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Political Polarization in Pakistan and future of Democracy in Pakistan

Outline

1. Introduction

Thesis Statement: Severe polarization in the political domain of Pakistan has undermined the democratic future of the country. Therefore, there is a need to take certain measures in order to curb the situation.

2. Contextualizing the Concept of Political Polarization

3. Factors causing Political Polarization in Pakistan:

- (A) Lack of consensus among leading political parties
- (B) Consistent undermining of the Supreme law (case in point: dismissing of no-confidence motion against the Prime Minister Imran Khan)
- (C) Constant intervention by the State institution (case in point: Ayesha Jalal - The state of Martial Rule)
- (D) Propagation of mis-information ^{through} social media (case in point: Pakistan Telecommunication Authority)

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- report, 2022)
- (E) Rise ~~in~~ hate and abusive speech culture
(Case in point: 16th April - Punjab Assembly)

4. How Political Polarization Jeopardizing Democracy in Pakistan:

- (A) Issue-less politics and bad governance.
(Case in point: Floods of 2022)
- (B) A Disoriented Youth
(Case in point: Social media campaigns against military helicopter crash)
- (C) A Crumbling Economy
(Case in point - Report of Barclays Bank)
- (D) Turmoil in: Social ~~economic~~ Condition.
(Case in point: Human Development Indicator 2020)
- (E) Inefficient accountability mechanisms
(Case in point: Quoting I.A Rehman)

5. Pragmatic Measures to consolidate future of democracy in Pakistan:

- (A) Prioritising political will for Parliamentary discourse
- (B) Ensuring National Consensus on major economic decisions

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- (C) Holding constitution supreme and strengthening institutions
- (D) Promoting political inclusion and tolerance.

6. Conclusion



Political Polarization in Pakistan and Pakistan's Democratic Future

History is a witness that Pakistan's diversity has been exploited for political gains since its inception. 75 years ago, when the country gained independence on its cultural, religious, lingual and societal unity and identity, nobody knew how the same foundations would shake the country to its very core. What the country is ended up with is a US vs THEM debate; a debate structurally constructed to exploit democracy and national integration for political interests. The rising political Polarization has made every Pakistani concerned about the future of democracy in Pakistan. There are ample of causes that have fostered political polarization

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In Pakistan such as lack of consensus among leading political parties, undermining of constitution and intervention of state institutions. Moreover, propagation of mis-information and rise in hate speech culture have resulted in political

polarization. There are various factors ~~that~~ manifesting that political polarization is jeopardizing future of democracy in Pakistan. The most prominent among them is issue-less politics and bad governance, a disoriented youth, and a crumbling economy. Furthermore, turmoil in socio-economic condition and inefficient accountability system are also threatening the democracy in Pakistan.

Nevertheless, every cloud has a silver lining, there is still time to consolidate democracy if certain pragmatic measures are taken. Prioritising political will, national consensus on major economic decisions, constitutional supremacy and political inclusion can have beneficial results and can strengthen the future of democracy in Pakistan. Hence, severe polarization in political domain of Pakistan has undermined the democratic future of the country. Therefore, there is a dire

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need to take certain measures to curb the situation.

Before elucidating the factors responsible for fostering political polarization, it is pertinent to understand what does political polarization entails. Polarization usually means an increasingly zero-sum disagreement of political views on policy issues and more dangerously, on the very rule of the political system. Such polarization can take place between political party leaders and their associated political partners. There is another form also, polarization between regular citizens belonging to different social, economic, or political groups. In many cases, the first type of polarization leads to the second type. In a nutshell, political polarization is a matter of concern as it halts the proper functioning of a state, and therefore, threatens democracy.

