

# Political polarisation :

## Governance and society

### Outline

#### 1. Introduction

##### Thesis statement:

The scourge of political polarisation has engulfed Pakistan, threatening to erode the governance structure and stain social fabric of the nation. However its momentum can be halted by adopting specific measures.

#### 2. Understanding the term 'Political polarisation'.

#### 3. How political polarisation impacts governance?

a. Partial judiciary : manifestation of polarised politics

• 26 amendment - 191-A

b. Prevalence of nepotism : death to meritocracy

• (PILDAT Report)

c. Political polarisation : a catalyst for diplomatic strains.

• SCO summit, 2024

- Tanveer Khadim - WPA, 2016
- d. Red tapism jeopardising governance structure Intrinsicly
  - How democracies die, 2018
- e. Populism undermining democratic norms
  - PTI leader's ouster
- f. Biased economic policies wreck economic downturn
  - frequent amend of IMF agree
- g. Imbalanced centre-province relations: gridlock in policy-making
  - Dissection of lists of subjects
- h. Interests-driven legislation undermining rule of law
  - NRO

#### 4. How political polarisation impacts society?

- a. Augmenting militancy threatens the right to life
  - 9 may incident
- b. Political polarisation fuels sectarianism
  - Zia Islamisation - SSP / Faizabad, 2017
- c. Education in doldrums: manifestation of polarised politics.
  - SNC policy - HEC report
- d. The right to fair trial: a grey area amid political polarisation.

- military courts - EU - ICCPR violations
- e. Political polarisation: a threat to gender equality.
  - Tamveer Khadom in tribunal
- f. Manoeuvring of public opinion through social media
  - Brexit
- g. Civic apathy and disengagement due to political polarisation
  - decline voter turnout - UNDP report, 2020
- h. Social divisions and disintegration distorts social fabric
  - Citizenship act - BBC, 2021

5. What are strategic directions to curb political polarisation?

- a. Fostering Inclusive leadership by regularisation of media
- b. Rigid legislation to fill vacuum in judicial framework

b. Conclusion

At its core, democracy is a belief in power of people, But what if there becomes complete factions and people become divided? When the partisanship occurs, interests dissect and motives bifurcate. It underscores that polarisation has taken its roots. The scourge of polarisation of politics has not only torn social fabric but also distorted the structure of governance in Pakistan. Radical polarisation and partiality, the prevalence of nepotism and diplomatic disfigure all are manifestation of identity politics. Through such exercises it distorts the very essence of federation. Besides, polarisation may foment interest-driven legislation. A part from it the rise of militancy and sectarianism counts to be play of polarisation. Unaligned views of politicians may also undermine rights of individuals, rendering educational in conundrums.

Moreover, polarisation may have lasting impact on gender equality, inculcating apathy and bifurcation on all levels. The scourge of political polarisation has engulfed Pakistan, threatening to erode the governance structure and stain social fabric of the nation. However, its momentum can be halted by adopting specific measures.

Political polarisation is a type of politics where interests and motives become dissected and two faced. It is an ideology where 'us v them' notion takes birth. Such type of politics seeks for immediate and short term reliefs over sustainable solutions.

According to some political scientists, such type of politics undermine national interests and democratic norms.

Moreover, such menace takes place where undemocratic norms and values prevail.

In short, it is a system where antagonism and radical ideologies takes birth, rendering collective decision-making and consensus-based politics a distant dream.

First and the foremost repercussion of polarised politics

is manifestation of partial judiciary. Partial judiciary reflects the system where judicial officers are inclined towards their political elites.

The prevalence of the same was evident when the parliament of Pakistan passed 26 amendment. It altered the method of choosing CJP and abolished the seniority system. This amendment was highly criticised by the public as it will enable judiciary to find a job before the parliament and get the apex scale. In a nutshell, such exercises and endeavours make judiciary partial.

In addition to it, the menace of polarised politics creates the culture of nepotism. Nepotism is a type of system where

patronage of politicians is valued over the meritocracy. Such prevalence is no less than a threat to democracy as it renders rights of individuals in shambles. As the posts of seniority level in PIA and steel mills are solely offered to the ones indulged in political patronage. (PILDAT report) Such exercises makes the dreams of individuals to remain aloof to the reality.

Therefore it is beyond reasonable doubt that prevalence of nepotism is the play of polarised politics.

