



New America Foundation: The Gap Between Democracy and Civil Rights

Why Representative Government Can't Solve the World's Other Social Problems?

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In a new article by Charles Kenny, Bernard L. Schwartz Fellow and Global Assets Project Senior Research Fellow at the New America Foundation, Kenny points out the “gap” between what is essentially the historical reality of democracy and its great ideal.

“The gap between democracy and civil rights isn’t a matter of government institutions falling behind the popular will. In fact, it often reflects popular attitudes across the world. The same polls that suggest ubiquitous global support for statements like “democracy may have its problems, but it’s better than any other form of government” also report considerable variation in answers to questions about civil rights.” – New America Foundation Article

The positive aspects of the historical realities of democracy is perhaps in its longevity. “Democratic institutions may be part of the secret to long-term growth (if not to the short-term kind). As Amartya Sen has pointed out, they don’t tend to let their citizens starve to death. And people living in democracies report themselves marginally happier than people living under other forms of government. As we all know by now, democracies don’t go to war with each other (much)” states Kenny.

But in this day and age, when the word “democracy” seems to be on the tongue of every western country as we watch the crises in the Middle East, it is important to note that real democracies can be illiberal, hypocritical, and faulty. What’s more, that elections do not solve tribal rivalries and historical resentments.