

## **Explanation of relationship between Geography and Elections (Electoral Geography)**

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### **Abstract**

Democracy is a social philosophy and the most geographic form of government in which people in role of arbitration hold the ultimate power to make decisions about issues of politics. Effectiveness of democracy and the development of democracy around the world have made the electoral geography the most flourishing trend of political geography over the past four decade. Since the politics is a plural phenomenon and geographic phenomena which are influenced by location- space processes, have dynamic and changeable nature, the spatial patterns obtained from the plurality and dynamism are studied in political geography and consequently in the electoral geography. Despite of many researches in the area of electoral geography, fewer researches have been conducted on the nature and existential philosophy of the topic. This research is a fundamental study which through an explanatory approach assumed that the scientific description of electoral geography is possible in a combine conceptual form. Required data is collected by library research methods. The results showed that electoral geography as a subset of political geography studies the spatial distribution pattern of power in the context of mutual relations between geography, election and power.

**Keywords:** Geography, Election, Politics, Democracy, Electoral geography.

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**Introduction**

In the past half century, the basic legitimacy of political systems have has a democratic foundation and these systems have tried to coordinate their origins with people's demands; so that nowadays validity of political systems and parties in national and international levels is measured by being people based and acceptability by people. In this regard, free and fair elections, right to vote and subsequently the right to choice or overthrow the government and rulers at all levels are the most basic rights of citizenship and the criterions for measuring the democracy of the political system. But election result rarely reflects actual point of view of the all of voters (Jons, 2007:252). Over the last few decades, electoral geography as a subset of political geography have has many studies on the concepts like democracy, participation, origin of votes, spatial weight of electoral constituency, role of places and so on. Perception of electoral geography requires understanding the relations between geography, politics and democracy. Government or independent political system is the most important manifestation of the relationship between geography and politics that exists on behalf of the two stable elements of territory and nation or indigenous people who live in territory and play role in its future (Hafeznia, 2006:212). Since the Politics is a divorce phenomenon and geographic phenomena are affected by spatial processes which have dynamic and changeable nature (Purahmad: 2007: 9), spatial patterns obtained from this diversity and dynamic process, are studied by political geography and consequently by electoral geography.

Theoretical Foundations.

**1. Relations between Geography, Politics and Democracy**

Humans are inherently social. This social form of life force them to create rules in order to sustain their existence and look for security. This social existence impels them to create rules that would maintain their sustainability and social security. Implementing such rules requires stabilizing strong organizations and units which are able to apply written or unwritten solutions for solving

community problems and contradictions. Such units are remembered generally as a system of government. Studying the function of these units is in the area of conceptual politics. Politics have been described as human conflicts resolution technique and the way in which community distributes resources and values and adopts decisions; Politics is power and influence in society (Rash, 2012:4). Power is pivot of politics. Power is generally defined as the ability to modify the behavior of others. Subject of power and the use of its tools have plural nature, function, and regulation; this plurality is the function of ideals, goals, attitudes, values and needs of the players. Because the players and actors are constantly changing, the diversity and evolution will be the consequences of corollary issues of politics, governance and the sovereignty. On the other hand, the origins of many human behaviors, compatibility or conflicts of interest have been tended to be in possession of power tools. Because the tools and resources of power are unevenly distributed in space, some geographic places have special features and attractions. Hence, the weight and the role of places in the relations of power are different. In fact, the weight and role of places are functions of the opportunities and limitations that provide for human groups such features which affect the thoughts and actions of humans and determine their behavioral patterns. Group behavior, expresses human group's political interest at different scales that is applied directly or vicarious. The human community consists of a group in geographic space and at any scale (from local to global) who often vicarious to exert their political behavior. They elect institutions and individuals to represent themselves and to take and implement appropriate practical measures for security and sustainability of the group. Thus, humans become political actors who either individually or as a group act for survival and providing their interests and security (Hafeznia, 2006:156).

