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Andrew Radin. "Domestic Opposition and the Timing of Democratic Transitions after War." *Security Studies* 26:1 (January 2017): 93-123. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1243917>.

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More than four decades ago, Robert Dahl¹ observed that the most stable democracies² emerged in countries where party competition evolved gradually, allowing elites to learn how to work together peacefully and respect the rules of the game. Ideally, this process of habituation occurred in a sovereign nation-state (a polity free from foreign influence or domination), and where the suffrage was limited to these elites at first and gradually expanded to the rest of the population. Dahl cited as examples countries such as the United Kingdom and United States.

The world has changed a great deal since Dahl wrote. First, many more countries meet the criteria for being considered minimally democratic. In addition, information is readily available and travels much faster than it ever has. Finally, prevailing norms make it difficult for rulers to restrict the suffrage to a minority of the population so as to ensure the long term stability of their regimes. These differences notwithstanding, there is renewed interest in 'constitutional engineering' the attempt to create durable and stable democratic systems in newly emerging and war-torn polities. This interest is motivated in part by the American military intervention in Iraq in 2003 and the extensive nation-building effort launched there by the United States.

¹ Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

² Dahl eschewed the term "democracy," opting instead for "polyarchy" (or rule by the many), to imply that democracy is a work in progress or an end state no society in his time had fully reached.

Following on these footsteps, Andrew Radin studies two post conflict societies – Kosovo and Iraq—in which international missions faced the daunting task of planning and creating a new democracy. These societies effectively stand at the other end of Dahl’s spectrum of cohesiveness, order, and stability. First, they experienced significant violence prior to the arrival of their missions. Second, they can be considered failed states, a situation where government administration had completely collapsed. Finally, democracy is a completely unfamiliar political system, adding up to a cluster of challenges that is very difficult to address.

Radin is concerned with societies in which international missions follow the widely popular recommendation to delay the holding of elections and, more generally, the handover of authority to locals until there is an effective institutional apparatus capable of ensuring that democracy can survive. Pippa Norris has persuasively argued that in societies where both democracy and the state have to be built up organically, one may get in the way of the other as democracy building overwhelms the limited capacities of state apparatus and state building reinforces undemocratic practices and behaviours.³ The literature on democracy promotion has also demonstrated that political liberalization can result in unconsolidated democracies if political competition is introduced too quickly in post conflict settings.⁴

Radin argues that indigenous forces sometimes try and succeed in hastening the time of the transition to democracy and presents a theory that spells out the conditions under which these attempts succeed. Local forces are likely to exert influence over the timing of the transition under two conditions: when elites cohere in a centralized organization that allows them to mount a boycott of existing rules and institutions; and when existing plans pose a threat to the nationalist goals and aspirations of a majority and this majority has the means to mount mass demonstrations against occupying forces. Radin’s theory and its application to the United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq show variation in the presence (or absence) of these antecedents and the outcomes he wishes to explain. In both cases, international missions planned at first for an extensive period of nation- (or state-) building before ushering in a democratic transition. But in Kosovo they were forced to move up a referendum on independence for Kosovo Albanians when riots broke out in 2004 over the UNMIK’s transitional plans. In Iraq, the CPA had planned to delay elections until a constitution had been drafted, but its hand was forced when a blockade by leading Shia forced the CPA to amend its original timetable.

Radin is careful to specify the scope conditions for his theory: “postconflict societies where international influence is particularly strong, and the international community appears at first glance to be most able to determine the timing of elections—namely occupations ... This includes US-led missions such as the CPA in Iraq, as well as UN missions, such as those in Kosovo and East Timor” (97). The goals and outcomes of these missions can thus be evaluated against the record of previous U.S. interventions to see what perspective we gain on recent attempts to fundamentally alter the course of a society.

In a review of U.S. military interventions that involved ground troops since World War II, Jason Brownlee observes that “in the developing world, the more modest the goals, the more successful U.S. interventions

³ Pippa Norris, *Making Democratic Governance Work: How Regimes Shape Prosperity, Welfare, and Peace* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴ Jai Kwan Jung. “Power-Sharing and Democracy Promotion in Post-Civil War Peace-Building.” *Democratization* 19:3 (June 2012): 486-506, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2012.674359>.

have been.”⁵ In fact, when American forces have stayed for several years as in Iraq and attempted a wholesale restructuring of society, the results have been disappointing, leading Brownlee to conclude that “more is less.” For those cases in which “U.S. troops did not stick around to arbitrate local politics or erect new governments from scratch,” history proves in fact that “less is more.” Brownlee summarizes the evidence as follows: “Sooner or later, whether in victory (Japan) or defeat (Vietnam), U.S. presidents defer to the power of the local society.”⁶ It is helpful to keep this history in perspective as we assess the failure of international missions in the twenty-first century to stick to their original time tables. What may appear as a problem then can instead be reframed as a challenge to ensure that political liberalization—the sequence of steps needed to establish democratic institutions – is done properly, albeit at an accelerated pace.

Radin stops short of considering the implications of the two modes of opposition he studies – mass protest and elite boycotts – for democratic consolidation, but this is an important question worth exploring in future research. In other words, what appear to be two equivalent ways of accelerating the timetable for liberalization might in fact have different consequences for the fate of the post-transitional project.

Another point that deserves consideration is whether the effects of opposition to the mission of the international community vary depending on whether the primary goal of this opposition is territorial secession and the creation of a new state, or whether it is simply to emerge as the dominant group or party in a newly reconstituted state. At first glance, it might appear as if Kosovo and Iraq are similar post-conflict societies, but the goal of Kosovo Albanians—which by some measures amounted to 90% of the population of the Kosovar province of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (106)—was an independent state, whereas the Shia, the largest ethnic group to oppose the CPA, never intended to secede from Iraq and create a separate state.

These quibbles notwithstanding, Andrew Radin’s article is a valuable contribution to the literature on conflict resolution, democratization, and democracy promotion.

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⁵ Jason Brownlee, “Was Obama Wrong to Withdraw Troops from Iraq?”, *The Washington Post (Monkey Cage)*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/06/26/was-obama-wrong-to-withdraw-troops-from-iraq/?utm_term=.b79e2bae4d30.

⁶ *Ibid.*