

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

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**Public Mistrust as the Main Cause of Loss of Government legitimacy**

Many Afghans don't believe the government is fair. This is not sentiment but reality; to most Afghans, the government doesn't exist for them, but for the privileged few. This psychological revolt against policies stems from a culture of mistrust built over decades.

In the Literatures on trust, factors usually used to measure trust or distrust in government is perception of corruption. Indeed, several studies have documented that corruption is the main determinant of citizen's distrust in governments. Afghanistan is not atypical of corruption plaguing its government. Without overemphasizing the debate about corruption, there are other yardsticks with which to measure determinant of trust in government, such as economic performance, misappropriation of public funds, political participation. In several studies on Trust, some analyst speaks of organizational trust, while others speak of interpersonal trust. However, the interest of this article is in political trust, a form of organizational trust, which is trust in government-governmental institutions and politicians.

Understanding political trust in Afghanistan is central to understanding perception of current democratic dispensation. Not only understanding perception of current democratic dispensation, it also matter to understand political trust because lack of trust can lead to erosion of public confidence, loss of legitimacy of governments. Consequently, distrust or lack of trust, can pose serious challenge to working of governments. Trust enhances confidence in institutions and consequently, attracts cooperation of citizens to the agreed policies and programs of the governments.

**How to Improve Public Trust to the Government**

Reform Measures for More Participatory Government is one of the key strategies in this regard. The agenda for participatory administration can be enforcement of cooperative governance with the civil society and active support for public service. The key measures may include strengthening the direct democratic values in which residents participate directly in government affairs; Building a foundation where the public can conveniently and efficiently participate in government affairs using E-government such as the online public engagement system; Allowing active and substantial civil engagement in the administrative process through the vitalization of policy communities; Stimulating the openness of government and the engagement of civilians through the expansion of the entry of civilians in public office, and expand the employment of minorities in public office; protecting the minority groups against the targeted attacks of the terrorist groups.

In addition to this, Government shall put the systematic effort for anti-corruption and promotion of a higher sense of ethics among public officials as the major priority. Specific actions include improving the systems and regulations that induce irregularity, devising anti-corruption measures for each sector, imposing checks and balances among inspection institutions, focusing on the substance of action plans, improving public ethics, and eliminating the authoritative administrative culture. The key measures that shall be taken include; Increasing administrative openness by expanding the disclosure of administrative information and enhancing access to it, and by making the Name Recognition System for Made Policies and the recording of major issues mandatory; achieve public ethics through improving regulations and the integrity of public officials; Preventing abuse of authority in local governments by establishing self-regulating constraint mechanisms such as securing the suitable environment for local legislation activities, strengthening the responsibility of local governments, and increasing the transparency and soundness of local financial management; And raising the level of public trust and preventing the possibility of non-transparent activities by establishing electronic systems for government duties.

**IEC Failure to Announce Timely Election Results Cast Doubt on Validity of Vote Counting Process**

By: Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

Afghan Parliamentary elections held on 20th October 2018 had been touted to be one of the most efficient and organized elections in country's history, but the whole electoral process has been a failure right from the onset when IEC started registration of voters in cities, major population centers, districts and villages across Afghanistan - where security allowed for their operations - to conducting elections on election day and the way present counting of votes is running and overdue elections results are handled. People of Afghanistan had pinned high hopes to the 20th October parliamentary elections because of several reasons, 1) they wanted to get rid of the present parliament, which is known as a pit of corrupt individuals who made business deals, suited their personal interests, employed their family and kinship on important key government position in return for their vote of confidence to appoint ministers or waving of green cards to pass certain legislations etc., and 2) they wanted to elect educated, clean handed, honest and hardworking individuals who could stand to face prevailing challenges Afghanistan is facing at present. It was these inspiring agenda which encouraged millions of Afghans - men and women - to come out and register their names at certain polling stations in cities, districts and villages across the country. IEC / IECC and Government of Afghanistan had responded to demands from political parties to introduce 'biometric machines' during voting day. These machines were brought in to make sure fraud and election rigging was prevented. Individuals across the country had accepted new rules of IEC to be background-checked before they were allowed to nominate to contest for a seat in the parliament. These procedures were tedious and tiring, but in order to bring change and break the present stalemate in the country, men and women stood out to go through them and nominate themselves to contest for a seat in the parliament.

