

Chapter 6

Music and Politics in Afghanistan: An Analysis of Seven Decades of National Anthems of Different Political Regimes in the Country

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed Afghanistan's national anthems in the last seven decades. This qualitative textual analysis found that national anthems from both secular and Islamic regimes included political visions of the ruling groups. In particular, during the Taliban, the Mujahedeen, and the communist eras, the national anthems had more aggressive tones. Although the Taliban regimes are known as Islamic extremists, the national anthem of the first Taliban era did not include anything about religion; rather, it focused on the history of defeating Western occupation of Afghanistan.

INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, music has been used as a powerful tool for political communication by governments, music artists, and politicians (Ho, 2016; Onyebadi, 2017; Ramet, 2019). Music can inspire citizens to embrace national unity and civic engagements

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such as voting, taking part in social movements, and even participating in revolutions (Street, 2013). Studies have shown that musicians use music to speak out about political issues and problems in societies and share their perceptions with the public (Onyebadi, 2018). Meanwhile, politicians use different types of music to easily disseminate their messages to their target public (Dunaway, 1987). Therefore, depending on political regimes and cultures, musicians and politicians rely on different schools and genres of music to publicize their thoughts and messages in different parts of the world (Onyebadi, 2018; Ramet, 2019). Pop music is one the most popular genres that have been politicized (Hutnyk & Sharma, 2000). National anthems also constitute examples of music's role in politics across the globe.

Afghanistan is a country that has experienced several types of political regimes since the early 1900s (Dastgeer, 2020). This has historically impacted the use of music in the country in several ways (Sakata, 2012; Slobin, 2020). After the country's independence from Great Britain in 1919, King Amanullah Khan established the first democratic regime in Afghanistan and welcomed all modern ideas and practices, including music. It was during his regime that the country's first national anthem was composed. However, it was music without lyrics. Nevertheless, it marked a new era for the intersection of politics and music in the country.

In the 1950s, Afghanistan's first national anthem with both music and lyrics was composed, and was used for four decades (Feroz, 2022). In the early 1970s, Mohammad Daud Khan overthrew the monarchy in Afghanistan, established a Republic, and became the first president of Afghanistan. Five years later, President Khan was ousted and killed by the communists, and introduced communist rule in the country. Quite notably, both President Khan and the communist leaders established a strong base for music infrastructure in the country (Feroz, 2022). They encouraged military service members to sing patriotic songs to strengthen the unity of the people against the Mujahedeen militias (Broughton & Doubleday, 2018; Lawrence, 2011; Slobin, 2020). During both regimes, new national anthems were composed to fit the political ideas of the people in power. In the first half of the 1990s, the Mujahedeen regimes used music to communicate their anti-communist ideologies to the public, including the use of their national anthem (Sakata, 2012). Even though the Taliban banned music and film in Afghanistan, they used songs (and their national anthem) with no lyrics to spread their political messages against the Mujahedeen and democracy (Broughton & Doubleday, 2018; Sakata, 2012). After the fall of the Taliban regime, with free media and the growth of music industry in the country, music was used in many ways not only by artists and the Afghan government, but also by different warlords, and political parties and figures for message dissemination. A new national anthem with music was created in 2006.

Nevertheless, with the return of the Taliban to power in mid-August 2021, not much can be accurately stated about music and national anthem in the country

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