

Democracy in Peril: Have Americans Lost Faith in Elections?

With the conclusion of the 2022 midterm elections, questions have been raised about the political environment and status of democracy in the country. A recent New York Times and Siena College poll revealed that 71% of all voters said democracy was at risk. Most of the survey's respondents viewed that the most serious threat to democracy resulted from government corruption. Interestingly, those polled reported long-standing concerns about the basic functioning of a democracy, as the New York Times put it, "whether government [even] works on behalf of the people." The poll also showed that the majority of voters in both parties identified the opposing party as a "major threat to democracy." Similarly, another poll conducted by NPR/Ipsos in January 2022 found 64% of Americans believed U.S. democracy was "in crisis and at risk of failing," while 70% felt America itself is failing.

Anyone who has followed American politics over the past few decades will observe that the sentiments expressed in these surveys are the ground reality. There is deep cynicism among average Americans about politics in the country. The political environment in the country has become quite volatile, with incidences of political violence erupting over the past few years, including during the current midterm elections. Examples of such political violence include the Capitol Hill 'insurrection' on January 6, 2021, the attack on Nancy Pelosi's husband, and threats against members of Congress. The country is highly divided on political lines—on issues such as abortion, gun policy, crime, and immigration—and allegiance to their respective political parties to the point that even couples wanting to get married view political differences as a non-reconcilable issue.

Regardless of the partisan rhetoric, faith in government institutions is at an all-time low. The mistrust in government institutions, the integrity of the electoral process, voter suppression, and political appointments goes past partisan differences. This is further demonstrated in a Gallup poll that revealed that only 27% of Americans had a great deal of confidence across the major American institutions. The same Gallup poll also showed a sharp decline in trust for the three branches of the Federal Government: the Presidency, the Supreme Court, and Congress. Interestingly, we have seen such trends in other Western nations as well. The questions of democracy working for people, faith in institutions, and the system functioning upon its ideals are being debated across western countries. The rise of populism, nationalism and democratically elected strong men like Bolsonaro and Trump further demonstrates people's frustration with the status quo and loss of faith in the system of democracy.

More than ever before, America's polarized cultural wars on issues such as abortion, CRT, LGBT and Trans rights, to political appointments to the Supreme Court are indicative of a people divided and a society in disharmony. This cynicism, polarization, anger, and mistrust further extend to American institutions, a trend that has been accelerating for the past few decades, especially regarding Congress. The discourse in

the country has moved beyond partisan politics and now questions the very core of democracy—whether the electoral process is free, fair, and representative of the people.

This is further echoed in the recent statement by President Biden when he said on the issue of "candidates running for every level of office in America...who won't commit to accepting the results of the elections that they're running in...[that] This is the path to chaos in America. It's unprecedented. It's unlawful. And it's un-American."

The truth is that the failure of the system of democracy to uphold its claims of being representative of the people is an old story—as noted, for example, by a 2014 Princeton University study entitled "Testing Theories of American Politics," which concluded that the United States is essentially an oligarchy. The study showed that the people had little to no effect on public policy, whether foreign or domestic. The study stated, "Multivariate analysis indicates that economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence." During this midterm election, approximately \$17 billion were spent on election campaigning while the country suffered historical inflation. Accordingly, the real fear in status quo figures like President Biden is the people's increasingly uncontrollable frustration and mistrust of the system itself, rather than any theoretical or ideological departure in American Democracy that never truly existed.

Today, democracy—far from the universal truth and the prime system of governance and justice touted by the West—is internally crumbling, with its people losing faith in its electoral integrity and the capability of the Democratic System to solve real problems.

In contrast, the hearts and minds of Muslims worldwide continually long for Islam and the Islamic System to practically govern and solve their affairs. Islam is rising and poses a significant challenge to the failing secular liberal order. Islam has its own government and justice system practically manifested in the institution of the Khilafah (Caliphate). The application of the system of Islam—as testified across a rich 1400-year history—possesses the power to legitimately unite people from different races, ethnicities, regions, and even beliefs into a harmonious, cohesive, and protected society. The world itself holds its breath under today's seemingly never ending crisis, division, exploitation, and misery since the destruction of the System and Institution of Islam in 1924 CE.

In Islam, sovereignty belongs exclusively to Allah (swt) and human beings do not legislate. Accordingly, society's fundamental principles are based on justice and the application of the divine law of Allah (swt), and unlike today, are not beholden to the limited, biased, and ever-changing morality or whims of the people or elites. **﴿إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ﴾**

﴿اللَّهُ﴾ “The rule is for none but Allah” [TMQ Al-Anam: 57].

Jumada I 5, 1444 AH

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Hizb ut Tahrir

America