In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

A Fresh Perspective on the Theory of Religious Democracy by Imam Khamenei

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Abstract

Religious democracy is a model of governance rooted in the divine-popular legitimacy of the government. While it prioritizes the will and intention of the Almighty, it also respects the desires and aspirations of the people. It asserts that the people play a fundamental role in the formation, continuity, efficiency, and flourishing of the government, essentially being its owners and primary overseers.

The theory of religious democracy was established by Imam Khomeini and has been further developed, elucidated, and sustained by Imam Khamenei. The aim of this research is to present a new interpretation and clarification of Imam Khamenei's theory of religious democracy. This article employs a descriptive-inferential and interpretive approach to first provide a comprehensive yet concise explanation of the fundamental concepts of democracy and religion. Then, it analyzes and examines Imam Khamenei's perspective on the concept of religious democracy. According to him, religious democratic governance rests on three main pillars, and if any of these pillars or indicators are absent, the essence of religious democratic governance collapses. These three pillars, in order of priority, are: the realization of scientific, managerial, insightful, and ethical competencies in the agents of the religious democratic system; the formation of government with the consent and participation of the public; the efficiency of the religious democratic system. Finally, after analyzing and elucidating the paradoxical nature of the concept of religious democracy, we provide a comprehensive critique through nine scientific and meticulous responses.

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Introduction

"The Theory of Religious Democratic Governance" is a keyword that Ayatollah Khamenei first introduced in 1979 and has since consistently elaborated upon and substantiated in numerous speeches. This level of repetition demonstrates his particular attention to the model of religious democratic governance. Ayatollah Khamenei's theory of religious democratic governance is the primary stabilizing factor of the Islamic Revolution and presents a new model of management and governance that is not in conflict with religious values and principles, leading all individuals to the attainment of worldly and otherworldly happiness.

Ayatollah Khamenei's theory of religious democratic governance is considered an explanation, elevation, and a new perspective on Imam Khomeini's theory of the Islamic Republic, scattered throughout his speeches and in some available books and articles.

Numerous works have been written on this subject, and here we will briefly refer to the most important ones and finally address the merits of this research with similar titles:

"Religious Democratic Governance from the Perspective of Ayatollah Khamenei," written by Mehdi Saeedi, published by the Center for the Documentation of the Islamic Revolution (2013). The main content of this book examines the six statements on the legitimacy of the Islamic government and clarifies Ayatollah Khamenei's view on the essence of the legitimacy of the Islamic government.

Article: "A Model for Explaining the Theory of Religious Democratic Governance by Ayatollah Khamenei," written by Mohammad Bagher Khoramshad and Parviz Amini, in the Political Science Research Quarterly of Baqer al-Uloom University (2017). This article, using a descriptive method, examines the historical review of the three waves created about religious democratic governance.

Article: "The Role and Position of the People in the Islamic Democratic Governance Model from the Perspective of the Esteemed Leadership," written by Hadiat Iqbal, in the Promotional Journal of Islamic Insight and Education (2017). This article, through a descriptive-analytical method, investigates and explains the pillars of power and governance in the political system of Iran, the supervisory role of the people over the holders of power, and the role of public participation in legislation.

Article: "The Elected Guardian to Religious Democratic Governance: Examining the Position of the People in the Guardianship System from the Perspective of Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei," written by Akbar Ashrafi, Islamic Revolution Research Quarterly, Issue 33, (2020). This article, using a descriptive-analytical method, elucidates the historical background of the theory of democratic governance, alongside the compatibility of the theory of democratic governance with the theory of the elected guardian.

Article: "Rational Explanation of Religious Democratic Governance," written by Abbas Ali Rahbar and Seyyed Mojtaba Naemi, Political Studies Quarterly, Issue 2, (2008). This article, through a descriptive method, explains the relationship between the religion of Islam and democracy.

Article: "Legitimacy Issue in the Theory of Religious Democratic Governance by Ayatollah Khamenei," written by Mohammad Bagher Khoramshad and Parviz Amini, Governance Research Quarterly, Issue 15, (2018). This article, using a descriptive-analytical method, elucidates how people intervene in governance, explains the model of single-axis and multi-axis legitimacy.

However, the merit of this research lies firstly in presenting a new interpretation and explanation of Ayatollah Khamenei's theory of religious democratic governance and secondly in providing the most comprehensive scientific critiques of the paradoxical nature of the concept of religious democratic governance.

The primary question of this research is the essence of Ayatollah Khamenei's theory of democratic governance. However, subsidiary questions include: What is democratic governance? What is religion? What are the characteristics of religious democratic governance and the possibility or impossibility of the concept of religious democratic governance?

People's Sovereignty (Democracy)

People's sovereignty, or democracy, was realized at least five centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ, peace be upon him and his family. The people of Athens, except for slaves and women, gathered in public squares in the fifth century BC and directly enacted laws and chose the executive and judicial branches themselves. This form of governance continued until the second century BC and the conquest of Athens by the Macedonian conquerors (Mali, 1983, p. 253).

The Latin equivalent of people's sovereignty is "democracy," and its Greek equivalent is "demokratia." "Demokratia" is derived from two words: "demos," meaning people, and "kratein," meaning rule, and in terminology, it also means governance by the people (Cohen, 1994, p. 20).

Socrates was executed in opposition to people's sovereignty in 399 BC due to his belief in the rule of wise men (Arblaster, 2000, p. 35). Plato believed that people are governed by three types of systems: 1) monarchy, where one individual rules over the people, 2) oligarchy, where a minority and limited group govern, and 3) timocracy, where large landowners govern (Alam, 2005, p. 99). Aristotle defines democracy as a system that allows the participation of all people (Aristotle, 1979, p. 127).

