

# Political Polarization: Governance And Society

## Outline

### 1- Introduction

Thesis Statement:

Political polarization has adverse impacts on governance and society as it fosters the governance challenges through legislative deadlock, exclusive institutions and corruption; disturbs the social fabric of society in the form of civil unrest, identity politics and economic inequality.

### 2- How Political Polarization Impacts Governance?

2a- Causes legislative gridlock

2b- Undermines institutional efficiency

2c- Brings exclusive institutions

2d- Increases corruption

2e- Hampers supremacy of law

### 3- How Political Polarization Effects Society?

- 3a- Deepens social fragmentation
- 3b- Brings civil unrest and violence
- 3c- Skews public opinion
- 3d- Entrenches identity politics
- 3e- Increases economic inequality

### 4- Case Studies Of Countries With Rising Political Polarization

- 4a- Case study of the US political landscape
- 4b- Case study of the UK Brexit

### 5- Recommendations to Mitigate Political Polarization

- 5a- Need economic reforms and integration of media literacy programs in education system.

### 6- Application Of Theoretical Paradigm To The Topic

- 6a- Theory of change by Robert Lahey.

### 7- Conclusion

## "Political Polarization; Governance And Society"

Political polarization pervaded across the globe. It mainly occurred owing to the rise of global trend of democratic decline. The 2023 edition of the Global State of Democracy report by the Stockholm-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance found a record number of democracies in decline. It calculated that over two-thirds of the global population now resides in backsliding democracies. It leads towards political polarization throughout the world. Consequently, political division has spill over impacts on governance and society. It exacerbates governance problems and social issues. The manifestations of political polarization on governance and society need to be explored. Political polarization has adverse impacts on governance and society as it fosters governance

challenges through legislative deadlock, exclusive institutions and corruption; disturbs the social fabric of society in the form of civil unrest, identity politics and economic inequality.

As the former Governor of Oklahoma, Brad Henry, aptly said:

"There is too much at stake for us to surrender to the politics of polarization"

To initiate with, political polarization impacts governance through legislative gridlock. The divergent ideas and actions of mainstream political parties leads towards stalemate in policy formulation. It becomes difficult to find a significant common ground to devise useful policies. Ultimately, it hinders policy making. For instance, the national assembly of Pakistan frequently experiences deadlock on critical issues, such as debates over

the National Accountability Bureau laws have been highly contentious. It highlights that political polarization is a hindrance in devising new laws. Therefore, the governance issues aggravates due to political polarisation.

In addition to this, institutional efficiency undermines owing to divisive polity. The efficiency of institutions largely dependent on the quality of communication between institutions. Political polarization is a roadblock in effective communication between institutions. Resultantly, it effects good governance. An case of 2022 floods in Pakistan, the lack of coordination between National Disaster Management Authority and Provincial Disaster Management Authority led the country towards catastrophic destruction in almost all provinces of Pakistan. It underscores that institutional efficiency requires good coordination. In case of political

polarization, this communication remain a distant dream. Hence, Political partisanship impacts governance through institutional inefficiency.

Moreover, political polarization leads towards exclusive institutions, which is a hurdle in efficient governance. Institutions become unrestrained in consolidation of power. It declines institutional forbearance, which made institutions exclusive. Ultimately, it excludes public participation and leads towards inefficient governance. Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson in book "How Democracies Die" argue that exclusive institutions perpetuate weak governance. It shows that institutions play major role in governance. However, political polarization impedes in developing inclusive institutions, which impacts good governance.

Furthermore, political polarization impacts governance through causing rampant corruption. When political parties focus is solely on consolidating power, then they restrict any form of accountability. Lack of accountability causes the substantial rise of corruption. It results in weak governance. According to Transparency International Report 2023, Pakistan ranks at 133 out of 180 countries at Corruption Perception Index. It showcases the high rank of Pakistan at corruption index. The increase in political polarization in Pakistan is the root cause of high corruption. Hence, it proves that political polarization affects governance through increasing corruption.

Additionally, political division undermines rule of law, which leads towards bad governance. To preserve power, political parties

interference in the rule of law. The provision of justice reduces owing to unbridled interference of politics in justice system. Hence, it results in propagating governance challenges. According to the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2023, Pakistan ranks at 130 out of 142 countries. It shows that political polarization hinders the supremacy of law. Lack of upholding rule of law brings turbulence in governance. Hence, political polarisation impacts governance through overseeing rule of law.