While discussing the factors fostering political polarization in Pakistan, lack of consensus among leading political parties tops the list. The opposition and government parties find it impossible to negotiate even on national security issues. State institutions, as well as the Parliament, fail to bring the political parties to agree on certain important issues

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without getting indecent. The prime example is visible each year in annual budget sessions when the economic policy of the succeeding year is presented at the Parliament without it being peaceful. Similarly, the political elites tend to fracture societal formation through religious, ethnic, and ideological lines. Hence, political parties lack of consensus and negative attitude of political elites have stimulated political polarization in Pakistan.

Apart from political parties consensus, consisting undermining of the Supreme law is another cause of political polarization in the country. The constitution of any country is its Supreme law, to be adhered ^{to} in ^{der} all circumstances to ensure law and order through structural and legislative means.

In Pakistan, politicians use constitution to manipulate situations according to their own political agenda. For example, ^{Act of} Deputy speaker Gasim Sani's dismissing the vote of no confidence against that time sitting prime minister on April 3rd, 2022 under article V was declared unconstitutional and undemocratic by ^{the} Supreme Court of Pakistan. This leads only to one conclusion that leaders in Pakistan

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have lost all regards for the Supreme law. Hence, such attitudes toward ~~the~~ the Constitution is further nurturing the menace of political polarization in the country.

Coupled with undermining constitution, intervention by state institutions is also major factor behind political polarization in Pakistan. Owing to weak political leadership and an unstable party system there has always remain a vacuum of leadership, since the very inception of Pakistan. Unfortunately, the military and bureaucracy has filled that vacuum. Out of 75 years, Pakistan has been governed under military rule for 33 years. Ayesha Jalal in the State of Martial Rule propounds that, because of the decades long military rule, democratic culture has never been established in Pakistan. Even today, when military is not in power, it is ~~blatantly~~ blatantly accused by political parties regarding their intervention in political affairs. Thus, ~~coexisting~~ coexisting intervention of state institutions have resulted in ~~boasting~~ boiling of political polarization in the country.

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Another major factor behind rising political polarization is propagation of mis-information through multiple social media platforms. Pakistan is a country that is digressed in education in an age of technological boom. From fake top trends on Twitter, to severe abusive hurts on social media platforms, the masses have forsaken basic ethics in support of their political ideals. In June 2022, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) chairman published a report that claimed 400 fake accounts were ^{being} reported daily that incited institutional censure. Additionally, propaganda through news channels and journalists is widespread. In short, such low level activities by public mainly supporters of certain political parties has enhanced political polarization.

Similarly, the rise of an abusive and hateful speech culture is taking place in the society. It starts from the acrimonious speeches by a party leader, addressing the opponents with indecent remarks reflecting hatred, and this

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trickles down to their supporters. Demonstration of such level of intolerance was seen in the Punjab Assembly on April 16' 2022 that turned into violence inside provincial assembly.

Hence, such actions shrink the room for constructive debates and consequently results in unprecedented polarization.

The cost that Pakistan is incurring due to political polarization is in the form of jeopardized democratic future. The most prominent ramification comes in the face of issue-less politics and bad governance. The flouting of opposition and easy defiance of governmental politics has led to bad governance in Pakistan.

The most recent example in the state of one-third of Pakistan, drowning in floods, with village rampant with disease and 33 million lives dist affected. Such huge disaster is result of climate change or ~~due to~~ poor planning of climate resilient infrastructure, and a political culture with public interest ~~least~~ on the least priority. In brief, people are sole spirit of democracy, and with political polarization on its peak, the sole spirit is threatened.

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In the same way a disoriented youth is another outcome of political polarization. National integration evolves when grassroots level policy formulation along the lines of justice, human development, and youth participation is ensured. Whereas, in Pakistan political leaders are exploiting this vulnerable segment of youth to their advantages. They preach them a binary worldview for the enhancement of their party following. "Hateful and abusive social media campaigns against the military on September helicopter crash in September that killed 6 army officers is a clear manifestation of disoriented youth. Such ~~an~~ extreme political polarization has bore the seeds of distrust in youth about the state and its institutions.