People's sovereignty means governance for the people, as opposed to governance over the people. In governance for the people, the people are the rightful owners, and the government is obligated to uphold the rights of the people. In this type of governance, people play a fundamental role in the legitimacy of the government (Nouzari, 2000, p. 416). In democratic governments, the legitimacy of power is solely based on the consent of the people to obey the government, assuming that people follow the government out of consent, not fear or coercion (Beshiriye, 2001, p. 19). If people are the agents of power, the form of governance will be people's sovereignty, or democracy. Kant believes that governments can be divided into autocracy, aristocracy, and democracy, based on the multiple individuals who exercise supreme power (Kant, 2002, p. 358). However, in democratic governments, the way power is exercised by the people varies, thus showing differences. For example, David Held in his book "Models of Democracy" analyzes and examines eleven models of imagined types of democracy:
1. Classical Democracy; 2. Supportive Democracy; 3. Radical Evolutionary Democracy; 4. Evolutionary Democracy; 5. Marxist Direct Democracy; 6. Competitive Elitist Democracy; 7. Pluralist Democracy; 8. Legal Democracy; 9. Participatory Democracy; 10. Autonomous Democracy; 11. Global Democracy (Taqavi, 1382, pp. 258-256).

Below are brief references from some Western and Islamic thinkers on democracy:

David Beetham and Kevin Boyle, contemporary Western political scientists, believe democracy belongs to a form of collective decision-making. Collective decision-making stands in contrast to another type of decision-making called individual decision-making, in which specific individuals alone decide independently from others… Democracy, in its essence, signifies the ideal that

decisions affecting a community as a whole must be made with; the consent of all individuals of that community, and all members must have equal rights to participate in decision-making. In other words, the existence of democracy requires two fundamental principles: universal oversight of collective decision-making and having equal rights in exercising this oversight. The more these two principles are realized in the decisions of a society, the more democratic that society will become (Beetham & Boyle, 1379, vol. 2, p. 17).

Cohen believes: A government in which members of the community directly or indirectly participate in making decisions that concern them or can participate is referred to as a democratic government (Cohen, 1373, p. 27).

Sisk says: Democracy is a form of government in accordance with the principles of popular sovereignty, political equality, consultation with all people, and organized majority rule… Democracy is based on the responsibility of officials who are elected through legal elections, elections in which almost all citizens can vote (Timony, 1378, pp. 25-20).

Popper argues: Democracy is not necessarily the rule of the people, but rather a mechanism of the political system through which undesirable governments are removed from power (Popper, 1367, p. 119).

Al-Mu'allim al-Thani (al-Farabi) criticizes democracy from a religious perspective. He labels democratic government as "al-Madinah al-Jamaiyah" or "al-Madinah al-Ahrar" and believes: Al-Madinah al-Jamaiyah is a city where its people are free and unrestricted to do as they wish, without anything hindering them. They mention four characteristics of democratic governance: 1) Popular sovereignty; 2) Citizenship equality; 3) Socioeconomic diversity; 4) Cultural diversity (Mahajeran, 1380, pp. 332-335). Almost all Islamic philosophers and scholars, including Avicenna, Khwajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, and Sadr al-Muta'allihin, after al-Farabi, believed that democracy and al-Madinah al-Jamaiyah represent undesirable governance (Homoo, 1378, p. 11).

Sadr al-Muta'allihin explicitly defends the model of divine appointment of leadership in Islamic society and believes: The leader of the community, like other people, is obliged to act according to divine laws, and in cases where there is no prohibition from Sharia, act based on consultation and general consensus (See: Lakzayi, 1387, pp. 150-101).

Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi believes: Democracy has three interpretations: 1) Democracy means the direct involvement of the people in government affairs, which was implemented in one of the Greek cities for a short period and then disappeared. 2) People's involvement in government through the election of representatives, the same method that exists in modern countries and even in our country. 3) Democracy means that all government affairs, including legislation and implementation, are separate from religion. In other words, the condition for the government to be democratic is its secular and secular nature (Yazdi, Hawzah Information Website, 1385/5/1).

Democracy According to Abdolkarim Soroush: Abdolkarim Soroush defines democracy as: "A way of organizing society in a manner that can accommodate all internal transformations without resorting to violence. Democracy is a set of institutions aimed at minimizing administrative errors by maximizing public participation and reducing the role of individuals in decision-making" (Soroush, 1372, p. 269).

In the literature of the architect of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Imam Khomeini, the term "republic" is equivalent to "democracy". He says in defining the republic and democracy: "The issue of the republic pertains to the form of government that requires a kind of democracy, meaning that people have the right to determine their own destiny" (Khomeini, 1368, Vol. 5, p. 262).

Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, emphasizes the necessity of achieving democracy: "In the political school of the Imam, human identity is valuable, dignified, powerful, and productive. The valuable result of human dignity is that in governing the fate of humanity and a society, the people's opinions should play a fundamental role" (13th anniversary of the passing of Imam Khomeini, March 14, 83).

