

3.2.2.3.2.69 Personal freedom, dictators, and weak government

Apart from the most important individual values, a comfortable death, and before that, during one's lifetime, optimal sex, the most important logistical values are freedom and safety. As a rule of thumb, freedom is more important to men, and safety more important to women.

People often equate dictatorial government with a lot of government interference with their personal freedom. But the equation is illogical. Whether a dictatorial government interferes with personal freedom depends on whether the dictatorial government wants to interfere with the personal freedom of the people. As a matter of fact, dictatorial governments often don't care, as long as their rule isn't affected.

A government can come into existence via different routes. One of the possible routes is to be elected, more or less directly, by the people. This is what is called democracy. Whether this government later interferes with the personal freedom of the people or not has very little to do with the fact that it was established in a democratic way.

A democratic route of establishing a government often has led, and leads, to governments that interfere to a high degree with the personal freedom of the people. Hitler was democratically elected. Saddam Hussein came to power in a democratic succession. The Iranian government is democratically elected. All of these governments have not been, and are not, dedicated to preserve or grant personal freedom.

The US is a democracy, but it also is the world's most advanced police state. Whether a country is a police state or not has nothing to do with the question of how a government came into power, whether democratically or by any other way. To characterize a country as a police state just means that the police have wide-ranging power over the lives of the country's citizens. And this is certainly the case in the US.

It doesn't really matter where the power of the police originates from. Whether it stems from power vested into the police by summary decree, or from a huge body of written legislation and regulations, as in the case of the US.

It's a common misconception anywhere in the world to equate "democracy" with "freedom". Democracy just means that a large number of largely incompetent voters are allowed to decide who should lead a government.

In the Philippines, largely incompetent voters often elect movie stars as president, senators, mayors, and even city councilors. Stupid Filipinos just vote for their favorite actors, and want to know nothing about the potential leader's political ideas.

In Indonesia, former dictator Suharto always enjoyed much backing from the female part of the population. Why? Because he was perceived as being good-looking.

In Islamic countries, when the people are called for to elect leaders in a democratic process, they vote for those candidates recommended by the prayer leaders in the mosques, because people are misguided into believing that it will give them credit with god.

Any in many poor and ethnically or religiously diverse countries, people just vote for candidates who promise to make life harder for the "others".

Skilled fascists have always had, and still have, a comparatively easy time to win elections, whether in Europe or Southeast Asia, as there is a fascist history of knowing the tricks. Preach hatred and hand out cheap gifts to a country's poor.

Often enough, democracy leads to bad government and a lot of interference personal freedom. If democracy leads to good government that allows people a high degree of personal freedom, it's not because the government was democratically elected but because incidentally, those who were elected were benevolent people.

Personal freedom is too high a value to entrust it to a popularity contest, or, for that matter, to democracy.

What are the alternatives?

One would be a powerful freedom-centered constitution. The best constitutions have often been imposed by victors after a country lost a major war. And this attitude does date back to Napoleonic times.

But the best constitution is only as good as a Supreme Court can guard it and a government wants it guarded. At the end of the day, the freedom of the people depends on those in power. If they are strong, the government itself may infringe on liberties. Better if governments are weak.

Plato, who felt contempt for governments established by a vote of unqualified people, recommended that benevolent philosopher kings hold power.

The concept of monarchies is outdated. But the essence is that government should be by an institution that is enlightened and benevolent.