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SUMMARY OF *DESIGNING DEMOCRACIES IN A DANGEROUS WORLD*

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ABSTRACT: This is a book review of *Designing Democracies in a Dangerous World* by Andrew Reynolds using USAID guidelines.

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DESIGNING DEMOCRACY IN A DANGEROUS WORLD

By Andrew Reynolds

In *Designing Democracy in a Dangerous World* (2011, Oxford University Press), the author prescribes institutional and procedural solutions to policy-makers and politicians the same way a physician does with medicine to patients. Following the tradition of Huntington, Kaplan, Carothers and Lijphart, Reynolds focuses on recent post-conflict cases including Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Burma, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Lebanon and the Democratic Republic of Congo among a total of 66 countries. For him, **political inclusion utilizing constitutional engineering offers the best solution to resolve conflicts, but it's not the perfect solution.**

- Applying a medical treatment approach to democracy design entails broader issues: **managing conflict** (best approach) **versus curing** it (likely impossible), **misdiagnosing conflict** (using inappropriate institutions as in Malawi in 1990s), using **first aid** (should be used only in beginning as in Bosnia in 1990s to end violence) **versus convalescence** (using more intense treatment over long term as in Nicaragua to consolidate democratic norms), **holistic design** (treating a specific disease while treating the patient as a whole as occurred in Fiji in late 90s) and **discharging too early** (using donor assistance and plans too quickly as with Zimbabwe's elections in 2002), knowing constitutional (or medical limits) as in Lebanon with power-sharing agreement, and democracy advisers (constitutional engineers) who use one size fits all approach (a wrong medicine), as in South Africa in 1948.
- In diagnosing his states, the author looks at 66 countries across all regions and uses *Polity* data to operationalize **democracy** and **stability** as dependent variables with two **intervening institution variables** (electoral inclusion, regions and localities and executive type). His independent variables are **demographic context** (segmentation, fragmentation, size, concentration), **sociopolitical context** (external threat, belief in the nation, multiethnic cleavages and focus of the fight), **economic context** (income, development level, inequality, dependence on resources, and type of natural resource) and **historical context** (colonial legacy, nature of *ancien regime*, internal military threat, culture of accommodation, type of transitions, level of violence and anti-government activity).
- Reynolds first tests his **consensus versus majoritarian approach (democratic alignment)** with political stability using data from 66 cases and finds variation. **He concludes that political stability is more likely when wealth/human development increases, conflict is not communally or ethnically based, the ancien regime is left-of-center if authoritarian in the past, and there broad support of the nation across groups.** Among significant historical and institutional variables, past political rules and wealth creation matter but their impacts can be lessened over time. More income, reduced reliance on natural resources, and fewer moveable resources lead to more stability. **Proportional electoral systems improve stability and political competitiveness but not executive constraints, and the military's absence from politics leads to more competition, as does not having an Anglophone history.**
- **Electoral systems are the most important of political institutions when promoting democratic participation.** Electoral systems range from **first past the post (FPTP)**, **SNTV (single non-transferable vote)** to **Mixed member parliament (MMP)** to **Block to List PR (proportional representation)** in order of least to most representative. 59 countries have changed systems from 1989-

2009 (70% becoming more proportional). **Block systems result in problems in political stability** (Mongolia, Palestine, Liberia), **FPTP should never be used in developing countries because it exaggerates ethnic bloc votes and excludes minority votes from office** (South Africa and Sierra Leone), and **mixed systems are an improvement on both** (Nepal, Japan and Palestine). **But none surpass full PR in transitioning countries.** Fiji, Guyana and Bosnia all show that **electoral systems should appear fair, avoid anomalies in results, create space for cross-cutting multi-ethnic parties, give women and minorities access, promote internal democratization, and create a geographic connection between voters and the elected.**

- The author then looks at **legislative inclusion** and focuses on several socio-political groups, claiming if these marginalized groups gain politically, then all of society is better off. **Ethnic minority parliamentarians are more numerous in block vote and MMP countries** (South Africa, Lebanon, Bosnia-Herzegovina) which is surprising but he **can find no relationship between higher minority representation and policies that might impact minorities.** **LGBT parliamentarians have increased in Western Europe and North America but have more difficulty in getting elected or passing laws in majoritarian/FPTP countries, and in societies that are less tolerant.** **Young people (aged 21-30) are in parliament in Africa and the Middle East more often (Oman, Niger, Syria) and surprisingly, block vote and FPTP systems elect more young people even though having more young legislators is not a predictor of reducing youth unemployment.** Societies that are Protestant or have high GDPs, or have quotas are more likely to have women in the legislature while FPTP, block vote, two round electoral countries and rightist governments are less likely, while Arab and African countries are placing more into office recently.
- **Institutional power-sharing occurs in the government, between the center and local regions and in how wealth is shared.** Political will and a viable state must exist to permit any power-sharing (i.e. providing guarantees to weaker political groups that they will not be exploited or marginalized) and creates incentives for all to work within the existing system rather than against it. Power is shared by a few or many, temporarily or indefinitely, and is done so via representatives (giving persons a political voice), with jobs across the government, and wealth to offset income inequality and sharing different values. **The use of federalism is a way to better represent minorities but decentralization also may give locals too much power (as in Afghanistan) or too much money or resources to rebels or warlords, or even foment secession movements.** Power-sharing usually occurs after or during a conflict and the timing has to be right. **Sharing can also create gridlock and freeze out new future political actors, making long-term pacts more dubious.** Sharing most importantly creates an ethos of toleration of social differences.
- **Iraq is in “intensive care”** in that it is threatened by external foes, its colonial past, its slow institutional reform that promotes violence, and its slow implementation of federalism. **Afghanistan is in intensive care** due to clashes among ethnic groups, external threats, low income, resources that are easy to pillage, a weak and unreliable military, violence and poor parliamentary design. **Sudan is undergoing “democratic surgery”** but suffers from a polarized and region-divided population that sees no state legitimacy in some parts, and a very weak state in the South and West while **Zimbabwe** has very low income levels, an electoral system that favors select groups and a dysfunctional parliament. **Future “democratic transition patients” Burma and Syria** both have poor electoral designs and parliaments and differ in that Burma has very little income per capita while Syria faces more external threats.

The author concludes by making several suggestions. He encourages **creating a theory** of design that permits building institutions needed for various societies, **knowing solutions** for creating stability are not necessarily the ones needed for creating long-term democracy, **using appropriate experts** to pre-plan a society's transition, finding a good exit strategy for the authoritarian or caretaker leadership, **understanding the pre-existing institutions** and where they came from, **allowing for space** for more democratically-elected leaders and multiple points, **reducing the influence** of private armies and militias, **bringing in the diaspora** of a society for expertise, experience and energy, **sequencing elections properly** by starting at the local level and working up, and **having an adequate state** (that can deliver services and enforce laws locally before doing anything else).

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