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The Grounds of the Fall of the Republic by Studying the Voting Behavior of the Afghan People (Case study: 2019 Presidential Election)

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Abstract

After the United States and its allies' attack on Afghanistan, the Republic government replaced the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban. One of the gifts of the Democratic Republic to Afghanistan was holding elections with the presence of eligible women and men as voters and election candidates. Based on this, the fourth presidential election in Afghanistan in 2019 was held amidst the confrontation between the central government and the Taliban in peace talks in Doha and war in various parts of the country. Approximately ten million eligible voters had registered to vote. The elections, which had been delayed for several months, were finally held in September 2019. The low voter turnout quickly made headlines. Only about two million six hundred thousand people, or just twenty percent of eligible voters, had turned up to the polls. This lack of enthusiasm signaled a major shift in

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Afghanistan's political situation. Given that elections are one of the most important symbols of democracy, the behavior of Afghan voters sounded an important alarm for the central government and, consequently, the survival of democracy. An alarm that no one paid attention to, and less than two years later, its result was evident with the fall of the republic and the return of the Taliban.

In this regard, the research question has been raised as to how the grounds for the collapse of the republican system in Afghanistan were formed in the behavior of voters in the 2019 presidential elections? The research method is qualitative with a descriptive-analytical approach. The data has been collected from library and internet sources. The theoretical basis of this research is also based on the views and opinions of Robert Dahl, Inglehart, and Pippa Nouris in the field of voting behavior.

Robert Dahl's theory, based on the principle of cost-benefit calculation, denies the approach of sociability and emphasizes the importance of rational choice. Overall, this approach seeks to demonstrate a direct relationship between citizens' inclination to vote and their benefit from participating in elections.

Inglehart's theory focuses on changing the values of generations. He believes that over time and with changes in the international climate, the desires and thoughts of generations change. These changes are reflected in the social and political behavior of individuals.

Finally, this research has sought the help of the Pippa Nouris views, which has proposed a model for examining political participation and, consequently, voting behavior, which is one of the most comprehensive theoretical models in the field of elections to date. The popularity and acceptance of this model is due to the use of three groups of macro, meso, and micro theories. With such characteristics, it is possible to examine the voting behavior of citizens at different levels.

The research findings indicate that a set of factors has influenced the voting behavior of the people of Afghanistan. These factors not only illustrate the people's disillusionment with the 2019 elections but also reflect a general sense of hopelessness and distance from the republican system among the people. This hopelessness ultimately led to the fall of the republic to the Taliban less than two years later.

These factors and backgrounds included the following:

First, "political and economic inequalities and imbalances" resulting from

the monopolization of power by the Pashtun ethnic group.

Second, "undermining the religious identity of the people" resulting from the Western democratic system's governance, which incited bias and religious sentiment among the people of Afghanistan, ultimately paving the way for the acceptance of the Taliban.

The third factor was the "negative effects of the engineering of the 2014 presidential elections." The engineering of these elections dealt a heavy blow to the framework of democracy imposed on Afghanistan, the consequences and effects of which were evident five years later with the people's lack of enthusiasm for the fourth presidential elections.

In the lead-up to the 2019 elections in Afghanistan, the legitimacy and acceptance of the republican system had reached its lowest point.

Fourth, "the failure to achieve peace and national tranquility" after the US invasion of Afghanistan, which, with the continuation of military confrontation between the US and the Taliban, was never realized, and the security of Afghanistan was severely undermined.

Fifth, "Deepening ethnic divides" as a result of the Pashtun-centric policies of Afghan presidents (Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani) intensified ethnic nationalism and division, impacting societal cohesion and unity. In reality, on the brink of the 2019 elections, democracy in Afghanistan brought about systematic and modern ethnic biases, fostering increased division and significantly diminishing political participation.

Sixth, "Multiplicity and weakness of parties." The emerging parties in Afghanistan were predominantly ethnocentric and focused on individual interests. In the 2019 elections, rather than uniting society to find the best presidential option, parties engaged in political maneuvering, leading to division along ethnic and religious lines.

Seventh, "Exclusion of women from political participation." Despite efforts during the republican system to uphold women's rights, an anti-women culture hindered active female engagement. Women's involvement in political and social spheres was notably low on the eve of the 2019 presidential elections.

Eighth, "Emergence of a new generation." Educated and well-informed, the new generation perceived the current Afghan government as ineffective and un-

trustworthy, prompting a boycott of electoral participation.

Conclusion: The lack of enthusiasm for the 2019 fourth presidential elections in Afghanistan served as an initial indication, signaling reduced legitimacy and acceptance of the republican system amongst Afghan citizens.

In this regard, the actions of the central government, opposition groups to the republican system, and the interventions of foreign countries were three crucial elements contributing to the diminishing desire for political participation among the Afghan people. Over the past two decades, the central government, through the monopolization of power within a specific ethnic group and the marginalization of other ethnicities, fostered a cold war scenario among various groups, political parties, and ethnic factions both against the central government and the favored ethnic group. Concurrently, the Taliban and ISIS, serving as the primary opposition forces to the central government, gained significant influence and power in Afghanistan.

The shift from military confrontation to soft negotiations with the Taliban, coupled with the government's unaccountable concessions to this group, further demoralized the populace regarding the republic and democracy. This led to political and social distrust towards the democratic system. By the time of the 2019 elections, democracy lacked a solid track record among the citizens. The voting behavior showcased that the downfall of democracy or the republican system in 2021 was not unforeseen. Issues like poverty, corruption, insecurity, and inequality had peaked prior to the 2019 elections. These problems exacerbated post-elections, resulting in the central government losing its primary asset - public trust.

The election results and the voting tendencies of the Afghan people underscored that democracy cannot be imposed without substantial foundations in place. There was a disenchantment with Western democracy, with the populace anticipating a new political structure following the elections and the Doha peace accord. However, less than two years after the elections, Afghanistan found itself back under the same autocratic Taliban rule from a quarter of a century ago.

Key words: Voting behavior, Afghanistan, elections, political participation, collapse, democracy.