## **2. Geography**

Science of Geography is based on the sustainable foundations of the nature environment that arise from the inherent characteristics of land makers 'elements (water, soil, climate, and plant).Materials which make the

environment around humans are the most basic subjects that have caused human cognitive desire that has led him to write and describe (graph) of natural phenomena. Geographic human is investigable from two perspectives: On the one hand, human relation with nature is one of the main issues in this field. On the other hand, the human, himself, has natural existence dimensions. This subject has overshadowed not only on natural environment but also the social sphere forms based on it. On the one hand, geographical environment is arena of the interactions between manufacturers and natural environment that form living layer and on the other hand, material and spiritual needs and abilities of human are accessible in relation with the aforementioned elements. The final result of such complex social and biophysical processes is the formation of space phenomena that are the foundations of geography science. Space is a relative and subjective phenomenon that is formed through interaction between natural and social elements. These factors have a fundamental role in creating spatial structures and consequently spatial functions. Hence, Geography is the science that deals with the study of spatial phenomena. Geographical Sciences and Planning Committee (2012:18) has defined "Geographical space "as the discipline of geography: geography is the science of understanding the phenomena, structures, and rules of geographical spaces and organizing the space as humans' habitat. Accordingly, geography, from fundamental point of view of power is the science of space study and from practical view is the science of space building for humans' decent and honorable living. Since these elements are the functions of the location and time; we are witness a type of distribution in geographical phenomena which are raised from dominant political, economic and social systems. From such a perspective, geography explains distribution, differentiation and local-spatial reproduction of phenomena in relation with socio-economic structures (Shakooei, 1999:45).

### **3. Democracy**

The human ecological relation with place and space which is interpreted as the "right of water and land" is a strong philosophical base for forming a field of

citizenship rights and civil and political role of human in a democratic process. In the logic of political geography, democracy and the political role of humans in space in which they live and shape related political structures and systems processes, are common rights related which are based on human- ecological relations pattern in geographical space, these are rights that people living or staying in a place have. Human political role in a democratic process find a philosophical concept based on the analysis of human ecological relations with geographical space (Hafeznia, 2008:36). However, the democracy concept represents the aspiration that decisions that are taken based on the needs of the community have to consider all or most comments of residents of the territory. Since the essence of democracy is based on free and fair elections and self-determination and decision-making at all matters and levels, apart from cultural differences, and life of citizens and residents of the geographic areas (local and national), all members shall have equal rights to participate in decision making. Whatever these principles are evident in making decisions for a community, the community seems more democratic society (Betham and Boil: 1999:17). Therefore, and democracy is the rule of collective decision-making and legitimacy. Matters such as public participation, freedom, political pluralism, dominance of majority, respect to minority, the equality and wise distribution of power are the features of democracy in the new era (Ghazi, 1997:726).

#### **4. Political Participation**

Studying of political participation was the subject of attention from the time of developing concepts of nation-state, citizenship and equality following the political revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries and has provided background for popular participation and using social forces in politics (Banihashemi, 1997:19). Political participation is any voluntary Successful or unsuccessful action, organized or non-organized and transient or stable political participation to influence the choosing public policy, operating, or the selection of political leaders in different levels of government that use the legal or illegal methods. Therefore, the political

participation phenomenon is a kind of citizens' behavior that considers the realm of politics and its goal in selection of rulers and involving in decision making practices (Held, 1991:169). Political participation is function of political-administrative, legal, cultural, political and various social changes (Seifzadeh, 1988:165). Factors such as political motivations, social status, personality traits, political environment, skills, resources and commitment affect the participation. Accordingly, differentiation and behavior patterns of partnership are functions of social and economic status, education, occupation, age, religion, ethnicity, area of residence, personality and political environment (Wainer, 2001:248). The depth and domain of political participation have direct relation with characteristics of the political system (being open or close) and political culture (Ayub, 1998:187). Political culture defines view of individuals or groups toward policy and political structure and determines the behavior approach in the political process. So, legitimacy means ability to establish and maintain the belief that Political system is suitable for society; the masses should follow it with no reluctance and accept its sanctity and its respect (Rash: 1999:131).