The foregoing paragraphs expounded the impacts of political polarization on governance. Let us discuss the impacts of divisive polity on society.

Initially, political polarisation brings social fragmentation. The



social fabric of society becomes fractured owing to divisive political parties. People become disintegrated on political views. The conflicting political opinions of people cause social fragmentation. According to a few Research Centre study, in Turkey, 8 out of 10 people would not want their daughter to marry someone who votes for the party they dislike. Nearly three-quarters would not want to do business with such a person. This fact underscores social division owing to political partisanship. It divides people along political lines which dismantles social cohesion. Hence, political polarisation brings social division.

Secondly, political polarization impacts society through spreading social unrest and violence. The dissenting opinions of citizens

make them intolerant towards each other. It brings chaos in society. The rising intolerance in society due to political polarisation erupts violence in society. For instance, the May 8, 2023 riots in Pakistan due to partisan polarisation is a starking example. The supporters of different parties damaged the military facilities in this riot. Consequently, it brought civil unrest in Pakistan. Hence, it clearly that political partisanship bring social fragmentation. It leads towards social unrest and violence.

Thirdly, Political polarization skews public opinion through biased media and information. The leaders of political parties tend to propagate misinformation about rival parties. It changes public perspective and deepens

partisan gerrymandering. According to PILDAT 2019 report, 74 per cent Pakistanis believe media bias is a significant problem. The media outlets often aligning with political parties and contributing to the polarization. This report highlights that political parties reinforce the existing beliefs of people through disseminating misinformation. Hence, public opinions mould and shape by political parties.

Fourthly, Political polarization impacts society through entrenching 'identity politics' in society. The mainstream political parties divide society along ethnic, religious and cultural lines. People align with their cultural party. Consequently, it brings social disintegration. Lilliana Mason, in her book, "Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became our Identity"

highlights that identity alignment with political parties deepens social divides and hinders partisan loyalty. In this way, people support too to that party, which aligns with their ethnicity. Hence, it divides them along political lines. Therefore, political polarization impacts society through identity politics.

Fifthly, society impacts by political polarization through rising economic inequality. The political division trickles down its impacts on economy. The lack of public service delivery, weak governance and institutions cause economic disparity in society. Therefore, people only support to that party, which they think could alleviate economic woes. As Thomas Piketty, in his seminal work, "Capital in the Twenty-

First Century", argues that rising inequality fosters political discontent and drives individuals towards more extreme political positions. They seek solutions to their economic woes. Therefore, it proves that economic inequality perpetuates partisan polarisation in society.

Political polarisation is a pressing issue in the United States of America. The political landscape of US has become highly polarized owing to democratic regression. According to a Pew Research Centre Study, 73 per cent Republicans and 77 per cent Democrats say that they disagree with the other party. It shows the rising political polarization in the US.

Moreover, another case study of political polarization is

Brexit in the United Kingdom, which has ripped the UK apart. In 2016 referendum, the people of UK opted to exit from the European Union. It showcases the rise of political polarisation across the globe.

To mitigate the impacts of political polarization, electoral reforms need to be introduced. Free and fair elections can quell the turbulent environment after election results. It will ultimately strengthen democratic values and norms. Moreover, spread political awareness among people is imperative to curb the menace of political polarization. It can be done through introducing media regulation and literacy programme in the national curriculum at all levels. For instance, Finland is renowned for its comprehensive

media literacy programs integrated into education systems. It will help people to sift the fact from the fiction. Consequently, it will reduce political polarization.

Applying theoretical paradigm to the topic, according to theory of change by Robert Lohy, when foundation of anything changes, then outcome will change. It means by implementing the above mentioned solutions can overcome the impacts of polarization on governance and society. When the root cause of political polarization is addressed, then it will ultimately reduce the adverse impacts of partisan polarization on society. Therefore, by applying this theory to governance and society, the malaise of political polarization can be curbed.

In conclusion, political polarisation reverberates its impacts on governance and society through impeding the establishment of good governance and entrenching fractured society. Political parties tend to erode democratic norms in a country. The democratic regression ultimately affects governance and society. However, by taking the required measures, political polarization can be mitigated. Although road to stability is a little bumpy, consistent efforts could help pass the sea of crisis. The collective efforts of all institutions can lead the polarized countries toward the high sky of development and progression. As the former federal secretary, Talal Masood, rightly said:

“Our leadership should have learnt by now that to bring changes and turn things around, they need to take a reconciliatory approach”