

Polarized politics and its impact on governance and society

Outline

1. Introduction

Thesis statement: "Polarized politics has seen a remarkable rise in recent years. This phenomenon hampers government functioning by deepening the political divide. At the level of the society, it fuels intolerance, breeds contempt and creates an 'us vs. them' hostile sociopolitical environment."

2. Understanding the key variable : polarized politics

3. Factors that contribute to a rise in polarized politics

- a. Public discontentment with the prevailing political scenario
- b. Charismatic politicians act as the only solution to the public outcry
- c. Intense appeal on social networking applications

1. Impact of Polarized Politics on Government:

- a. Lack of consensus in policymaking
- b. Distrust among fellow parliamentarians over trivial matters
- c. Moral uprightness takes precedence over government performance
- d. Misplaced priorities lead to ~~global~~ undemocratic interference
- e. Hampers the process of rule of law

5. Impact of Polarized Politics on Society

- a. Erosion of trust in political institutions
- b. Deepens the cleavage between supporters of opposite parties.
- c. Leads to civil unrest in society
- d. Prevents engagement of civic society in progressive political discourse.

6. Way forward: Making politics more inclusive

- a. Role of education in instilling political values
- b. Independent media as safeguard of democracy

7. Conclusion



Essay

In the past few years, the world has noticed the rise of unconventional politicians like Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, Imran Khan, and Boris Johnson. They might represent different geographic regions but almost all owe their rise to the phenomenon of populism. These leaders use their narratives to paint a black and white picture: those with them are right and those against them are wrong. This leads to polarisation in the world of politics. Polarized politics owes its rise to the local discontent with the status quo. Charismatic leaders channelise this and rise to the world stage. Polarization of politics has ~~had~~ led to political gridlocks in the legislature and stems distrust among fellow parliamentarians. They prioritise uprightness than ~~on~~ their task of running government affairs. Misplaced priorities often lead to a hue and cry among opponents. Not only at the government level but also at the societal level, polarized politics ~~had~~ has created many a problem. Erosion of public trust and deepening division between opposite factions leads to civil unrest in the society. It is high time that this menace be dealt with accordingly and education is a major way to curb this problem. Hence, polarized politics has seen a remarkable rise in recent years. This phenomenon hampers government functioning by deepening political divides. At the level of the society, it fuels intolerance, breeds contempt and creates an 'us vs. them' hostile political environment.

In order to have a holistic discussion on the topic, it is necessary to define the key variable of polarized politics. Polarised politics in the phenomenon when the political discourse hinges on two opposite

approaches. One faction believes its views are right, patriotic, and the need of the hour. The same faction is also convinced that ~~who~~ those who disagree with them are wrong, unpatriotic and irrelevant. This leads to a growing gap between the opposing political factions. For example, a populist leader might believe that a particular religion should take precedence over all others in his particular country. The dissenting voices will automatically be labelled as enemies of the state. By utilizing emotions over reason, such leaders create an ideological division among the masses. This creates a snowball effect whereby the polity at large is divided into either of the two extreme opinions.

Many factors have contributed to the rise in polarized politics and among them public discontent with the prevailing political scenario is a major one. When the public seems to be dissatisfied with the political functioning, it eyes an alternative political discourse. This discourse must be emotionally engaging and reflect the beliefs of the majority of unheard individuals. In ~~for~~ such a social setting, it is easier for a populist leader to rise and take control of the reins of politics. The rise of Hitler following the imposition of harsh treaty of Versailles can be taken as a test case of this argument. He engaged the masses by promising them their lost glory and went on to become their supreme leader, Führer. Thus, the rise of polarised politics can be attributed to the sociopolitical scenario of a polity that creates a vacuum for the rise of a populist leader.

Similarly, charismatic leaders not only benefit themselves of the opportunity but convince the masses, that their only hope is pinned on himself as their saviour.