Government security institutions badly failed to level playing fields for electoral process to take place in a normal environment. Those provinces which were relatively calm, including Kabul, had suffered checkered security incidents, but they have done well. The main challenges before government security institutions had been provinces which were besieged by Taliban insurgents including Kunduz, Helmand, Baghlan, Ghazni and few others. A case in point of total failure on the part of government to provide conducive security environment was Kunduz province. It took eight months since electoral process started in March 2018 when candidates started to register for contesting parliamentary elections till the election day on 20th October, but government did nothing the widen government control to areas around major population centers. Government control remains less than twenty percent of the total province. Taliban rule starts right after three kilometer around Kunduz city, and less than one kilometer around district centers. Worse of all, Taliban insurgents remain in control of overall situation in the province. Their regulations are followed by mobile phone operating companies and most of ordinary civilians who live under their rules. It was expected that more than twenty thousand army and police personnel who are stationed in Kunduz, would start military operations against insurgent groups to expand writ of government deep into population centers, which are under Taliban insurgent control. But nothing like this happened. It seemed like conspiracy and ordinary people started asking government hadn't done anything to push back insurgents from the brink of the city and major population centers out in the districts. As a result, Taliban insurgents organized killer squads who could easily entered city centers and knocked at the doors of candidates and their campaigners. They would take campaigners one by one out of their homes and shot them at blank-point few hundred yards away from

their homes. More than thirty-five individuals were target-killed during registration process in March and April. Worse was to come on elections day on twenty October! Taliban attacked Kunduz city and district centers across the province killing and injuring more than two hundred civilians - mostly those who were employee of IEC, candidates campaigners, representatives and people who wanted to vote. In one such incidents, Taliban armed personnel simply visited one of the pooling booth located five hundred meters from the nearby government police post, took five female civilians with them, who had come to vote, shaved their heads and killed them at blank-point, and also injured ten people including candidates observers. Apart from very few local news and social media, which covered very limited security incidents, the real scale and depth of casualties were not covered by any media outlets during or after elections day - a total media blackout persisted! Taliban insurgents would post their armed personnel roaming freely on main highways and some district centers and communicate military progress / orders to their men across the province. It looked like the whole province was going to fall to Taliban insurgents on the day of elections.

This situation has sabotaged elections all over the province. More than hundred and fifty thousand voters who had registered themselves could not come out of to vote. Taliban insurgents had sanctioned elections and warned ordinary civilians they would be killed or heavily fined if anyone caught doing campaign, represent a candidate or work at IEC. They blocked all roads and access routes that led to cities and major population centers. Armed men associated with Taliban were openly patrolling access roads between district centers. In the face of this active threat only twenty-five thousands managed to vote for more than ninety candidates who had been registered across the province! In addition, strong men and existing parliament members all of whom re-registered and contested elections, had used at their will and prerogative government provided vehicles, arms and their influence on security institutions in the province in couple of districts including Imam Saheb and Khan-abad, who had filled ballot boxes at will - even without biometric registration. This opportunity was provided to them by Taliban attack where all observers had covered for their lives in nearby shelters and ballot boxes were left exposed for exploitation. In the backdrop of these incidents, candidates in Kunduz province continue to protest these riggings and frauds, and have asked IEC and government not to count those votes which are not accompanied with biometric slips.

Such incidents have repeated themselves in many provinces across the country. As if this whole fiasco was not enough, government and IEC continue to play foul and keep delaying announcement of parliamentary elections results for almost a month now! These notorious tactics have allowed for rumors to seep through such as 'government will delay elections results announcement until after Presidential elections scheduled for late March 2019 as it fears strong men will react during presidential elections in the event they failed to make way to parliament', and that 'parliamentary elections will take place anew in order to allow Taliban representatives to contest in the event a peace deal is reached'. In a democratic set up, people are empowered and have all the rights to know about events that affect their lives. Elections are the most important phenomena in a democratic society. Playing foul with this important pillar of democracy is an insult to the people. Government should at once come out and share with people whatever is holding elections results, and also update the nation about progress about ongoing peace process with insurgents.