### **5. Election**

Election (fair and equitable) is the most obvious link between participation and legitimacy. Since millions of citizens can not directly have effective participation in government, an indirect or vicarious representation system has been proposed as appropriate form of partnership in today's complex societies. According to principal laws of many countries, those who are responsible for key responsibilities of countries are determined by election. People usually gain the possibility and opportunity for selecting their representatives, government accountability and if needed the removal of unworthy ones by elections and polls. Election is democratic, temporal (at the end of period, mid-term or premature) and has a spatial (local, regional and national scale) process in democratic societies. In which, usually the people who are candidates for government responsibilities introduce themselves and their programs and

propagandize appropriate financial, technological and cultural characteristics of the community and the people (voters) also throw their ballots to ballots based on the type of program, manners and tendency of volunteers and their needs. In order to the electors be able to choose any one who want, there should be various options and at least two alternatives for free and fair elections. Also, presence of different options and freedom of choice should be guaranteed by law in order not to hurt the right to choice and freedom of choose. Foundation of electoral law is election system. Electoral system covers a variety of topics of electoral law among which, most important ones are: electoral formula or the way of prorate the vote among seats of parliament, the size of constituency or the number of seats assigned to each constituency, Ballot form or how to select options by voters and finally electoral threshold or the minimum number of votes required for the election (Pai and cidni, 1981:78). However, the free and fair election is the final outcome of development of democracy not its initial result (Alem,2003:107). Accordingly, the democracy is highly correlated with the political organization of space. Parties are democracy accessories that represent portion of the people and territory. They are underlying the national unity in the nation- state format that are generally heterogeneous and have dissimilar regions and sub-regions. Parties in democratic systems through tactician bottlenecks and problems regions and sub-regions can enter residents in the national unity and territorial integrity and reduce some of the costs of divergent security and add the state democratic form in the international system. Links between conceptual and philosophical concepts of geography, politics and democracy are drawn in the form of the following diagram and based on it, the citizenship right, decision making right and electoral right in electoral geography have been explained, because human ecological relations with specified location lead to emerge and develop of emotional ties, process the ecologic concept and create the scope of life or in other words create the water and land right for people living in the area. This right will not lose under any circumstances.

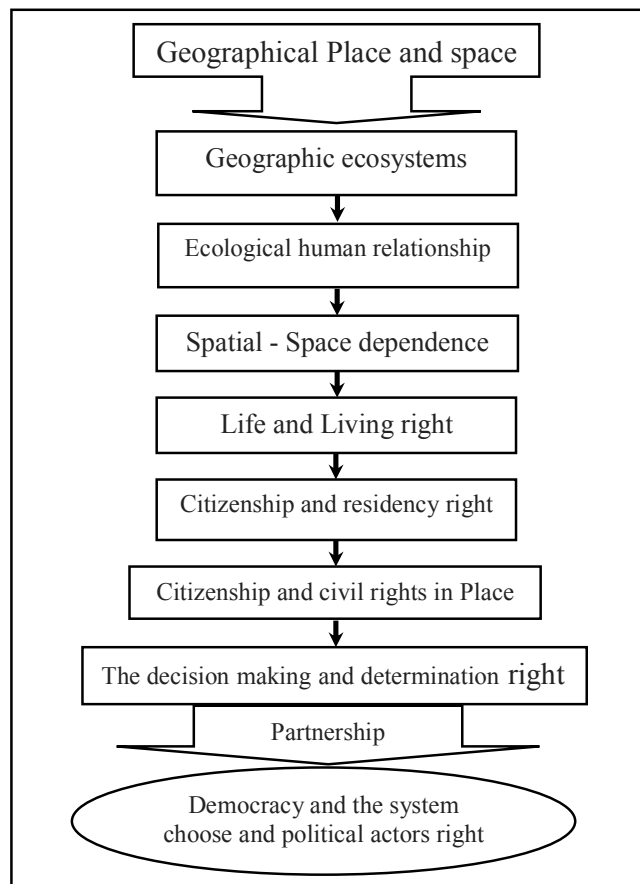


Figure 1: The pattern of explaining geographical - philosophical concept of human right and democracy (Hafeznia, 2006: 176)

