

# Polarized Politics; the issues and challenges of democracy in Pakistan

## 1) Introduction

## 2) Factors contributing Polarized Politics in Pakistan:

a) Partisan politics rather than national politics

b) Negative Role of media

c) Rift in Civil-Military relations

d) Weak Political institutions

## 3) The issues and challenges of democracy in Pakistan:

a) Governance challenges

b) Erosion of trust in Institutions

c) Judicial and Electoral independence compromised

d) Rise of Populism and Extremism

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4) Some workable solutions to address polarized politics:

a) Political consensus-building

b) Positive role of media

c) Prioritize the national interests over partisan interests

Is Political Polarization a new phenomenon in Pakistan? How Polarized Politics undermines the essence of democracy in Pakistan? Answering the above questions; the Political Polarization is not new phenomenon but it is the old wine in new bottle. Since its very inception, Pakistan sowed the seeds of Political Polarization. Besides this, Political Polarization has been undermining the democratic values on which democracy of Pakistan is made. Political Polarization is fueled by the Partisan politics over the national interests. Media also played a negative role to polarized the society by aligned itself to partisanship. Erosion of Civil-Military relations further divided the political culture of Pakistan. Furthermore, the weakening of political institutions pay the ways to rampant military interventions in country. Besides these factors there are issues and challenges of democracy by polarized politics. The issues starts from, Governance challenges; Lack of trust in institutions; Judicial and electoral independence; undermined and Surge in Populism and extremism in country.

These are Pragmatic Solutions which if addressed, the Political Polarization could be countered. There must be political dialogue between all Political Parties, Media can play a Paramount role in educating the masses, last but not least, national interest needs to be emphasised over Partisan interests. The Political Polarization undermines the democracy in Pakistan. It poses numerous challenges and issues like, Governance challenges and trust deficit towards institutions. But these issues and challenges can be addressed by workable remedies.

Pakistan, since its very inception witnessed polarized political culture due to the partisan political culture. The partisan politics is the adherents of masses to their political parties and ideologies. Political leaders use the partisan politics in order to exhibit their opponents as enemy of the people and the country. For instance, the ongoing tug of war between Pakistan's major political parties like; PMLN, PPP and PTI clearly demonstrates the partisan politics.

That partisan politics between major political parties is undermining the political dialogue and paving the way for political polarization in country. Furthermore, Political leaders also use the media to further reinforce their perspectives in the masses. In a nut shell, Pakistan has been facing the political polarization by partisan political culture, which is undermining the democratic values of country.

The Media plays important role in aggravating the polarized political culture in Pakistan. The media, either electronic or social media, both has aligned herself to the political parties.

The political leaders of parties support some media outlets in order to get their perspective spread in the mind of masses. Media further creates the favouritism blocks within their outlets in order to support their perspective. It is logically proved that the media plays paramount role in further reinforcing political polarization in Pakistan. Furthermore, the increasing influence of media in Pakistan is also contributing to hamper the constructive political dialogue between the political parties. It further entrenches the antagonism in masses about their political rivals. Hence, it is clear by above arguments that media plays vital role in aggrandizing the polarized politics in Pakistan.

Behind the Partisan Politics and role of media, the rift in civil-military relations also pave the way for political polarization in Pakistan. The bad relation between military and civilian government is not a novel phenomenon. But Pakistan has been facing the deteriorating relations between both institutions.

The power struggle between civil-military relations pave the way to numerous non-state actors to destabilize the democratic principle. Furthermore, the rampant military coup in Pakistan further undermined the elements of democracy and aggravated the political polarization. In addition, the recent ouster of former Prime Minister Imran Khan from the throne increased the antagonism between the political parties and the military establishment. This antagonism further enhance the polarized culture in country and impedes the democracy in Pakistan. Hence, it is evident by aforementioned arguments that deterioration in civil-military relations undermines the democracy and aggravate political polarization in Pakistan.

The weak political institutions in Pakistan leads to political polarization. The political institutions of Pakistan like; Parliament, Election commission of Pakistan and Judiciary plays vital role in governance. If these institutions failed to address the grievances of people then there occurs the trust deficit among the people towards these institutions.

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In recent case of major Political Party named PTI, the role of election Commission of Pakistan seemed biased and partial. It had deprived the PTI of Party Symbol and reserved Seats of women. In the result, this act of election Commission of Pakistan undermines the meritocracy of institution. And this act further fueled the antagonism among people towards the institutions. All in all, by above arguments, it is easy to say that weak Political institutions contributes to Polarized Politics and hampers the development of democratic rules in Pakistan.

Having discussed the factors responsible for Political Polarization in Pakistan, It is time to discuss the issues and challenges for democracy. The first and foremost issue and challenge is Governance. It is the responsibility of governance to address the grievances of masses. Having failed to govern the country due to Political Polarization, people seek to adhere themselves to different ideologies. They seeks to topple the current setup



violently. And these violence and demonstrations results in political polarization. The failure of governance compelled people to demonstrations and creates trust deficit towards democratic institutions. Furthermore, failure of governance pose the challenges for democracy in Pakistan. Hence, having argued above, it is evident that due to governance failure, democracy in Pakistan is being challenged. ~~and~~

The another issue and challenge of democracy in Pakistan is erosion of trust in institutions. For any democratic country, institutions, such as, Parliament, Judiciary and Executive play paramount role. In addition to this, incoherent behavior of these institutions leads to trust deficit among people. For instance, tug of war between the executive and the Judiciary in Pakistan sowed the seeds of credibility gap among people towards these institutions. Resultantly, people creates mistrust in working of democratic institutions and seeks to believe in authoritarian regimes.

In history of Pakistan, democracy had witnessed numerous issues and challenges. These issues and challenges posed by inability of institutions to address the issues of masses. Hence, having discussed above arguments, it is obvious that inability of institutions creates many challenges and issues of democracy in Pakistan.

Furthermore, Judicial and the electoral independence also leads to issues and challenges for democracy in Pakistan. The independent institutions such as, Judiciary and Electoral department are vital for running the democratic country. In addition to this, if these institutions get compromised, the democratic principles also compromised. For instance, for any democratic country, free and fair elections are vital to create trust of people in democracy. However, if the electoral process is rigged, people would create mistrust for the democratic institutions. Flash back to the history of Pakistan's elections. There has been hue and cry from people against the electoral institution.

Thus, having argued above, it is clear that hijacking of Judiciary and electoral institutions creates issues and challenges for democracy in Pakistan.

Apart from that, there are some workable Remedies to address the political Polarization in Pakistan and that is creating political consensus-building. Building Political consensus in Pakistan, which is deeply polarized along Ideological and regional lines is complex but necessary. For instance, there must be national dialogue platforms. In addition to this, bring together Political Parties, civil Society, academia, media and other stakeholders to discuss key national issues like; governance, economic reform, and regional integration. Hence, establishment of Political dialogue could reduce the intensity of Political Polarization in Pakistan.

In a nutshell, Pakistan has been facing Political Polarization since its inception. Many factors are there which contributes Polarization such as, rise in Partisan-

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Politics in country. Besides this, the role of media, whether, it is print, electronic or social. The incoherent relation between Civilian and Military establishment. The fragile Political Institutions. However, there are some issues and challenges for democracy in Pakistan. Inefficiency of governance, mistrust among people towards institutions, Hijacking of Judicial and electoral institutions and Rise of Populism and extremism. Besides these issues and challenges, there are some workable remedies to address the Political Polarization. First and foremost solution is establishment of Political dialogue; Role of media to alleviate the trust among people about democracy. Emphasised on the national interest over the Personal gains.