Pakistan's political paralysis has also crumbled the economy. Pakistan is burdened with huge debt but politicians are still fighting for their powers. As a result Pakistan is on the brink of default. According to Barclays Bank, foreign debts of Pakistan

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worth \$15.5 billion. However, the political air of Pakistan is still thick with trivial short-term solutions for averting default. Loans from China, borrowed dollars from Saudi Arabia, and IMF's extended policy are all but temporary bargains for political face-saving of the government. Thus, political disturbance has ~~placed~~ ^{pushed} democracy in Pakistan into a vulnerable situation.

Political divide has also caused turmoil in social conditions of people in Pakistan. The livelihood of majority of people in Pakistan is below the internationally recognized standards of living. As per Human Development Index, Pakistan has dropped seven places, ranking 161 out of 192 countries. This highlights a depressingly stunt level of human growth and development due to non-serious attitudes of political parties sitting in government offices. Hence, political difference have drastically affected lives of people.

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Last but not least, absence of strong and efficient accountability mechanism due to political disputes and personal interest, is also a threat for Pakistan's democratic future. Accountability in the political domain is a prerequisite for democracy to prevail. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, the accountability mechanism has performed poorly. I. A. Rehman in his book, *Democracy in Transition and Challenges they face* states that, "Accountability and transparency are pillar of democracy in Pakistan, but its absence is causing hurdles for democracy to flourish in Pakistan. Thus, inefficient system of accountability is an imperil for bright future of democracy in the country.

The preceding section has clearly highlighted that how ~~political~~ political polarization is risking the democratic future of Pakistan. It is now pertinent to ~~highlight~~ mention steps that need to be taken in order to secure the future of democracy in Pakistan.

A prudent first step is to prioritise political will for parliamentary discourse. Normal parliamentary democracy should

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be encouraged rather than confrontational style of politics. Emotional manipulation by factional elites has to be put off due to which unrest among masses occurs.

When the critical debate is promoted at the individual level, it will move up the political ladder and free the common rhetoric from the shackles of propagandas.

Hence, to ensure a prospering future of democracy, political will is a mandatory.

Furthermore, national consensus on major economic decisions hold great importance. Given the huge crisis in the economic domain, it is imperative ~~that~~ to reach political consensus for economic sustainability. Provisions of fuel subsidies, against the Extended Fund Facility's conditions were evident measures to create a devastating predicament for the next government. Therefore, politicians must abide by democratic norms and realize the need for national level reapprochement, so that nation can be pulled out of many of its political and economical woes and confidence in democracy is restored.

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In addition to that, the constitution must be held supreme. It should be the guiding principle in setting the rules of the game to address the rising political polarization and improved democratic governance in Pakistan. The judiciary need to function as an independent, fair state institution and its decisions respected and accepted by all. Only then the character of the State be defined as truly democratic and free from political partisanship.

Likewise, promising effort are needed to limit polarization by promoting political inclusion and tolerance. People must feel they are not marginalized by the State and are included in the political process. It will revive the confidence of public on the state and its institutions. Ultimately, it is imperative upon the Pakistan's ruling classes to discourage manipulative activities, and strengthen their commitment to rule of law, so that democracy's true spirit can revive in Pakistan.

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In a nutshell, Pakistan's political, religious and social systems are diverse in nature. It is a heterogeneous society where people live under their own certain traditional values. Since its inception, many political parties and powerful groups and institutions have been polarizing this diversity to fulfil their vested interest. There are number of factors that demonstrate how these ruling elites have polarized the democratic environment of Pakistan. ~~That~~ include, lack of political consensus among political parties, constitutional crisis, and state institutions intervention. Furthermore, dissemination of mis-leading information and surge in hateful speech culture are prominent factors. Resultantly, this political divide has threatened the future of democracy in Pakistan. that can be seen in the form of bad governance, disoriented youth and inefficient accountability mechanism. Nevertheless, ~~for~~ the menace of political corruption can be curbed and democratic future of Pakistan be secured if certain pragmatic measures are taken.