## Research findings

### 1. Electoral geography

Electoral geography is a geographical approach to the issues of democracy and elections in which patterns of political behavior of citizens are rooted in diversity of their attitudes and demands of governing structures. There are different definition so electoral geography and it seems that be reason of this



fact that there are different approaches of elections in different countries. However, when Frenchman André Siegfried (1913), Founder of electoral geography, proposed this field; electoral geography has been challenged in the domain of political and geographical sciences. This means that each of the experts of the two fields, based on some of the reasons, consider it belonging to the realm of their science and have studied about it. However, Many of the models in political science and sociology are focused on " Who" in the election process; but electoral geographers in addition to " Who" consider "Where" a person lives and the environment; so that the role of place in understanding and analyzing this subject will be important and from this perspective, analyses the spatial differences. The approach of place is the combination of elements such as ethnicity, class or socio - economic and geographic environments that can affect the outcome of elections. Geographers experienced that religious and material and social experiences will affect the votes of the electorate. Therefore, focusing only on a single factor and background cannot help researcher to review of results, diversity and spatial pattern of election. Geographers have sought to examine all causes of the subject together, but in different ways in different places that are historically and culturally distinct, analysis of political selection and representatives' composition in local, regional and national level can be effective(Agnew,1997: 138).Geography is important because it adds a new dimension to the study of elections. Geographers specifically emphasize to study electoral behavior toward location, spatial interaction and distribution. In geographical studies, spatial differentiation is reflected on the map which the manner of its reflection is the function of the following three questions: 1- What factors have been decisive in shaping the pattern? 2- What are the consequences? , and 3- How these patterns might change to achieve specific objectives (Johnston.1990:37).

### **7. Definitions of electoral geography**

1. Electoral geography is the study of geographical aspects of organization, management and the result of elections (Pattie, 2006:2).

2. Electoral geography ,as the oldest field of political geography, analyses the interaction between space, place and electoral processes simultaneity with regard to psephology and political science(Pattie,2006:2)
3. M. Horn: electoral geography as a subset of the political geography focuses on geographical districts as context of representatives elected in different levels of local, regional and national. The border districts have a strong influence on the composition and functioning of political institutions and the government (Horn, 1999: 940).
4. The geographical analysis of elections; the study of the spatial patterns of voting and power, influence of sociological and local factors on voting behavior, environmental effects on voting and the drawing of constituency boundaries(Mayhew, 2009: 170).
5. Electoral geography is a subfield of political geography that studies the spatial patterns of voting and representation that its study area is include organizing of election campaigns managing of elections and election results (DeBlij& Muller, 2009:132).
6. It seems that scientific definition of electoral geography can is explained in conceptual and compositional framework. This field as subfield of political geography science studies spatial distribution patterns in the interaction between geography, elections and power.

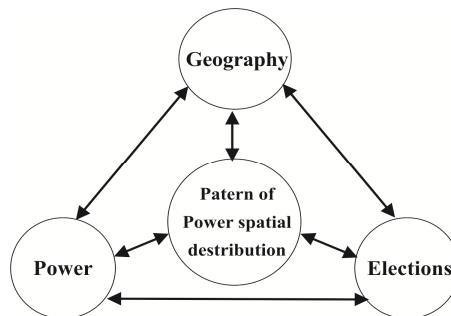


Figure 2: Conceptual pattern of electoral geography (illustrated by the authors)

In this definition, space is an objective aspect which changes the social,

political and economic processes during the time in context of place that reveals the elements and relations of power. Power as motivator and modifier with instruments of capital, media and ideology is the creator of these changes. Owners of power try to maintain or change the status of power based on interests of units (Individual, groups, organizations, country, etc.), through creating of meaning and directing of spatial processes or influencing mechanisms in spatial distribution of phenomena. Election as a mechanism of change and continuity of political system reflects the interaction between units for taking charge of power tools in a democratic manner with purpose of organizing processes and processes of building space. Because the contents of the space naturally create power, the attempt to control space in the electoral process is power purpose which electoral geography studies it. There are several interpretations and patterns of democratic system in the world; this means that although the partnership, votes and demands of people are the fundamental and core elements but based on the content of the constitution, electoral system and power distribution system, we are faced with spatial patterns in the distribution of power and decision making in goal setting and policy making.

There are high correlations between cultural, social and economic structures and spatial patterns of power distribution and patterns of community events which gives identity and political function to space. Space's political identification, spatial patterns of elections, electoral behavior mapping, the spatial distribution of power, effect of social and environmental factors on voting behavior and consequences of the decision to a vote become apparent in the environment. In this regard, power function is control and monitoring of the contents and relations of space. Whatever, interaction between three elements of elections, power and space is more transparent, analyzing and drawing of dominant of spatial patterns of action and political behavior of voters, predicting participation, election results and voter demands on the different political - space levels will be easier.