Religion

Religion is among the concepts whose meaning and definition has always sparked diverse opinions and various perspectives have been put forward regarding it (Misbah Yazdi, 1365, vol. 1, p. 28). As one Western thinker puts it, even presenting an incomplete list of definitions of religion has become impossible (Eliade, 1373, vol. 1, p. 85). Among the challenges of defining religion are: 1) Differences in the methodology of defining religion. Some have defined religion based on empirical methods and external functions, while others have based it on rational methods and pre-existing concepts. 2) Differences in the instances of religion as a tool for understanding the nature of religion. (For example, some have also considered philosophical and social schools as religions). 3) Confusion and lack of distinction between the essence of religion and its adherents. 4) Internal referencing of religion or lack thereof. 5) Use of ambiguous and complex concepts. 6) Use of lexical and verbal definitions instead of terminological definitions. 7) Influence of preconceptions and mindsets of different individuals. 8) Lack of tangible and perceptible instances for religion. 9) Particularism and lack of a holistic view of religion. 10) Distortions occurring in divine religions (Khosropnah, 1390, pp. 51-49). In lexicography, religion means creed, nation, path, law, method, tradition, reward, accountability, command, and obedience (Dehkhoda, 1342, under the entry for "religion"; Moein, 1379, vol. 2, p. 1597). Ibn Farsi linguistically defines religion as submission, acceptance, and obedience. Religion: the principle to which all its branches return, and it is a type of submission and humility. Therefore, religion is obedience; it is said he has a religion if he adheres, submits, and obeys. And a people of religion means obedient and submissive (Ibn Farsi, 1404 AH, vol. 2, p. 319).

In the Quran, the word "religion" is repeated more than 90 times. The term "religions" in the plural form is not used, perhaps because religion, like light, is a singular truth yet has various levels.

The Meanings of Religion in the Quranic Verses are as Follows:

1) Following a creed and belief system (Yusuf: 37 and 38).

2) Affirmation of the Almighty God, the Messenger, the Book, the Day of Judgment, and the Hereafter (Infitar: 9).

3) Submission to the Blessed and Exalted Allah (Al-Baqarah: 131).

4) Following the path of Abraham, peace be upon him, and his family (Al-An'am: 161).

5) Belief in monotheism and the worship of Allah (Yusuf: 40).

6) Clinging to the divine rope (Al-Baqarah: 256).

7) Establishing prayers and giving alms (Al-Bayyina: 5).

8) The religion of Islam (Al-Imran: 19).

9) Law (Yusuf: 76).

10) Retribution and reward (Al-Hijr: 35, Al-Hamd: 4).

11) Dominion and sovereignty (Al-Baqarah: 193).

12) Beliefs (Al-Baqarah: 256).

Religion is a series of scientific teachings that follow actions. It can be said that religion is beliefs, and beliefs and faith are matters of the heart and cannot be governed by coercion and compulsion (Tabatabai, 1394 AH, vol. 4, p. 527). In terminology, religion refers to a specific method in worldly life that provides the well-being of worldly life and the perfection and happiness of the hereafter (ibid., vol. 2, p. 194).

Some other scholars have defined religion as follows:

- Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi: Religion is equivalent to believing in the creators of the world and human beings and practical commands corresponding to these beliefs (Masbah Yazdi, 1365, vol. 1, p. 28).

- Ayatollah Javadi Amoli: A collection of beliefs, laws, and regulations for managing human society and nurturing individuals for the sake of achieving worldly and otherworldly happiness is called religion (Javadi Amoli, 1377, p. 93).

- Ayatollah Qureishi: Sharia is called religion in terms of obedience and subservience (Qureishi, 1364, vol. 2, p. 380).

According to the writer's belief, religion is a collection of commandments, moral principles, and beliefs that lead to worldly and otherworldly happiness, among which the preliminary rules of morality and the morality of beliefs are included. However, it is necessary for a religious person to acknowledge some of the doctrinal and ethical propositions at the outset, but it should be noted that only by adhering to jurisprudential and ethical propositions can true beliefs be attained.

According to Imam Khamenei, restricting religion to individual spheres and separating religion from worldly affairs and politics is a manifestation of polytheism. "One of the greatest manifestations of polytheism in the present era is the separation of the world from the Hereafter, material life from worship, and religion from politics... This is the same polytheism that Muslims must purify themselves from by declaring their innocence from it." (Message to the Pilgrims of the House of Allah, 14/4/68, the first of Dhu al-Hijjah 1409 AH).

Religious Democracy

Religious democracy is a keyword that Imam Khamenei first introduced in 1979, and since then, it has been widely used in his political literature and by other statesmen of the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

Religious democracy is a model of governance that, while prioritizing the divine will and decree, also gives authenticity to the will and desires of the people, stating: "The right to participate is in human nature, and no one can take it away from humans to grant it back to them again with various credits and contracts." The foundation of religious democracy is different from the Western democracy foundation. Religious democracy, which is based on our elections and the desire and duty of humans according to divine law, is not just a contract; all humans have the right to choose and determine their destiny. This is what elections mean in the country and the Islamic Republic system. It is much more advanced, meaningful, and rooted than what exists today in Western liberal democracy" (16th Anniversary of the Demise of Imam Khomeini, 14/3/84). This type of government, which truly makes the people sovereign, was founded by the great architect of the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini, and was promoted, elucidated, and continued by Imam Khamenei.

Some consider religious democracy to be an additional combination, such as the concept of Islamic Parliament and Islamic civil society, in which a Western concept is appended to an Islamic concept, creating a third concept. In this interpretation, the concept of religious democracy refers to the absence of dictatorship and tyranny, and the Islamic concept refers to the implementation of Islamic laws. However, Imam Khamenei believes in the simplicity of the concept of religious democracy and that it is not adding a Western concept to the Islamic concept to create a new concept. From his perspective, the concept of religious democracy, like the concepts of Islamic jihad and Islamic jurisprudence, both belong to a single command within the religion and are not independent of each other. "This religious democracy has absolutely no connection with the roots of Western democracy; it is something else. Firstly, religious democracy is not two things; it is not as if we take democracy from the West and pin it to religion to have a complete set. No, this religious democracy itself belongs to religion" (Meeting with the Agents of the System, 79/9/12).