Such leaders paint a very bleak picture of the political milieu and the ordinary citizen views the leader as their only way out of the permanent gloom. This leader then attracts the citizenry and repels his opponents; both engage in a virtual war from thereon. The meteoric rise of Bhutto in the 1970s can be seen in a similar way. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto with his charm made the citizens believe that he was the only option for them. Stanley Walpert in his book Zulfikar Bhutto of Pakistan claims the 1970s were probably the most politically polarized years of Pakistan due to Bhutto. Thus populist leaders increase the political divide and further polarize the society.

Another factor that has led to a rise in polarized politics is the intense appeal of populist leaders on social networking applications. These platforms provide an access to the political narratives of populist leaders for virtually everyone. Moreover, the pictures and videos of their daily lifestyle can be easily edited to make them more impressive for ordinary citizens. Their belief in their polarizing leaders grows manifold this way. For instance, edited videos of Donald Trump in White House have significantly increased his public appeal. His Republican followers tend to have developed a cult like following for him. Simultaneously, their dread for his opponents has increased tremendously. Therefore, the use of social media to bolster the public perception of their leaders increases polarized politics.

The previous discussion revolved around the phenomenon of polarized politics and reasons for its increased popularity. The ~~up~~ upcoming paragraphs would dilate upon the effects of polarized politics on the government.

Firstly, ~~polarized~~ a major impact of polarized politics on government is the lack of consensus in policy making. In the legislatures, a consensus is required to carry on any legislative

business. As members of the house are themselves ideologically driven apart, they cannot agree on the legislative process. The case in point of the United States in building a wall at its Southern border with Mexico fell victim to this problem. The ~~two~~ diametrically opposite Republicans and Democrats could not agree upon the bill for its construction. Consequently, legislative matters are impeded when polarized politics guides law makers.

The lack of consensus in policy making is coupled with their distrust for fellow parliamentarians over trivial matters. Despite becoming elected representatives of a country, the parliamentarians continue to think along partisan lines. This is evident in the speeches of the Members of National Assembly in Pakistan. Members continue to bring their trivial issues at when deliberating on matters of national importance. The bill for National Action Plan faced multiple issues due to absentee law makers who kept their petty grievances to heart and remained absent. Thus, the house fails to work in unison due to mutual distrust prevalent in the minds of parliamentarians.

This distrust over often leads to a deft adherence to moral uprightness over government performance. Very often, the legislators pay tribute to moral uprightness of their leaders and spew venom at their opponents. The elected members let their egos take precedence over the day to day ~~govt~~ government business; the latter being their sole responsibility as being elected parliamentarians. The government fails to function properly due to this myopic approach of the members. This is the reason that major issues are created whenever the bill for budget is announced. Instead of deliberating on matters of revenue, the house cheers for their respective leaders and this creates chaos in the National and Provincial

Assemblies of Pakistan. Therefore, government business takes a backfoot when polarized politics exists.

Furthermore, misplaced priorities sets the petridish for interference by undemocratic forces. According to the spirit of the constitution, only the elected members can make policies. However, discontent among members of the house leads to unelected institutions to bring in their selected policies. ~~Strictly~~ This leads to further disorder in the elected chambers of the country when elected individuals rely on nonparliamentary institutions to back them in their constituency. The 2024 elections were fraught with allegations of election fraud and undemocratic interference. Thus, disunity among parliamentarians makes them more vulnerable to dictations from undemocratic institutions.

Lastly, rule of law is hampered when polarized politics fails to address issues pertaining to justice. Independence of judiciary, transparency and rule of law are benchmarks of democracy in a country. If this is meddled with in any country, it fails to remain a democratic country. In this context, the controversial passing of the 26th Amendment is being criticized by law firms and justice thinktanks across the world. Partisan approach and extreme polarization of Pakistan's political milieu has brought matters to such an impasse. Hence, hampering of the rule of law is a major drawback secondary to polarized politics.

