

Political Polarization: Governance and Society

Thesis Statement

Political polarization has rendered government unaccountable, unresponsive, and single-issue based, while society has turned more violent, radicalized, and fragmented. However, politics should be all-inclusive and welfare-based to heal the wounds of both bad governance and societal fissures.

I. Introduction

II. How does political polarization impact governance?

A° Confrontational politics distracts from accountability in governance.

Case in Point: South Punjab: Excluded and Exploited (HRECP)

B° Political instability remains all-pervasive in a politically charged milieu.

Case in Point: Electoral Fraud and Rigged Elections (CSIS)

C. A polarized politics renders government ineffective solely focusing on settling political scores.

Case in Point: Polarized National Action Plan (NAP)

D. Political gridlock hampers decision-making, affecting the government's regulatory authority.

Case in Point: Centre-Province Tensions in K and Balochistan

E. Ideological extremist parties misuse governance structures to enrich themselves through corruption.

Case in Point: Panama Papers Leak

F. In polarized politics, loyalty to party supersedes the true letter and spirit of the rule of law.

Case in Point: Politicization of Judiciary (26th Constitutional Amendment)

III. How does political polarization impact society?

A. Debate and dissent become anathema in a politically polarized society.

Case in Point: Political Echo Chambers on Social Media

B° A politically polarized nation's security is weakened by emboldening extremist voices.

Case in Point: 'Dialogue' with the TTP.

C° Political gridlock often translates into real-world violence among the general public.

Case in Point: Akhtar Mengal's Resignation.

D° Extreme distrust among political parties ultimately erodes public trust in state institutions.

Case in Point: 2018 General Elections.

E° Political extremism threatens the civilian freedom of expression.

Case in Point: Divided Parliament and Anti-People Legislation.

F° Political polarization creates fissures in society along ethnic lines.

Case in Point: Pathan vs. Punjabi nationalism.

✓ conclusion

The distance between political parties is to be measured in light years instead of ideology and political divergences. Every party whether ruling or opposition, has a huge stake in the country's politics as an equally legitimate stakeholder. Every political party across the world is united in the disunity of politics. From the worst and youngest political structures of Sudan to that of the oldest and strongest one in the US, ruling and opposition parties are invariably seen as 'binary opposites'. This confrontational and hate politics has seismic fallout on both governance and society equally. Governance structures are distracted due to the heightened partisan conflicts among the political parties. In the way of demonizing the other party, politicians falter at their most basic job of providing expeditious public services. Moreover, in such a polarizing milieu, rule of law takes a backseat to keep partisan

loyalty at the forefront. Since state is society and small, the political tussles in parliament spill into streets, coupled with exchange of abuse and slurs among respective party followers. Gradually, but visibly, society starts creating debate and dissent as an anathema, further emboldening the existent extremist voices or create new ones from scratch. As a result, the general public resorts to violence as a first line of defence, as their trust in state institutions, consumed by intra-party tussles, erodes. Thus, political polarisation has rendered governance unaccountable, unresponsive and single-issue focused, while society has turned more violent, radicalised, and fragmented. However, politics should be all inclusive and welfare-based to heal the wounds of both governance and society.

To begin with, confrontational politics distracts from accountability. Political parties involved in politics of survival barely take

responsibility when it comes to the use of
power, resource or authority. They do not
tend to act in the public interest. They do not
even selectively hold opposition party responsible for
negative policy outcomes. Political power elites
shield their in-group representatives and blame
out-party members. This blame game distorts
and skews accountability mechanism. For instance,
South Punjab is the least developed region of the
most populous and prosperous Punjab just because
it is run by the opposition parties. Resultantly, ruling
parties label even their constructive criticism as
'Partisan or politically driven'. This weakens the
core governance structure of accountability, making
it the least of all concerns.

By the same token, the rift between ideological
parties deepens conflict and weakens consensus
building. Partisan animosity inhibits cross-
party dialogue and attempts to achieve
compromise and implement reform. This hyper-

partisan atmosphere makes politically stable environment elusive and deepens party fissures. When policy continuity is not prioritized to discredit the outgoing government, practical solutions take a back seat. For instance, Pakistan's 2024 elections, allegations of rigged results by opposition parties, fueled protests, legal battles, and undermined political stability. Resultantly, political polarization stirs political instability across all levels of government.

Similarly, polarized politics render government ineffective by overly focusing on settling political scores. This zero-sum approach forces leaders into short-term political battles at the expense of long-term stability and development. Instead of addressing core national issues, political elites divert resources to score partisan points. For instance, Pakistan's National Action Plan (NAP) originally created to counter terrorism, turned politicized as parties exploited it for blame games rather than genuine policy implementation.