For a comprehensive analysis and elucidation of the theory of religious democracy, firstly, the foundations of this theory need to be thoroughly examined. According to the writer's belief, six foundational topics can be analyzed and scrutinized in the section on the foundations of the theory of religious democracy:

1) The cognitive aspect of God and the proof of monotheism in the lordship of creation and legislation.

2) The relationship between religion and the world and the necessity of the flow of religion in all its various dimensions: political, social, cultural, and individual.

3) Anthropology and the intrinsic proof of human free will and the role that humans play in their own destiny.

4) Islamic governance and the discussion of the necessity of its establishment and continuity.

5) The guardianship of the jurist (Velayat-e Faqih) and the role of the people in the theory of appointment and election.

6) Verses and traditions that prove religious democracy.

Secondly, the characteristics and components of the theory of religious democracy must be fully refined. Based on the research conducted by authors in the collection of works and speeches of Imam Khamenei, it has been concluded that 12 characteristics and components are necessary and essential for the governance of religious democracy. These 12 characteristics include:

1) Divine and popular legitimacy of the government.

2) Central justice.

3) Service orientation and the servants' role of government officials.

4) People-centeredness and the absence of a gap between the people and the statesmen, and the realization of a deep relationship between the people and the government.

5) Genuine freedom.

6) Competency and the necessary religious qualifications in the agents of the Islamic government, including knowledge, piety, and insight.

7) Elections and the necessity of all officials coming to power through elections (general participation).

8) Efficiency and capability of the Islamic government.

9) People's supervision over the rulers and informing the people about various economic, political, cultural, and other developments.

10) Rejection of dictatorship and colonialism.

11) Religion-orientedness and submission to religious values.

12) Law-centeredness.

Thirdly, the main rival theory to the theory of religious democracy, namely Western democracy, should be thoroughly analyzed and critically scrutinized, and its inefficiency in practice should be identified. This is to compare the qualifications and privileges of the theory of religious

democracy with Western democracy, to demonstrate its strengths and merits. In this section, we first mention several definitions that contemporary scholars have raised for religious democracy, and then we proceed to analyze and review religious democracy from the perspective of Imam Khamenei, in comparison with Western democracy.

Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi defines religious democracy as a model of governance that is based on divine legitimacy and popular acceptance, where the ruler operates within the framework of divine regulations, prioritizes justice, focuses on service, and creates a platform for both material and spiritual growth and excellence (Misbah Yazdi, Nowruzi, 1391, pp. 53-52).

Masoud Porfard believes that religious democracy is a method and a political way of life accepted by people who have embraced the religious system. This system should guarantee at least freedom, independence, satisfaction, political participation, and the implementation of social and political justice for the people, ultimately reflecting the dominance of the spirit of the Sharia in the political life of the people (Porfard, 1384, p. 53).

Mehdi Saeidi states that religious democracy is a model of governance that recognizes the votes and choices of the people within the framework of Islamic standards, and considers the selection of system officials from among the competent individuals as the right and prerogative of the people (Saeidi, 1392, p. 156).

As mentioned, from the perspective of Imam Khamenei, in addition to having its own specific foundations and being entirely different from Western democracy, religious democracy is firmly based on twelve characteristics and components. Among these twelve, three play pivotal and fundamental roles in such a way that if any of these three are absent, the legitimacy of religious democratic governance is called into question. These three key characteristics, in order of priority, are:

1) The realization of scholarly, managerial, insightful, and ethical competencies in the officials and agents of the Islamic government.

2) The formation of a government with the consent and election of the people, and their general participation in the selection of all officials.

3) The effectiveness of the religious democratic government.

Exposition of the First Criterion:

Imam Khamenei believes: "In a religiously governed people-centric system, all officials must possess specific qualifications and privileges such as knowledge, religiosity, piety, and insight. If in any government, officials lack these criteria and characteristics, that government will lack legitimacy. The conditions set forth in the constitution for the Supreme Leader, the President, members of the parliament, and ministers, and our assertion that these conditions are

sufficient for carrying out these duties, represent the criteria for legitimizing the assumption of these responsibilities and the authority and power bestowed upon us by law and the nation. This mandate of guardianship extends over all branches and aspects derived from it, not over individuals; as long as these titles are preserved and exist, legitimacy exists. When these titles disappear, whether from the leadership figure or other officials in various sectors, that legitimacy will also vanish" (31/6/83. Meeting with members of the Assembly of Experts). "Anyone who assumes the role of leadership or the role of the Guardian Jurist, if stripped of the criterion of knowledge, or the criterion of piety, or the criterion of insight, even if the people want him and chant slogans in his name, becomes unfit for the position and cannot continue this responsibility" (83/3/14. Fifteenth anniversary of the passing of Imam Khomeini, may God's mercy be upon him).

However, Imam Khamenei believes: The qualities and qualifications required for officials and agents of the people-centric religious government are solely determined by Islam and its religious propositions. People in this regard are followers and their compliance with the criteria and characteristics is akin to other religious injunctions.

