

Proposals for tackling seemingly impossible tasks

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Winston Churchill was famous for expounding pithy yet meaningful phrases. One of his best was: "Democracy is the worst form of government ... except all others." Was he correct? Maybe, maybe not.

Economist Dambisa Moyo, an African American scholar born in Zambia, earned her BS and MBA degrees from American University in Washington, DC, her MPA degree from Harvard and her PhD from Oxford (called a "DPhil" in UK). She worked at the World Bank and Goldman Sachs in foreign bonds and finance, which took her to more than 75 countries to examine the political, economic and financial workings of emerging economies.

She has written four New York Times bestsellers on politics and economics. She is on the boards of Barclays Bank, Chevron and Barrick Gold.

Dr. Moya has some scintillating ideas on how government can be organized to tackle seemingly impossible tasks. Her starting point is a recognition that political parties in democracies tend to be influenced by special interest groups, which constitute their base of reliable voter and financial support. When in power party leaders attack long-term challenges (if at all) with short term solutions.

When the opposition party comes into power: same thing. So chronic problems such as solvency of Social Security and Medicare, immigration reform, infrastructure decay, etc., get kicked down the road.

Dr. Moyo notes that China, a non-democratic economy, enjoys constant economic growth allowing for investment in infrastructure, health care, education and the like so that the populace is happy and government is stable.

She is concerned about democracies' voting populations. A University of Pennsylvania survey revealed that only a quarter of those contacted could name all three branches of U.S. government and fully a third could not name any. She also is concerned about voter apathy and lukewarm turnout. Writing in UK's the Guardian she notes how tepid voter turnout and narrow elections, such as the Brexit vote and Trump's victory, "test the limits of people's faith in democracy."

Dr. Moyo proposes civics testing of voters and giving greater weight to the votes of the well-informed to "reduce the influence of those most likely to be apathetic or disengaged from policy debates and thus to make poor electoral choices."

Hmmm. Sounds a little like Democratic Party "super delegates" who assured Hillary Clinton's nomination regardless of Bernie Sander's electoral success with Democratic voters. Moyo favors mandatory voting laws.

Dr. Moyo points to Singapore as an effectively structured government. Singapore has been rated well above the United States in terms of financial integrity, health, stability and folks who are happy with the general welfare. Dr. Moyo believes that the real secret of Singapore's success lies in terms of office that are long enough to tackle intractable problems plus a financial incentive system that attracts the brightest and best to government.

Compensation is tied to achievement of goals defined at the beginning of terms of office. Examples are gross domestic product growth, real per capita income and work force participation rate; production of national wealth permits generous social welfare programs plus fiscal integrity. If goals are not attained there is a negative incentive "claw back" where the executive's pension fund is dunned, Dr. Moyo reported.

Last year Singapore's prime minister earned almost \$4 million (in U.S. dollars) per year. Other ministers also are well-compensated. Such incentives assure that government executives pursue goals benefitting the general welfare rather than those of special interests who quietly command attention with generous political contributions.

Candidates for highest offices must prove prior experience in local and regional governments.

Human rights watchers are less enthusiastic about Singapore. There is very little crime because punishments are swift and severe. Misdemeanor crimes against property are punished by stringing perpetrators up in public and striking them with canes. Littering can result in a \$15,000 fine.

So is Churchill right or Dr. Moyo? You decide.

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