Apart from it, the diplomatic strains are manifested by the enigma of polarised politics. The diplomatic image of nations holds true value as political, economic, and socio-cultural interests are



attached to it. The distortion of image may cost a hefty amount to a nation. The same was evident when the banned party of Pakistan, which remained in power, back then, ~~currently~~ held country wide protest on the day when SCO summit was organised in Islamabad in Nov, 2024.

Moreover, some naysayers block the China - Pakistan trade routine. Thus, considering this all, it is evident that polarised politics wrecks country's diplomatic relations in shambles.

Moreover, politics when become polarised, it creates notions like red tapism. Red tapism is a delaying tactics under the garb of documentation. It is a colonial remnant

In Pakistan. It is further argued that it destroys the rights and liberties of individuals. Such delaying tactics are followed by censored political interests and that threatens the democratic framework intrinsically. (How Democracies Die, 2018) It further writes that it gives birth to unethical practices that are sheerly detrimental to the country.

Over and above it, polarised politics undermine democratic norms by invoking populism. Populism is a politics that solely rely on emotions and is aloof from any strategic notion. It threatens democracy as it exploits the emotions of populace making them think what that populist think. Hijacking the minds of people makes it utterly

undemocratic. The prevalence of it was evident when an PM accused foreign powers for his ouster on no plausible grounds. Moreover, the Brexit was also the play of populism as the emotions of masses were exploited. In short, polarised politics makes populism a reality, threatening democracy. Furthermore, polarised politics gives birth to economic downturn. As it is widely accepted that economic stability cannot be achieved if a country's political status is ambivalent. The same was noted when PM of Pakistan was ousted through no confidence vote. At that time, the economy remains at very low. It reflected that country is in dire need of stability.

Moreover, the frequent visits and cancellation of IMF - agreements caused stir. Thus, it is contended that when interests become bifurcated, the economic stability becomes a pipe dream.

Having defined economic repercussions, political polarisation also hampers policy making by straining centre and province relations. The amicable relations of centre and province reflects the originality of federal system.

As per a research, the educational status of punjab remains way higher than the KPK. It is the pure manifestation of the system as education was conferred to provincial list. Hence, it can be contended that making such crucial subjects to the unitary authority creates imbalance in the educational

system. It is beyond doubt that preferring personal interests over the national interests can create a rigid policy deadlock.

Besides that, polarised politics undermine the rule of law by enacting biased legislations. The rule of law means the law is sovereign over any authority.

However, in the dictatorship of Musharraf from 1999 to 2007, Pakistan faced ample political challenges.

In the same time, the law of impunity, the National Reconciliation Ordinance was introduced which allowed pardon to many politicians in many cases. Under that law, ex-PM Benazir Bhutto ended her exile and returned to politics. Such legislation was purely interests

based and widely criticised.  
In a nutshell, polarised  
politics renders interests  
based legislation, wreaking  
rule of law a distant  
dream.

Having elaborated the  
implications of polarised politics  
on governance, the societal  
implications shall be brought  
under the light.

The menace of  
polarised politics threaten the  
social fabric of society by  
invoking militancy. The  
curse of militancy threat-  
ens the right to life  
of individuals. As it was  
evident on 9 May, 2023,  
when an PM was arrested  
and he turning the blind  
eye to law and order of  
country, ordered demolition  
and country-wide protest.  
In the meantime, some

naysayers got their ground and vandalized military infrastructure. Thus, it can be contended that such sort of blind and 'us v them' politics threatens the life of masses by involving violent actions.

In addition to it, polarised politics fuels the fire of sectarianism. The curse of sectarianism deepens the divide in the society by fanning the flames of ethno-centric ideologies. The same was evident when an dictator of Pakistan, Zia introduced islamisation policies which alienated many sectarian groups. It led to creation of Sipah e Sahaba that has been in animosity with Lashker e Jhangvi - Shia backed

group - until now. Hence such policies without ruminating implications causes sectarianism, alienating minorities of nation.

Furthermore, polarised politics renders educational woes in the nation. It can be argued when interests become self-centric how subjects like education can be free and smooth. The prevalence of radical politics and antagonistic policies has rendered education in shambles. It has further deepened the drop-out rates and infrastructural degradation. (HEC Report)

Moreover, the most criticised policy of single National Curriculum caused stir in the country. Hence, it can be asserted that polarised politics can make



educational disparities in the country.