Imam Khamenei in responding to the role of the people in the formation stages of the Islamic government, says: "One stage is forging standards (governing standards), to see if they have a role in this regard according to the views of Islam and our Islamic and jurisprudential foundations. The answer to this issue has been given here; the principle of the guardianship of the jurist, which we deduce from traditions and the Quran, means that this matter has been established and expressed in Sharia. It is a religious decree, the sacred legislator, that has articulated the standards. Therefore, people, as the accountable believers and participants in this decree and Sharia knowledge, treat this stage like all other religious injunctions. The sacred legislator has clarified this matter and set the standards. Here, people have the role of believers and devotees and are actors of this decree and have knowledge of the Sharia. This stage determines the standards for governance (the scholar must be knowledgeable, a jurist, and just) that from them we take the Sharia" (5/11/76. Meeting with members of the Assembly of Experts).

The basis and main principle in the theory of the people-centric religious government according to Imam Khamenei is this very axis; because by adhering to monotheism in the divine sovereignty in the creation and legislation of the Almighty God, the entire universe is God's dominion and therefore no one has inherent sovereignty over others, and if sovereignty is established for an individual or individuals, it must be derived from the sovereignty of the Almighty God; meaning directly or indirectly authorized by the Almighty God for governance. "Sovereignty means governance and supervision in the Islamic society, something naturally separate from sovereignty and supervision and government in other societies. In Islam, the supervision of society belongs to Almighty God; no human has the right to take charge of managing the affairs of others; this right is specifically reserved for Almighty God, the creator of humans, and the owner of human affairs. Indeed, the owner of the affairs of all particles of the

universe. This sense in the Islamic society is unparalleled. No power, no sword, no wealth, not even the power of knowledge and planning, gives anyone the right to become the owner of the destiny of others and the decision-maker about their fate. These are values, but the right to guardianship and leadership of the people is not granted to anyone, this right belongs to God. The Almighty God exercises this guardianship and sovereignty through a special channel. That is when the Islamic ruler and the guardian of the affairs of Muslims are determined based on the person (as it has been realized according to our beliefs regarding the Commander of the Faithful and the Imams, peace be upon them) and based on the criteria and principles) are determined and this authority is given to someone who can manage the affairs of the people, even this guardianship is the guardianship of God, this right is the right of God and this power and divine sovereignty is exercised on the people" (20/4/69. Meeting with officials and agents of the Islamic Republic system). "The foundation of the Islamic Republic system is adherence to the fundamentals. What is considered as the source of legitimacy in this system, namely divine sovereignty transferred to the jurist, is conditioned upon adherence to divine ordinances. The one who occupies the position of leadership, if he deviates from Islamic ideals, from Islamic laws theoretically or practically, loses his legitimacy, and his obedience is no longer obligatory but rather prohibited. This is recorded in the constitution itself, that is, in the original document of the revolution" (14/3/85. Seventh anniversary of the passing of Imam Khomeini, may God's mercy be upon him). "In Islam, no sovereignty or rule over humans is acceptable unless it is specified by the Almighty God" (26/9/82. Meeting with professors and students of Qazvin).

Exposition of the Second Criterion:

From the perspective of Imam Khamenei, recourse to the desires and will of the people is a definitive ruling of Islam, and hence the formation and continuity of a government, without the consent and will of the people, is not legitimate from the outset. One of the points of divergence in the theory of people-centric religious governance according to Imam Khamenei from other proponents of people-centric religious governance is precisely this criterion and component. From their viewpoint, the legitimacy and authorization of the system of people-centric religious governance, in addition to being based on the will and desire of the Almighty, is also based on the will and desire of the people.

Imam Khamenei in expressing the first criterion (realization of necessary qualifications in the agents of the people-centric governance system) and the second (realization of the will and desire of the people), states: "Having criteria alone is not enough, but the choice of the people is also a necessary condition, and without the choice of the people, it is not legitimate" (13/11/70. Meeting with the agents of the system). "The opinion of the people is decisive, but with respect to a person who possesses the necessary criteria. If the necessary criteria are not present in that person, the election cannot legitimize him. The necessary criteria are piety, religion, justice, and familiarity with Islam; the person who possesses these criteria and is complete in piety, self-restraint, full of religiousness, and necessary knowledge, then it is time

for our acceptance; if the people do not accept this same person with these same criteria, it still lacks legitimacy. We do not have something called a government of coercion in Islam" (Khamenei, 1362, Vol. 1, p. 33, Heydari, 1382, p. 26).

As observed, from the perspective of Imam Khamenei, the will and desire of the people are truly the creators of legitimacy, and the people are the fundamental basis of the system of people-centric religious governance and Islamic government. Since one of the points of divergence in the theory of people-centric religious governance according to Imam Khamenei from others is their adherence to this composite legitimacy, we refer to other statements of his explicitly emphasizing the granting of legitimacy by the will and desire of the people to the system and Islamic government:

"In Islam, the people are a legitimate pillar, not the only basis of legitimacy; the Islamic system, in addition to the vote and will of the people, is based on another foundation, which is piety and justice... The people's vote is also necessary; Islam attaches importance to the people's vote" (26/9/82. Meeting with professors and students of Qazvin). "Any government in Islamic Iran that does not rely on its people is not legitimate" (10/11/83. Meeting with the people of Pakdasht on the occasion of Eid al-Ghadir). "The will and faith and belief of the people, even more than that, their emotions are the main basis of governance; this is the view of Islam, and we also believe in it... In the constitution, the distribution of power exists logically and correctly, and all centers of power, directly or indirectly, are related to the opinions of the people, and the people are the determiners and decision-makers, and if the people do not want a government, then that government essentially loses its legitimacy. Our view of the people is this... In religious thought, the basis of religious governance, the influence of religion, and the power of religion, in its actions, what are its methods for achieving its goals? The main reliance is on the people. Until the people do not want it, until they do not have faith, until they do not believe, what can be done?" (4/12/77. Question and answer session with student newspaper managers).

