At one end is the voter, at the other end, political decisions. In a democracy, there is supposed to be a link to assure that political decisions are the ones voters want made or approve.

The voter is found to be a pretty constant entity as far as values and attitudes are concerned. He and she remain citizens and continue to see themselves as political animals. They are interested in political issues and active in social life. If democracy is weakening, it is not from below; this is not an apathetic population, not even one into which apathy is creeping.

But behavior is changing. Voter participation in both central and local elections is on a downward trend. The total number of members in political parties was reduced to a half in one decade after 1990. Citizens are turning away from conventional forms of political participation. That, however, is not because they are retiring from public, and withdrawing into private, life. It is more that they are shifting their involvement in public and social matters to other arenas and forms than the traditionally political ones. Other forms of participation than in party politics are increasing, such as various forms of direct action, petitions, manifestations, and political events and discussions, particularly locally. One might be tempted to see more direct politics as being also more democratic, but there is no change in the social stratification of participation. Middle-class citizens dominate direct participation as they do voting and working-class citizens remain in the background.

Not only parties but also other established associations find themselves the victims of indifference on the part of those they see themselves to be serving. The twentieth century, toward its end, was a grand movement of social organization: unions and labor organization of various descriptions, benevolent and charitable organizations, local associations, women’s organizations, temperance and lay religious movements, later the organization of leisure in sports, travel, and culture. This, the study finds, came to a halt and was reversed around 1990. Traditional organization is in decline, crowded out by what is called “here-and-now-organization,” in often small, nonmembership-based, professional, single-issue, action groups. Diagnosis: “a democratic infrastructure in collapse.”

This all makes for a new working environment for elected representatives. How do they and the institutions in which they work respond? Those institutions are municipal councils and the national legislature, the Storting.

Norway is a country of many small municipalities, about 440, with an average population of less than ten thousand. The municipalities have been powerful units, with vast responsibilities for local infrastructure and social services, and powers to match. Democracy in this country has been rooted in a principle of local autonomy, but local autonomy has ceased to be a reality. The forms of local democracy are in place, but the honorable practice of local politics has gradually become a matter of administrating decisions made
in the central government and imposed on local governments. Nominally, autonomous municipalities are reduced to standing with cap-in-hand at the finance minister’s door, and consequently, local government is demoralized and voters are disinterested.

Local government ideally plays two roles in a democratic system. It is supposed to be about decision-making in local matters and it is supposed to be a part of the infrastructure that links citizens and the central government, in this respect not unlike nongovernmental associations. Citizens are linked to the national legislature by the vote, but if that is the only link from people to rulers, there is less than a chain of command. Governance will be distant and citizens small.\(^8\) It is a function of local democracy to give citizens a reasoned feeling that they are included in the system of governance in the long periods between elections. The demise of local democracy—this is the one trend the study chooses to describe with the word “crisis”—is a further contribution to the collapse of the democratic infrastructure.

There is less power in local government because central government has usurped it. If that means more power to the national legislature, it could be good news for democracy. If there is more power over which to fight, there is more reason to engage in fighting over it and democracy could see itself revitalized. Yet, voters do not believe that parliamentary politics is becoming more relevant; they are less, and not more, interested and involved. The interpretation is not—to repeat an essential finding that deserves elaboration—that people are turning away from politics because of new values and attitudes of “individualism.” Rather they continue to be as interested in political and social issues as they have ever been but are turning away from constitutional politics because of the way in which constitutional politics are changing. In this polity, the citizens are found to be good enough and blame is allocated to those who work on their behalf.

The decision-making power of the national legislature is in decline. One reason is that other more or less competing institutions are gaining power, and it then follows that the legislature must be losing out. The winners are the market, the media, and the courts. First, (large) economic actors have acquired one very specific new form of power which radically eats into the capacity of the legislature. That piece of power comes from economic globalization, which provides the credible threat to move capital or economic enterprise out of the country. Legislatures make decisions that pertain to the national territory. Businesses can now credibly make it understood that, if the legislature makes decisions they find unhelpful or objectionable, they may move capital, production, headquarters, or jobs out from that territory. There is nothing new in the use of economic threats in democratic-capitalist politics, but the

credibility is new. This puts power in the hands of business, which is now so obvious to political decision makers that it is usually not even necessary for economic actors to display it for legislatures to bend to it. Business has acquired veto power in economic policy.⁹

Second, in recent years, a framework of supra-national law has emerged which is binding and limiting in national legislation. Supra-national law comes from two sources. One is international covenants which national governments have formulated collectively and which national legislatures may subsequently give the status of national law. The prime example is the European Convention on Human Rights, which several countries—Norway being one—have incorporated into national law. That convention is guarded by the European Court of Human Rights, which has the last word in its interpretation. By incorporating the human rights convention into national law, the national legislature chooses both to limit its own discretion in decision-making and to subject itself and the national courts to the higher authority of the international court.

