


the creation of new norms. That the norms in question are actually responsibilities, Sikkink suggests, is best left unsaid. These days, responsibilities simply do not trend well. And if one cannot completely avoid using the *r*-word, it should only be employed as a means of avoiding terms that are even less cool, such as *obligation* or *duty*, which are not considered “persuasive” in our times (37).

We live in a consumer culture that is notably narcissistic (Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic* [Free Press, 2009]). In such a culture, a sense of individual entitlement overpowers the recognition of responsibility. Sikkink maintains that responsibilities are the hidden face of rights. She seems to be saying that the face of responsibility is also best hidden from view, the better to achieve the social and political changes one agrees with in a culture that cannot be persuaded we have any real obligations or duties.

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Hélène Landemore: *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. Pp. xviii, 243.)

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If you have not read Landemore, and you are interested in democratic innovation, then I would suggest you really have not been reading. *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century* cracks open the oyster of closed, modern, representative democracy and, with the deft articulation of key historical debates and how they relate to contemporary political events, it offers the new model of “open democracy” for adoption in polities both large and small.

Open democracy is defined as a practicable model of representation which is brought to life when a government or a state institution or procedure can demonstrate it has met its five minimal criteria. These are (1) that all members of, say, a polity seeking to use open democracy have equal chance of participating (i.e., participation rights) which is guaranteed by lottery; (2) that the means through which an output like agenda setting or policy recommendations is to be reached must be deliberative in practice; (3) that such work is *not* constrained by supermajoritarian hurdles but rather simple majoritarian ones (otherwise final decisions can languish or, indeed, be improbable

to reach); (4) that the demographic diversity of the polity in question is proportionally reflected in the deliberating body so that it is democratically representative; and that (5) all of the aforementioned happens under a very bright light (i.e., it is done transparently).

Open democracy's goal is to offer pragmatic means to getting more nonprofessional members of a polity into its formal politics. The idea is for such nonprofessional persons to have a direct hand in agenda setting, proposing legislation, reviewing legislation, and participating in those irregular but significant moments in a polity's life where big changes, such as constitutional reform, are on the docket. Nonprofessionals really can do it better along with expert politicians rather than relying on the experts alone—the outcomes, as Landmore explains, are worse in the case of the latter.

There is much to admire in this book. For example, Landmore's historical disambiguation of representative democracy shows how it could have eventuated in its open rendition, principally in the time of Revolutionary America (40–44). Landmore also shows how Rousseau erred in his valorization of assembly-based democracies (in Geneva, Corsica, and ancient Athens, for example) as direct democracies (56–74). That Rousseau's assemblies were, in fact, functionally representative and not direct—in that members of those popular bodies were still acting as proxies for the people-at-large—is a particularly strong and well-delivered argument of the book.

Proof of open democracy's salience in complex polities today is Landmore's involvement in the "grand national debate" in France, convened in response to the yellow vest movement, and in the Icelandic experiment in constitutional reform, a response to the country's economic collapse during the global financial crisis. Although the Icelandic experiment is still struggling to meet its ultimate end (getting the national parliament to pass the new constitution into law), and the French debate has left much to be desired (particularly around its disappointingly low participation rate), Landmore carefully explains where the problems lay and offers convincing correctives. It is reasonable, therefore, to propose that open democracy should be trialed, especially at local levels, where the complexities that accompany large operations, a problem in the Icelandic case, and the recalcitrance from entrenched career politicians, a problem in the French case, are likely to pose less of a burden on the open democratic procedure.

In a critical vein, the argument's reliance on two assumptions gave me pause. First, Landmore writes that "democracy is the official regime form of more than half the countries in the world" (xiv). This is undeniably a statement of fact vis-à-vis numerous democracy indices, but it does restrict the argument in the book as it makes such polities seem more democratic—or to have more "democraticity," in Landmore's parlance—than they actually are. What this points to is the author's understanding of what makes a polity democratic which is, *tout court*, the type of democratic practice that its national level and infra-level governments use. This framing gives Landmore scope to argue that governments that use closed representation

have less democratic legitimacy and therefore should use open democracy to increase that measure. But it also succeeds in blocking consideration of workplaces, schools, families, and other “informal associations” that would benefit from using open democracy too. Such bodies are, after all, not in the habit of governing themselves democratically. Crucially, these informal associations are where most people in a polity spend most of their time and are consequently most affected by them. Why not then extend open democracy to them instead of focusing on governments alone?

Second, why state that “the ancient Greeks” were the ones “who invented democracy” (1)? This was a surprising mistake as there is a bounty of excellent scholarship that disproves this assertion. Consider, for example, David Stasavage’s book *The Decline and Rise of Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2020), which explains how “early democracy” preceded the Athenian arrangement; or Yves Schemel’s essay “Democracy before Democracy” (*International Political Science Review* 21, no. 2 [2000]: 99–120), which explains how both Egyptian and Mesopotamian polities used public debate and voting procedures; or even still the body of literature which problematizes the notion of being “Greek” as antique city-states around the eastern Mediterranean (or still further afield such as into the Black Sea) often had more in common in trade, alliances, even language with their proximal neighbors (“African,” “Asian,” “Hyperborean,” for example) and identified accordingly not as Greek but Spartan, Athenian, Theban, Cretan, and so forth.

To be fair, the issue concerning the Greek invention of democracy statement is explained by Landemore’s disclaimer (22) that the book has come through the Western, mainly Anglophone doxa of democratic theory, which commonly refers to Greece as its “cradle of democracy.” This may also explain why certain referents—such as polities in the West—are treated with specificity in the book while others, from the non-West, are given passing attention as when “some of the Native American tribes” are mentioned (2), which led me to wonder about exactly which tribes (I would have used the word “nations”) the author had in mind.

On the whole, *Open Democracy* offers readers a strong case for adopting open representative democracy as a tool for governance, especially at the local level. This book, the two issues raised here notwithstanding, demonstrates a mastery of scholarship in the field of Western democratic theory and political theory more broadly. Through Rousseau, Habermas, Manin, Urbinati, Warren, and more, Landemore offers her readers a thoroughly persuasive argument.

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