Moreover, political gridlock has severely hampered decision-making and weakened regulatory authority. Opposing political factions, divided into 'us vs them' camps, are unable to reach consensus, leading to legislative stalemates. This delays policy implementation, furthering weak regulatory control across all levels of government. For instance, in KP and Balochistan, centre-province tensions have created governance vacuum, exploited by militants and separatist outfits such as TTP and BLA. Thus, political polarization stalls policy implementation and its regulatory quality.

Furthermore, ideological extremist parties often exploit governance structures to further their power and authority through systemic corruption. Their rent-seeking tendencies, coupled with patron-client mechanisms have transformed political parties into dynastic entities. Politicians use politics^{more} as a manipulative tool for self-enrichment when they feel threatened.

by opposition parties' growing power. They
will then use any means, political or kinetic,
to crush the opposition voices by hook or
by crook. For instance, the Panama papers leak
in 2016 exposed global political elites. Even in
Pakistan, a political leader was dismissed from
office in 2017 for failing to disclose assets. This is
how political figures exploit state mechanisms for
personal gains.

By the same token, political polarization
undermines the rule of law by eroding
institutional independence. More often than not,
political institutions become battle grounds for
political factions, with parties accusing each other
constantly. This usually leads to selective enforcement
of laws, fostering a perception of bias. Ultimately,
such polarization threatens the foundational principle
that laws apply equally to all, regardless of
political affiliation. For instance, the passage of
26th Amendment allows Parliament to appoint the Chief
Justice from among the top 3 senior judges. International

watchdogs have criticized the amendment as a blow to judicial independence, allowing the ruling coalition to install politically aligned judges. Thus, political polarization has put party loyalty at the forefront, pushing the rule of law to the backseat.

By the same token, political polarization has impacted society by criminalizing dissent and debate. Dissenting voices are often marginalized, as opposing viewpoints are viewed with hostility. This environment fosters echo chambers where individuals are exposed to information that reinforces their beliefs. Consequently, the public sphere becomes less conducive to constructive debate and understanding. For instance, in Trump's 2nd term, political polarization in the U.S. created echo chambers within society. Conservative media outlets amplified Trump's narrative, sidelining dissenting voices on Twitter and reinforcing partisan divides. This underscores that political polarization shrinks the space for debate and dissent in society.

similarly, political polarization emboldens extremist voices in society by deepening ideological divides. As political discourse becomes increasingly binary, individuals with extreme views find greater visibility. Even mainstream parties pander to radical elements for electoral gains, legitimizing fringe ideologies. For instance, in Pakistan, the state's divided response to TTP's rise allowed them to regroup and reassert themselves. Thus, a polarized politics further radicalizes extremist voices in society.

In the same vein, political gridlock spills into real-world violence among the general public. As political leaders become divided in Parliament, they turned violent on streets and at homes. Frustration with rival parties and political standoffs leads to heightened social tensions. Even some families are torn apart by political disputes and citizens clash in anger. For instance, Akhtar Mengal's resignation from Pakistan National Assembly due to unresolved issues in Balochistan fueled

under public discontent, leading to protests and street power politics.

By the same token, extreme distrust among political parties erodes public trust in state institutions. When parties constantly blame each other and fail to work together, people lose faith in leadership and institutions. Citizens become highly disillusioned, seeing government as corrupt and dysfunctional. For instance, 2018 General Elections deepened rifts between the ruling and opposition parties. Political debates grew toxic and meaningful dialogue disappeared from public spheres. The rejection of opposition's election results deepened mistrust across society.

Similarly, political polarization creates ethnic fissures in society by fueling identity-based politics. When politics becomes deeply polarized, these alignments harden, and political debates shift from policy issues to ethnic grievances.

As a result, citizens begin to see themselves less as part of a unified nation and more as members of competing ethnic groups, which weakens national cohesion. For instance, political parties are supported by specific ethnic groups such as PML-N in Punjab, PPP in Sindh, PTI in KP and Balochistan nationalist parties in Balochistan.

Thus, it could be concluded that when leaders prioritize rivalry over reform, both democracy and societal harmony become immediate casualties. This in turn polarized politics paralyzes institutions, turns parliaments into battlegrounds, and shifts focus from public welfare to political point-scoring. As parties become more hostile, consensus-building disappears, resulting in poor policymaking, delayed reforms, and weakened state capacity. On a societal level, polarization fuels intolerance, deepens ethnic and regional divides, and normalizes public distrust.

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In democratic processes: since society
is state and large it reflects the
political fissures within the ruling elite.
Citizens begin to mirror the animosity
of their leaders whom they blindly
worship, turning political disagreement
into a personal hostility. Ultimately,
the long-term impact of political
polarization is not just a divided government
but a divided nation.