The other source is in supra-national cooperation, principally within the European Union (to which Norway, although not a member, is indirectly affiliated and obligated through the mechanisms of the European Economic Area). Cooperative EU decisions have the direct force of legislation, requiring no decision for incorporation into national legislation. Here, joint decisions are made which have the force of law in the participating nations. This obviously limits the decision-making power of the national legislatures. Well and good, that is, as intended and as decided by those legislatures. But there is, as is well known, a democratic deficit. EU laws are not adopted by a European legislature—the European Parliament is only a watch dog—but by the Commission under the oversight of national governments or by those governments jointly. This is perhaps slightly undemocratic, but the real problem is not so much in decision-making as such as in the virtual impossibility of unmaking law once made, in particular, treaty law. This gives the European Court near unlimited power to impose on and above national legislatures its view of what European law bids nations to do or not do. Judicial review is not “undemocratic”—if so, there would be hardly any democracies—but unrivalled judicial review arguably is. The country that has this power of judicial review is the United States, where the Supreme Court has vast real, if not formal, powers of legislation.¹⁰

In most democracies, judicial review is held under control by the power of the legislature to threaten the courts with counteraction if they should be inclined to take judicial review to extremes. When courts know that the legislature

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can strike back with new legislation, including new constitutional legislation, including possibly on the authority of the courts, they are unlikely to censure legislation if they think that could provoke “corrective” subsequent legislation. This balance of power allows us to have it both ways, the legislature being in good control of legislation but disciplined by a mild threat from the courts to stay carefully within the constitution and not infringe on the rights of citizens. The European Court is under no such threat. The final democratic deficit in the European Union is not in the power of the Commission but in the absence of a democratic legislature to balance the power of the Court. The Court does not make directives but it decides what they and European treaty law mean and is in this, for all intents and purposes, sovereign and answers to no one. The democratic deficit does not rise from the delegation of legislative power upward, but from the absence of democratic grounding in the institutions to which that power is delegated.

These are the main observations that lead to the conclusion that rule by popular consent is disintegrating. It is well documented that there is an erosion of established democratic procedures. The overall conclusion is nevertheless contested. The question is what the site of democratic quality is and where this quality should be observed. If it resides in the constitutional procedures of democracy, then democracy in Norway and many other systems is in decline for the reasons given above. But if the quality of a democracy is seen ultimately to be a matter of the strength of rights and citizenship of persons and of their security and quality of life, the final conclusion might be different. For example, if in Norway women and minorities have won emancipation by force of legal provisions and adherence to international rights conventions (which is very much the case) and national and international courts have therefore gained in power relative to the legislature as custodians of citizenship rights, there may be a weakening of “democraticness” in the system but at the same time a strengthening of the equality of citizenship that is the ultimate purpose of democracy.

Three General Observations

There are some general lessons to be drawn from this case study. First, the double set of observations—a robust democracy, comparatively, with nevertheless notable weaknesses in trends—suggests that the state of democracy in the world, although impressive in quantitative terms after the surge released by the revolutions in Europe in and after 1998, is still far from impressive in qualitative terms. We should be very careful with pronouncing democracies as solid, consolidated, immanent, and so on. The democracies of the world, even

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the most established ones, are very different in quality, and democracy overall is and remains a fragile and endangered system of government.\textsuperscript{12}

Second, is the significance of solidity in policy procedures. What other democracies could learn from the Norwegian case might primarily be the importance for democratic order and legitimacy of firm, stable, and established procedures and institutions in the system of government. When the “model” democracies of the United States and Britain perform comparatively poorly in international comparisons, it is governance more that “democraticness” that pulls them down. For example, in a recent compilation of twelve biographies of American presidents, from Franklin D. Roosevelt to George W. Bush, one of the lines through seventy years of recent history is just how rough, disorderly, and corrupt American politics have been.\textsuperscript{13} In a recent study of my own of the British case, I conclude that “a strong government was defeated by a weak system of governance.”\textsuperscript{14}

Third, is the pervasive importance of the elusive quality of democratic culture. Where democratic culture comes from is, as Robert Dahl observes, a bit of a mystery. It obviously comes out of history as well as from good governance, and it comes from luck in the way the many components that make up “culture” reinforce each other. With history, legacy, and luck, leaders of the day can do little, but they have at least some control over governance. Democratic leaders have a duty not only to their voters but also to the needs of democratic systems for good governance. When citizens are turning away from constitutional politics—as in the Norwegian case, and generally—one contributing reason may be valid dissatisfaction with the quality of democratic leadership.

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\textsuperscript{12} On the concept and comparison of democratic quality, see Ringen, \textit{What Democracy Is For}.

\textsuperscript{13} Nigel Hamilton, \textit{American Caesars} (London: Bodly Head, 2010).
