

How Goes Democracy Around the World?
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Democracy Project. The United States has long had a \223democracy project.\224 After World War I, President Woodrow Wilson tried to establish an organization that would midwife newly freed colonies into democracies. He was instrumental in establishing the first \223World Government,\224 the League of Nations, but a key Senator prevented the US from joining. That organization without us had even less teeth than today's United Nations.

At the end of World War II, the US has once more promoted \223democracy\224 for 50 years in competition with the Soviet Union's Communism. Since the end of the Cold War, we've had serious problems with our Democracy Project. Elections do not make democracy; nations newly freed from fascist dictatorships (such as Iraq) or living in feudalism, tribalism, and in the grip of medieval Islam (Afghanistan) cannot sustain a modern democracy.

What is Democracy? Democracy is a centuries-long process of increasing participation in governance--- parliament of nobles, parliament of educated and wealthy men, and finally, inclusion of all adult citizens, including women. Our democracy depends upon rule of law (and willingness to obey that law); ownership of private property; a free press; and an education system that promotes a majority middle class that can think with intelligent self-interest.

Our own democracy does not always live up to these ideals, but we are a work in progress, forever reforming and revising our democracy as we learn more. I am reading Supreme Court Justice Breyer's new book: Making Democracy Work, a book written for the general public explaining what the Supreme Court is and how it has changed over the life of this country. This book has filled me with thankfulness that we have had such a history of becoming a better, more just society.

Benjamin Franklin worried that we might not be able to maintain this republic. I have had fear about the current trend to scorn the government---a scorn that comes from both the far right and the far left---each for different reasons. However, I think we are hearing once more from the middle who do not scorn government. It is our government and its flaws can be corrected.

Failed Democracies. But let us look at our democracy projects around the world that have been planted in places not ready for them.

- o The Ivory Coast (Cote Ivoire) had an election in which the candidate opposing the President clearly won. The President will not step down; he controls a thuggish military that backs him. Civil War is coming again to that country!

- o Belarus (formerly part of the old USSR), a dreadful holdover of Stalinist Communism, just had an election too. The dictator who has ruled for decades wants to rule for decades more---and the election was so fraudulent that it finally roused an angry public. Once more, the thugs have all the weapons and control the media too. Peaceful demonstrators are killed.

- o Afghanistan will not make it as a democracy, no matter how many elections they have. They are still feudal. And their neighbor Pakistan, although supposedly a republic with elections, has such a large population of illiterate, tribal Muslims that they can outvote the educated.

- o Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, one of the worst, whose 86-year-old crazy dictator (who first won in an election) wants yet another term in office that he will surely win because he is a thug and his population lives like prison inmates, too damaged to defy him. Prosperous Rhodesia is now a failed state.

I would hope that nobody thinks that Somalia or Yemen can hold valid elections that could lead to democracy. They both suffer from the same ills: tribalism, illiteracy, and militant (and very medieval) Islam. Philip Caputo's classic novel The Horn of Africa can give you insight into how fragile democracy is---and how such a place cannot sustain it.

- o Techno-Terrorism. A threat to democracy, not to mention any sort of world order, now comes from the young anarchist computer hackers of WikiLeaks, who know only how to destroy a democracy but not how to make one. This is a challenge we must meet and

defeat if we want rule of law to survive.

691 words

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