Moreover, the right to fair trial also becomes undermined where politics of partisans and factions prevails. The right to a fair trial is fundamental right where the say of accused is valued and heeded. However, recently Pakistan has issued a verdict where civilians have been sentenced in the military court. According to EU, it is the sheer violation of international covenant on civil and political rights. Such the prisoners have been indulged in act of vandalism of public properties. Therefore, it can be contended that the powerful party can

go to any limits in the  
bid to take revenge. In  
short, such interest based  
politics threatens the right  
to a fair trial.

Furthermore, polarised  
politics appears to be threat  
to gender equality. It is  
argued that gender apartheid  
is the play of unethical  
politics. As Tanveer Khadom  
writes in tribune that the  
women protection act, 2016  
remained unpassed due to  
rampant opposition by the  
PTI which was in opposition.

This way, the parties  
remain aloof to the  
global commitment in  
the bid to further their  
stance. Gender equality  
is the SDG 5 that has  
to be achieved by 2030.  
Whereas, Pakistan remains  
at 145 out of 146

in gender gap index. Is a nutshell, polarisation in politics halts gender equality.

Moreover, the public opinion is manoeuvred through social media in the times of polarised politics. The public opinion is very crucial element to drive political future of the nation in democratic systems. But when public is deceived through technology and deep fakes, it becomes entirely threatening. In 2020 the withdrawal of UK from the European Union was the pure manifestation of moulding public opinion and the referendum was altered before time. It is widely argued that amype of facebook accounts

were hacked and exploited  
to further their interests.

Thus, it can be argued that  
political polarisation moulds  
public opinions through illib  
usage of social media.

Over and above  
that, polarised politics renders  
civic apathy and disengagement  
due to such menace. The  
ambience where civic apathy  
prevail and disengagement  
prevail, the political system  
weakens, leaving a large  
room for revolutions and  
ousters. It is noted in  
the report of UNDP 2020  
that voters turnout has  
largely declined in the  
polarised democracies of  
the globe. As per such  
findings, it becomes beyond  
reasonable doubt that  
political polarisation hinders  
civic engagement and

fosters apathy in masses.

Besides that, the short-term politics deepens social divide, distorting the very essence of society. Social divisions are in alarming situation where national integration becomes compromised over the whims of the political and charismatic leader.

For example, the enactment of citizenship act in 2019 invoked nation wide protests in India. (BBC, 2021)

That legislation sheerly threatened the minorities of India. In a pure democratic system, the interests of minorities are secured. However when, 'us v them' notion takes its place then social divisions and nation disintegration becomes

the future of the nation.

Having elucidated the implications of polarised politics, some strategic pathways shall be discussed to drive the vehicle of country towards stability.

First and foremost the issue is divisions.

Thus to curb it, 'Inclusive leadership must' be furthered through regularisation of media. The antagonism and animosity only takes place when it is fueled by external sources. The sources like hate speeches and unethical criticism are the reasons behind it. In order to make leaders united, there must be anti-hate speech law that imposes heavy penalties of the violaters. Moreover, media must also be

scrutinised under that law and accounts speaking fake, biased and unauthentic news must be blocked forthwith. In short, this measure can make a huge difference in the polity of nation.

Secondly, there must be rigid legislations to fulfill the vacuum in judicial framework.

No matter the system where parliament is supreme, judicial activism is criticised. However,

the recent 26 amendment of constitution of Pakistan has snatched *ex toto* powers of judiciary. It has made judiciary a toothless tiger. Thus, such authoritative powers must be restored to law adjudicating arm

of state. It will not only lessen divides but it may put an end to unethical politics. As those practices can be reviewed at any time by the apex court without any request or petitions.

To conclude, it is beyond reasonable doubt that political polarisation makes governance and society pay for it. The prevalence of amnostic politics threatens federalistic structure, polarises judiciary and fosters favoritism. Such sort of immoral polity undermines rights and liberties of the populace. The rise of sectarianism and militancy appears to be a byproduct of polarisation. Furthermore, the economic stability and merit based legislation



become a distant dream.

Destroying the very fabric of democracy, the system offer nothing more than civic engagement and alienation of masses.

In the area of factions and sects, the gender equality remains elsof.

In order to put an end, fostering collective leadership becomes the need of the hour.

Now the onus relies on overhauling the political structure. Only then a sustainable and fair future <sup>will</sup> lead the way of nation.

855