The previous paragraphs dictated upon the impact of polarized politics on government functioning. The upcoming paragraphs would shed light on the impacts of polarized politics on the society at large.

Firstly, polarized politics leads to erosion of trust in political institutions. The citizens are convinced that the institutions are biased against them. Their hope of receiving justice and transparency in recruitment is undermined. Moreover, they believe the

system is rigged against them. This point of view is reflected in a recent poll conducted by Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDF): 60% of Pakistanis believe that the National Assembly and Senate are a rubberstamp parliament and they refuse to acknowledge them as the real source of political power. Similarly, Pakistan ranks 129/140 in Rule of Law index. Thus, trust of the public in political institutions is eroded due to extreme polarized politics.

Along with this distrust, the cleavage between the two ideologies deepens with time. Either side is convinced that they are right and the other is wrong. This fuels intolerance of opposing points of view and brews contempt for the other side. For example, the political supporter of one party would refuse to even dine with a political opponent based on different political views. As a result, mutual animosity is increased due to polarized politics.

This mutual animosity is reflected in civil unrest in the society. When the political opposition peaks, the opposing factions take their differences to the streets and engage with each other violently. Although a common happening in developing countries like Pakistan and India, this phenomenon was observed in the January 6th attack on Capitol in Washington D.C. after rioters, charged by Trump's divisive rhetoric, charged the House of Representatives and Senate. Hence, a law and order situation was created due to the negative appeal of polarized politics.

Lastly, an extremely charged polarized political environment prevents political discourse from happening. Prior to the polarization phenomenon, civic society frequently engaged in debates to solve their problems. This often led to a dispute mitigation. However, the politically charged supporters now refuse to even sit in the presence of an opponent. This is a very disastrous approach and leads to further enmity. For instance,

Donald Trump ~~was~~ urged all his voters to refrain from going to the inauguration of his opponent Joe Biden. Therefore, polarized politics prevents engagement of civic society in progressive political discourse.

The previous paragraphs discussed the impacts of polarized politics on the society. In order to have a holistic understanding of the topic, it is essential to give a way forward: making politics more inclusive.

For politics to be more inclusive, education must play the primary role. From the very formative years, students need to be inculcated with political values. Freedom of expression and respecting the opponent's view is crucial to get rid of polarization of politics. Moreover, blind following of any leader is destructive in the modern sense. The state must assume the responsibility of instilling these attributes in the youth. Certain private schools in the United States have begun this process whereby they teach the young about the importance of voting etc. Many online teaching institutes like Khan Academy have a course outline for the young learners as well. Therefore, such an approach is crucial to bring about change in the political realm.

Not only education, but the media also has a crucial role to act as the safeguard of democracy. An independent media brings ~~an~~ accountability to the masses. It also formulates public opinion on matters of public importance. If the media moguls act like the vanguard of democracy, they can indeed bring about change. Independent media like Washington Post has frequently opened the lid on gross government incompetence. This paper's report on Nixon ultimately led to the resignation of the United States' President in 1973. Hence, media has a very important responsibility to shoulder to make politics more inclusive.

To sum up the discussion, polarized politics has made huge strides in the recent years. Its popularity is linked to the public grievance with the status quo. Frequently, ambitious populist leaders grab this opportunity to spring into action. Their dividing narratives are spread rapidly via social networking applications. The impacts of polarized politics on governance include political gridlocks, increased distrust among parliamentarians and misplaced priorities that ~~it~~ include hampering the process of rule of law. At the social level, polarized politics increases the gap between opposing factions and leads to civil unrest in society. In order to curb the harmful impacts of political polarization, the ~~more~~ education and media should work to instill democratic values and keep a stringent check on the ~~govt~~ political parties. Although political polarization is a relatively new phenomenon, its rise needs to be checked at the earliest. Otherwise the human nature is such that it will use this to ~~pe~~ pit the opposition against the wall and then it would be as Hobbes remarked in 'Leviathan,' 'A war of all against all.'