In general, in the ideological system of Imam Khamenei, in the system of people-centric religious governance, the people are rulers, influential, and role players in four aspects:

1. The people play the primary role in legitimizing the system and forming the government and selecting its essential components.

2. The people are the primary owners of the system, and officials merely serve and hold trusteeship.

3. The people are the main factor in the prosperity and elevation of the country.

4. The people must always be aware and informed about various aspects of the system of people-centric religious governance.

Imam Khamenei in referring to the leadership of the people in four spheres, states thus: "When the Imam relied on the element of the people, he wasn't merely just verbalizing it; in the true sense of the word, he believed in the essence of the people within the Islamic system and placed the people under his precise and genuine attention in several areas.

The first area is the reliance of the system on the opinions of the people. The system's reliance on the opinions of the people is one of the fields in which people have a role. A system without the support, votes, and desires of the people is, in fact, nothing...

The second area is the duty of officials towards the people... In Islam and the Islamic Republic system, the philosophy of officials finding responsibility in the country is to work for the people. Officials are for the people, servants of the people, indebted to them, and trustees of their affairs. The people are the axis. Anyone who assumes responsibility in the Islamic Republic system must share all the joys and sorrows with the people; both for the world of the people, for the materiality of the people, for the spirituality of the people, for establishing justice among the people, for reviving the dignity of the people, for the freedom of the people. These are among the main duties of the government...

The third area - which again revolves around the axis of the people - is the utilization of the thoughts and actions of the people in the path of the country's elevation; meaning to flourish talents and not to delay it...

The fourth area regarding the Imam's attention to the people is the necessity of continuously raising peoples' awareness..."(14/3/80. Remarks on the twelfth anniversary of the passing of Imam Khomeini, may Allah have mercy on him).

Exposition of the Third Criterion:

The third significant and pivotal characteristic in Imam Khamenei's view that plays a fundamental role in the theory of religious democracy is the efficiency of the system. This characteristic is considered one of the distinguishing features of Imam Khamenei's theory of religious democracy, as he, contrary to the views of other intellectuals who do not consider efficiency to be related to the legitimacy of the system and merely advocate for its role in the survival and continuity of the government, believes: the efficiency of the system has a close relationship with the legitimacy of the system, and if a system is not efficient, legitimacy will also be lost.

"Our legitimacy is tied to the performance of duty and efficiency in performing duties. I insist and rely on the fact that reliance should be placed on the achievements and efficiency of officials, according to the same principles adopted by our laws from the Sharia and the Constitution. Wherever there is no efficiency, legitimacy will vanish" (31/6/83. Meeting with members of the Assembly of Experts).

"Of course, the efficiency or inefficiency of a system must be evaluated with a broad perspective. The Islamic government system is formed based on goals and ideals. The closer the system and government are to these goals, the more efficient they will be considered. Efficiency should also be in the direction of realizing Islamic desires and goals, in the direction of embodying values in society" (8/6/83. Meeting with officials of the system).

Imam Khamenei, while referring to justice as one of the goals and ideals of the Islamic government, says: "My legitimacy and yours depend on combating corruption, discrimination, and also striving for justice; this is the basis of our legitimacy. There is much talk about legitimacy now, and I am familiar with these talks; but the truth of the matter is, if we are not pursuing justice, truly, my sitting here will be illegitimate; meaning whatever authority I have and whatever I seize will be illegitimate; the same goes for others. We have come for justice and to eliminate discrimination. We have come to enable society to benefit from its divine gifts, the most important of which is justice, as well as ethical and spiritual gifts" (5/6/82. Meeting with government officials).

It should be noted that the efficiency of a system is not called into question by minor and temporary problems in economic matters and other issues; the efficiency of a system should only be understood by evaluating the goals of the Islamic system and the current situation, and if, by chance, a government or institution is inefficient in a period, this inefficiency will not be considered a flaw in the system. "The efficiency of the system is besides the efficiency of this or that institution. The system is an efficient system; of course, the efficiency of the system is a set of positive and negative actions that the institutions of the system have, but this is a positive outcome" (83/8/10. Meeting with students in the blessed month of Ramadan).

The final point in explaining the system of religious democracy is that the concept of religious democracy is different from the concept of religious populism and religious assistance. Religious populism solely means good behavior and dealing with people. Although in a religious democratic government, rulers and officials are obligated and responsible for kindness and good conduct towards the people, religious democracy encompasses much more than religious populism, and religious populism is only one of the indicators and components of religious democracy, and relatively speaking, the absolute relationship between these two concepts is realized. Religious assistance is also just one of the indicators of a religious democratic government and means that the government and rulers must consider the interests of the people and support them against foreigners, villains, and specific classes of society. However, the term "Islamic democracy" is synonymous with the concept of religious democracy, and Imam Khamenei, in the inauguration ceremony of the ninth term of the presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has used this term instead of the term "religious democracy" (84/5/13).