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**Disaster Capitalism Comes to Puerto Rico**

By: Martin Guzman and Joseph E. Stiglitz

It has been more than a year since Hurricane Maria ravaged Puerto Rico, compounding the agony of a commonwealth that was already caught in an economic downward spiral. In addition to experiencing an out-migration crisis, the island sought what amounted to bankruptcy protection in May 2017. And under the US Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), a federal oversight board now oversees its finances.

Though Maria was a tragedy, it also created an opportunity to rewrite a flawed fiscal plan that had been certified by the oversight board in March 2017. That plan was supposed to restore the island's economic health while also providing money to creditors who were clamoring for repayment. But the plan was projected to depress economic activity even further, and failed to establish an appropriate basis for calculating how much debt restructuring Puerto Rico would need.

Sadly, the opportunity to right Puerto Rico's fiscal ship has not been seized. On the contrary, the oversight board recently certified a new fiscal plan and a deal with holders of bonds issued by the Puerto Rico Urgent Interest Fund Corporation (COFINA) that could put the island in a debt straitjacket indefinitely.

At \$17.8 billion, the stock of COFINA bonds (which are backed by future sales-tax revenues) accounts for more than one-third of the total debt in the new fiscal plan. And the COFINA deal is itself part of a larger debt-restructuring effort that is based on an unrealistic assessment of the commonwealth's economic conditions. Simply put, the terms of the restructuring do not provide enough relief for Puerto Rico to be able to achieve future growth. Under the new deal, Puerto Rico's annual debt payments would increase from \$420 million in fiscal year 2019 to almost \$1 billion in fiscal year 2041, implying an aggregate recovery rate of 75.5% of the amount owed. That is a very generous deal for COFINA bondholders. But if Puerto Rico's other bondholders are hoping to receive similar treatment, they should think again. As our computations show, if such a deal were to be implemented, there would be virtually nothing left for the other categories of bonds (assuming that the point of the debt restructuring is to restore the sustainability of the island's debt).

Thanks to the oversight board, COFINA bondholders will now be getting far more than what they could have expected last December, when Puerto Rican bonds bottomed out. Prices of both COFINA and general obligation bonds have steadily recovered, owing to a political game over disaster relief funds that has been playing out among the oversight board, the US Congress, and bondholders - a game that Puerto Rico's House of Representatives joined a

few days ago when it passed a bill to allow for the COFINA deal.

As the old saying goes, funds are fungible. Even if all the money earmarked for disaster relief actually went where it was supposed to go, the injection of funds nevertheless frees up money elsewhere. Hence, the recent evolution of Puerto Rican bond prices reflects an expectation that the additional funds will go not to Puerto Ricans still suffering from the devastating effects of Maria, but rather to the commonwealth's creditors.

The oversight board's new fiscal plan is equally flawed. Based on new growth projections that are even more optimistic than those in the pre-Maria plan, the board assumes that the hurricane somehow provided a net positive shock to Puerto Rico. The new plan includes a relatively bright forecast for fiscal year 2019, and foresees economic growth and higher government revenue from then on, despite larger doses of fiscal austerity and declining federal aid.

It is hard to make sense of such assumptions, and harder still to accept that they could provide a good basis for computing Puerto Rico's actual repayment capacity. As Brad Setser of the Council on Foreign Relations explains, the oversight board justifies its optimism by assuming - implausibly, in our view - that the plan's proposed structural reforms for the 2021-2023 period will deliver extraordinarily large gains.

More realistically, the plan projects a steep decline in Puerto Rico's population, from 3.3 million today to 2.1 million by 2058. Yet while the oversight board tacitly recognizes that many citizens will have to leave for the US mainland to find work, it expects output per worker to rise miraculously to compensate for the contraction of the labor force.

Despite a strong consensus among economists that Puerto Rico needs a radically different economic and debt-restructuring plan, the relevant policymakers do not seem to be listening. If the island's liabilities are not properly restructured, it will remain in a debt trap. As long as the money needed for investments is going to pay bondholders, sustained growth is impossible.

Given the state of Puerto Rico's economy after Maria, a much deeper restructuring is inevitable. But by pursuing its new fiscal plan and the COFINA deal, the oversight board has squandered valuable time, ensuring that Puerto Rico's decade-long struggle will both continue and grow worse.

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