#### 8- Studying demotions of electoral geography

Those political, economic and cultural structures which can affect electoral spatial patterns and map of electoral behavior of voters in the form of opportunities and constraints in range of places are assessed and evaluated in electoral geography. The first published works in this area were strongly influenced by environmental determinism (Hafeznia and kavianirad, 2013:259). During the 1960s, through dominance of positivism approach in human sciences, the influence of quantity methods in human geography and in subjects related to electoral geography attracted more attention. In recent decades, according to the growing concern about the role of government in political geography many researchers have been attracted to study of election (Johnston, 1990: 37). In the context of this paradigm, much of these studies have analyzed spatial distribution of the data and the voting results. In these researches, statistical methods were used to determine the correlation between voting and other environmental characteristics. Deviation and certain direction in electoral process and the expected general trend are interpreted as possible outcomes of contextual effects (Geography of Power). Models based on the conclusions and arguments have been developed which involved spatial elements of information distribution and other factors affecting voting (Taylor, 1989:227-228), while the more works which have been done on describing various aspects of electoral geography, election, voting patterns and other geographical aspects of the election, attracted less attention. Peter Taylor was an electoral geography activist in this period who believed that elections function is power allocation (Ibid). Therefore, if the inputs (voting patterns) and throughput (the process of converting votes into seats and positions) have explicit spatial dimensions, their outputs must be so. Majority of researches and studies have been conducted in the context of electoral geography; have more tend to geography of support than geography of power. The causes of such a phenomenon is dominance of

positivism approach in human geography, researchers' easy access to electoral various data and statistics, utilization of statistical method sand stratification of among voting and other social indicators. But according to the subject of geography of power, not only citizenship demands and Spatial- Space dependence affect the election result, but also political trends change results of the election toward their benefit in the forms of political parties, dominant political system, and even financial and promotional sponsorship of international and foreign organizations through intervention in votes and conspiracies in the election process. In this regard, researchers cannot wait for the official data to recognize the geographical dimensions of power; but its consequences should not be ignored just because the research in this field is difficult (Ibid).This indicates that there is a fundamental difference between the election and voting. Geography of voting mostly is located in the context of geography of power. Power and tendency to governance impose itself to the space, demands of citizens and election results, since any change in the power structure challenges its legitimacy and continuity; therefore it is inevitable to hold election in the context of the geography of power. This action would be voting more than being election and actual power system through apparently democratic mechanisms, guarantees continuation of the quo status and desirable situation.

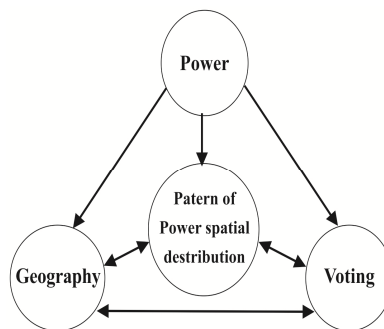


Figure 3: conceptual model of the geography of voting (illustrated by the authors)

### **Conclusions**

Electoral geography as a subset of political geography studies power spatial distribution in the form of interaction between three elements of election, power and space. The default of this definition is existence of democratic constitution, democratic system and belief in this truth that power is distributed in the lower layers of society and in diverse and pluralistic spaces and places. Individual and group can mobilize it and get sovereignty which is placed in the situation of this relation. Perception of electoral geography requires understanding of relations between geography, politics and democracy. Since the politics is a plural phenomenon and geographic phenomena are affected by spatial - space processes which have dynamic and changeable nature, election as a mechanism of political system changes and continuity; reflects the interaction between units for taking charge of power tools in a democratic manner that its purpose is to organize the processes of building space. Because the contents of the space naturally create power, the attempt to control space through the electoral process is the power purpose that electoral geography studies it. Political geography studies spatial patterns obtained from this diversity and dynamics of process and subsequently located in field of electoral geography. Accordingly, the scientific definition of electoral geography is explained in a conceptual and compositional framework. This field as a subfield of political geography science studies spatial distribution patterns in the interaction between geography, election and power.

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