The possibility or impossibility of religious democracy

The possibility or impossibility of religious democracy is one of the fundamental and highly important topics, which involves examining the well-known paradoxical nature of the system of religious democracy. The skepticism generally goes like this: the combination of democracy, or democracy with religion, is not feasible and is a kind of paradox. Firstly, democracy has evolved within the framework of secularism, liberalism, etc., and none of these foundations are compatible with religion, which here refers to Islam. Secondly, religion, meaning submission and absolute obedience to the commands and decrees of the Almighty, does not equate with the sovereignty of the people and the governance of the people's will. The foundation in religious democracy and generally in any religious society is divine sovereignty and the legislative laws of the Almighty, but in civil society and democracy, the basis is the sovereignty of the majority of citizens and their will. Akbar Ganji in the article "Islamic Paradox and Democracy" says: "The possibility of combining Islam and democracy does not exist unless Islam becomes entirely secular" (Ganji, 1373, p. 19). Mohsen Kadivar in the article "The Jurisprudent and Democratic People" states: "The fundamental conflict between absolute appointment of guardianship of the jurisprudent and democracy is so clear that conceiving both leads to confirming the conflict, and there is no need to present any evidence." He believes, "those who reject Western democracy and advocate for religious democracy are merely playing with words" (Kadivar, 1383, p. 11).

Multiple authors have penned arguments to prove the impossibility of religious democracy. Their reasons are as follows:

First Reason: Democracy, or rather democracy, is a new philosophical concept that has no precedent in Islam, so it cannot be described as Islamic (Shabestari, 1384, p. 68).

Second Reason: Islamic religious rulings lack the richness of governance and legal rights to address contemporary governance issues. Therefore, the religiosity of democracy remains only in word and cannot influence the substance of democracy (ibid, p. 66).

Third Reason: A political system is related to how to govern, and religion does not teach us how to create civility and mechanisms to solve life and social problems (ibid, p. 104).

Fourth Reason: Democracy and popular sovereignty are not merely a method of governance to categorize them as Islamic or non-Islamic. Democracy exists in any society, or dictatorship, and the middle ground between these two is inconceivable (ibid, p. 144).

Continuing, in presenting nine responses to the above doubts, the possibility and even the necessity of establishing a system of religious democracy become evident:

First Response:

The highest and strongest evidence of the possibility of achieving something and its non-paradoxical nature lies in its external realization. Imam Khamenei says: "Religious democracy is

a reality. Some gentlemen have made great efforts and sat down, thought, and said: Religious democracy contains a contradiction within itself (in their words, it is a paradoxical issue). No, it is not; it is a completely direct, practical, and correct issue. We have elucidated religious democracy, strengthened its foundations, and acted upon it. How can a theory be contradictory and paradoxical when it has been materializing for 23 years?" (27/5/81. Assembly of the Office for Strengthening Unity).

Second Response:

There is no contradiction or conflict between the teachings of Islam and the real and essential needs of the general public at different times. Islam accepts all rational and empirical achievements of humanity that are based on the real needs of the general public. In other words, Islam itself advocates for democracy, and fundamentally, the basis of real democracy should be Islam, not various human credentials. Imam Khamenei believes: "Being people oriented in the Islamic system has Islamic roots. When we say that in the Islamic system it is impossible for the people to be ignored, the basis and foundation of the people's rights in this choice is Islam itself. Therefore, our religious democracy, which is religious people's democracy, has a philosophy and foundation. Why should people vote? Why should the people's vote be valid? This is not based on empty and hollow emotions, but on a very strong Islamic foundation" (14/3/80. Statements at the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini).

Third Response:

The combination of religion and democracy is a real combination, and it is not the case that Islam and democracy are independent concepts, and then we compare them to see if they converge or not. Therefore, the question of the possibility or impossibility of combining Islam and democracy is essentially invalid and incorrect. Imam Khamenei says about this: "Religious democracy does not mean the combination of religion and democracy, but rather it is a single and ongoing reality in the essence of the Islamic system. Because if a system wants to act based on religion, it cannot do so without the people. Moreover, the realization of real popular governance is not possible without religion" (13/10/79. Meeting with the General Council of the Union of Islamic Student Associations). Religious democracy is not two separate concepts that we combine, but rather it belongs to religion itself (12/9/79. Meeting with the representatives of the system).

Fourth Response:

Only Islam and religious teachings can recognize the various dimensions of human real needs and present practical plans for their growth and improvement according to reality. The so-called democracies that capitalists advocate are merely deceiving the general public and aiming to degrade human dignity and authenticity in pursuit of desires and whims. Therefore, true popular governance and the dignity of humanity are only possible under the shadow of Islam and religious teachings. Ayatollah Khamenei believes: "What honor can true democracy have when the money of Zionist capitalists speaks first in it, and what can it teach the people of the

world? True democracy is people's governance based on religion and faith" (12/5/84. Inauguration ceremony of President Ahmadinejad).

Fifth Response:

Democracy is fundamentally opposed to tyranny and dictatorship, and since Islam, especially the Shiite school, is the staunchest enemy of dictatorship, tyranny, and autocracy, it can be concluded that true and genuine democracy is realized by adhering to religious teachings. Ayatollah Khamenei says: "Religion holds serious responsibilities for governments in front of the people. Religion does not accept dictatorship and autocracy from any ruler or under any title" (2/10/82. Statements at the Islamic World Conference, Challenges and Opportunities).

Sixth Response:

1. The social life of humans requires numerous laws.

2. The primary and essential right to legislation belongs firstly and fore mostly to the Almighty. None but the Almighty has the independent right to legislate and command, and any law that is enacted must either be from the Most High or with His permission and within the scope of His will and commands.

