Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21st Century, Kathryn Sikkink (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017), 336 pp., $35 cloth.

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For over twenty years Kathryn Sikkink has produced pioneering scholarship on the hidden effects and widely overlooked impact of international human rights norms. In *Evidence for Hope*, Sikkink sets out to critically engage with and challenge key assumptions and methods underlying both a string of critical academic assessments forecasting the human rights project's impending decline and a rising sense of human rights' futility among activists in an era punctuated by the Trump presidency and the Syrian tragedy.

The book begins by addressing critiques centered around the human rights project's Western legal roots and its ties to Western political agendas. Through a condensed history of non-Western (mainly Latin American) engagements with international law and human rights dating back to the late nineteenth century, Sikkink paints a picture of leaders and activists who not only aspired to uphold democratic values and rights but also made important contributions to the development of international human rights law and institutions. Pointing to this history, she concludes that the human rights regime was never simply a product of Western traditions or political agendas, but was a much more relational and dialogical product of mutual contributions from and contestation among Western and non-Western actors.

While the core argument is not entirely new, the detailed examples add layers of complexity to the existing scholarship. At the same time, the "contested history" reflects Sikkink's own evolution from a scholar whose earlier work and point of departure took limited account of the problematic East-West hierarchies entwined in human rights politics, to one who is much more attuned to these dynamics. For example, she recounts some early examples of Latin American actors pushing Western counterparts to adopt more binding human rights obligations or more progressive conceptions of human rights, including in the realm of women's rights. She also depicts the simultaneous desires of non-Western human rights activists both to invoke human rights and to infuse the framework with greater justice vis-à-vis the international hierarchies within which they were operating. Sikkink challenges the notion that Latin American legal experts and human rights activists can be dismissed as elites who blindly adopted an inherently Western tradition by analyzing how their collective political consciousness was shaped not simply by their exposure to Western ideas but by their lived experiences of marginalization as non-Western people.

The book's most significant contributions, however, emerge in the next section where Sikkink calls for a fundamental reexamination of how supporters and detractors alike evaluate human rights' effectiveness. She begins by distinguishing between comparing human rights outcomes to "an ideal," such as the eradication of poverty (an approach taken by many critical scholars), and an approach that measures relative gains or losses over time. For Sikkink, the latter approach is preferable because when human rights efforts are viewed through short-term comparisons to visions of an ideal, important evidence of long-term progress is missed.

Next, Sikkink identifies a variety of factors that lead to the misperception that

human rights conditions are getting worse, when in fact significant gains have been achieved. First, as a result of efforts to bring attention to human rights violations, as well as the way those violations are then highlighted in repeated news cycles, we are more aware of violations now then we were in the past. Likewise, we are more aware of violations than of progress. Second, we continue to expand our notions of what constitutes a human rights violation. In these ways, the very success of human rights advocacy in drawing attention to more and more instances and forms of human suffering has the unintended effect of creating a perception that there is a vast insurmountable gap between the human rights project and its emancipatory promise.

For Sikkink, this is why we must take more pains to make empirical, data-driven assessments and comparisons to the *past* in reaching conclusions about human rights today. Yet the task of measuring progress presents real challenges. Not only does available data vary from country to country but there is now more data available than before, leading to distorted comparisons. Similarly, skewed findings may result from authoritarian regimes underreporting violations, while democratic states may report more accurately. Finally, definitions of particular human rights violations can change (and expand) over time, obscuring gains.

Attempting to account for these measurement hurdles, Sikkink offers data demonstrating long-term improvements in a variety of rights areas, including the declining number of deaths resulting from war and conflict, greater gender equality, improved rights for sexual minorities and persons with disabilities, and decreasing famine and infant mortality. Based on this data, she maintains that "overall there is less violence and fewer human rights violations in the world than in the past" (p. 141). She further concludes that human rights change takes time; can result from years of seemingly futile struggle, contestation, and institution-building; and is often contingent on continued commitment and effort. Sikkink also takes issue with critiques of human rights that do not provide any viable alternatives to the framework. She suggests we must accept the messiness and contradictions of human rights practice and institutions because they often produce improved conditions over time and because there is no better alternative.

A few other arguments put forth in this section are notable. First, Sikkink takes an unambiguous stance against military forms of "humanitarian intervention," explaining that calls for such military intervention usually arise out of perceptions of the human rights regime's futility, and arguing that they almost always result in worse human rights outcomes. Second, she advocates seeing human rights institutions as a site of struggle between states that want to co-opt them and human rights activists who want to use them as tools to foster compliance. Finally, as a practical measure, Sikkink calls for activists to carry out less "naming and shaming" and information politics, and instead to pursue more "effectiveness politics," considering what has worked.

In several respects Sikkink's thesis is supported by developments over the last decade in the Middle East, where my own regional expertise lies. First, the centrality of rights in recent political contests in the region speaks to the frame's resonance in another non-Western context and supports the idea that the lack of democracy, more than any cultural resistance, could best explain the region's human rights deficits. Second, while some of the region's human

rights activists can be characterized as elite, self-interested, or removed from the masses, as critics have maintained, increasingly a new generation of Middle Eastern activists is not only genuinely committed to improving conditions in their societies through the human rights framework but also is introspective, connected to their societies, and capable of critically assessing and challenging problematic human rights politics. Third, even as the democratic aspirations of the uprisings have been (with the exception of Tunisia) tragically dashed for the foreseeable future, some of the rights consciousness of the era has had enduring effects, for example, as evidenced by normative shifts in terms of women's rights.

In several other respects, however, *Evidence for Hope* does not fully capture how human rights politics have played out in the Middle East, where despite long-term improvements in some specific areas, domestic and international actors' co-option of human rights has severely limited avenues for meaningful progress in critical civil and political areas for a very long time. Sikkink acknowledges the variation in progress both across different areas of rights and across different regions of the world. Yet she gives us little guidance on how we can weigh progress in some areas against stagnation or regression in others; and her emphasis on looking beyond "the ideal" seems to prevent her from seriously addressing cases like that of the Middle East, where sizable gaps between the promise of human rights and their practice persist.

Finally, while Sikkink's argument that, historically, seemingly ineffective human rights contests and institutions have laid important foundations for future human rights gains is highly persuasive, she does not fully explain why we should be hopeful that the same trajectory may be possible in different contexts and under changing circumstances in the future.

Some academic audiences may be disappointed that Sikkink occasionally gives only cursory coverage to topics that merit much more extensive treatment (such as human rights' relationship with neoliberalism) and offers sweeping prescriptions for the future that include reducing levels of war and promoting democracy. But this should not detract from the valuable contributions that *Evidence for Hope* does make. Sikkink's latest contribution introduces a set of new ideas and approaches assessing human rights' effectiveness that, like her past groundbreaking work, will likely be debated, developed, and critiqued for years to come.

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Refuge: Rethinking Refugee Policy in a Changing World, Alexander Betts and Paul Collier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 288 pp., $18.95 paper.

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This book should be read by anyone interested in understanding the global refugee crisis or in thinking productively about what can be done to help the approximately