The second topic raised in theology is under the title of unity in legislative lordship. Since the management of the world is solely in the hands of the Almighty and we are mere intermediaries to Allah, having no independent authority, it is meaningless for us to advocate legislative rights for any other entity or entities. In other words, the creative lordship of the Almighty means that the planning and will of absolute matters pertaining to possibilities, including the realm of legislation and law making, belong to the Almighty. I seek refuge in Allah from Satan, the accursed. The judgment belongs to Allah, the High, the Great (Quran, 40:12).

Result: In all governments, laws must be established by the Almighty, and those who execute the law must firstly have a scientific understanding of the ordinances and divine laws, secondly possess justice and piety, and thirdly be aware of the conditions and circumstances of the Islamic society. All people, while participating in the formation of government, its efficiency, and oversight, are obligated to adhere to divine laws, meaning they exercise religious authority. Therefore, the assertion that democratic governance should be purely secular stems from ignorance in the unity of legislative lordship.

Seventh Response:

Divine laws are of three kinds: A. Laws directly revealed by the Almighty to the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) and are present in the Holy Quran. B. Laws entrusted to the Prophet and the infallibles, which can be found in the entirety of narrations. C. Laws that are partial and temporary and are named governmental and guardianship laws. In Shia jurisprudence, the jurist, who is the legal ruler and authorized by the Almighty, can establish

regulations, albeit limited and subject to the specific conditions and criteria set forth by the jurists in jurisprudential discussions (Misbah Yazdi, 1392, p. 109).

Given the above explanation, it is clear that Islam has plans for all social and political areas and does not tolerate ambiguity. To claim that Islam lacks a program and ruling for social and governmental matters is due to ignorance of Islamic laws and regulations, or simply having a minimalistic view of religion. The authors firmly believe that for the majority, almost all aspects of social and governmental structures within the first two categories of divine laws are progressive and in line with reality, ensuring the well-being of people in this world and the hereafter. However, a detailed examination of social regulations is beyond the scope of this article and requires a suitable platform.

Eighth Response:

Democracy, or popular sovereignty, has two dimensions and statuses: methodological and ideological. In ideological democracy, various foundations such as human dignity, reliance solely on reason, rejection of intellectual sources, epistemological pluralism, secularism, being subordinate to the legitimacy of people's desires and wills, negative freedoms, etc., have been adopted. It is clear that none of these foundations are compatible with Islam, and ideological democracy is completely rejected from an Islamic perspective. However, in methodological democracy, democracy is merely a method or approach to political life that clarifies how the masses participate in governance. Some characteristics of methodological democracy include popular acceptance of government, public political participation, separation of powers, political equality of all people, elections, freedom of expression, the existence of political parties, etc. Islam not only does not oppose these characteristics but also deems them necessary. With this brief explanation, it becomes clear that in the theory of religious democracy, democracy and Islam, like a vessel, can accommodate various contents including Islam.

Ayatollah Motahhari, in comparing democracy and Islam, says: The Islamic Republic (religious democracy) is a system where the republic or its popular part serves as the proposed form of government and Islam or its ideological part serves as the content of government (Motahhari, 1381, p. 80). In other words, in the eighth response, we endeavor to say: Schools such as liberalism, although they have always appeared and spread in the form of democratic governments, it does not mean that democracy is opposed to liberalism and other philosophical, economic, and political schools, contradictory to Islam.

Ninth Response:

Democracy not only does not contradict the governance of divine laws but rather supports it; because the essence of democracy is the rule of the people over their own destiny. Therefore, if a nation autonomously demands Islam and its lofty teachings, according to democracy, divine laws and executors must govern the Islamic government. Just as in Western societies, where people have chosen liberal beliefs by their own will, in Islamic society, people also demand the sovereignty of divine will. If someone claims: the vote and desire of Muslim people for Islam are

in conflict with democracy and national governance, in reality, they are questioning democracy and deeming it impossible. The conclusion is that the belief of the masses in fundamental Muslim principles such as Islamic principles is not opposed to democracy, and this lack of belief in accepted principles by the majority contradicts democracy (Ref: Same, pp. 85-81).

Summary:

Democracy, or popular sovereignty, entails the involvement of people in governance, typically through intermediaries and by electing representatives. Religion, on the other hand, encompasses a set of principles and beliefs that provide a framework for individual, familial, and societal life, aiming to secure the worldly and otherworldly happiness of individuals.

Religious democracy is a relatively new and independent concept, distinct from Western democracy. It is a governance model based on certain definitive and rational foundations, such as unity in legislative lordship and the inherent right to determine the destinies of individuals, believing in a combined legitimacy to achieve the well-being and spiritual welfare of all people.

In terms of foundations, characteristics, and components, religious democracy differs from Western democracy. However, among its distinguishing features, three are particularly significant: a) realization of scientific, managerial, insightful, and ethical competencies in the agents of the Islamic government; b) formation of government with the consent, choice, and participation of the public; c) effectiveness of the religious democratic government.

According to Imam Khamenei, these three components are the pillars of legitimacy in the system of religious democracy, and if any of these components are missing, the system of religious democracy will not be legitimate.

Religion, in harmony with the definitive teachings and real needs of the masses and governments, addresses all real human needs, including those related to societal life, thereby serving as the primary opponent to dictatorship and the tyranny of whimsical rulers. It embraces democracy as a method and commands it. Therefore, the concept of religious democracy is by no means contradictory and inherently accepts democracy. Essentially, if a nation, by its own will and desire, demands the implementation of the teachings and ordinances of religion, religious democracy must be realized according to the dictates of democracy.

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