

DEMOCRACY IS WEAKENING GLOBALLY DUE TO POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND POPULISM

Outline

1- Introduction

Democracy is weakening across the globe primarily due to increase in political polarization and rise of populism. Both undermine democratic process by social and political divisions; promoting authoritarian practices, weakening rule of law and trust in institutions.

2- Understanding the terms "Democracy", "Political Polarization", and "Populism"

3- Political Polarization as a Driver of Democratic Weakening

- i) Social and Political divisions weaken democracy
- ii) Decline of trust in democratic (electoral) process
- iii) Rise of sectarianism
- iv) Weakening rule of law
- v) Increase in political deadlocks making government inefficient
- vi) Divided media narrative promotes polarization

4- Populism as a Catalyst of Democratic Decline

- i) Populism increases representatives but undermines governance
- ii) Makes executive more powerful than legislature
- iii) Promotes authoritarian practices
- iv) Normalizes extra-constitutional adventures
- v) Rise in criticism culture
- vi) Populism influences accountability and justice

5- Relation between Political Polarization and Populism

6- Strengthening democracy: A Way Forward.

(Strengthening institutions, improving checks and balances)

7. Conclusion

THE ESSAY

Democracy was considered to be the most efficient system especially after world war I.

To promote democracy, number of institutes were formulated.

However, soon the factors like political polarization and populism emerged which adversely affected

democracy. As per the quotation "A house divided is the biggest threat to itself", the political polarization threatened the democracy. Social and political divisions emerged and sectarian culture grew that increased the political deadlocks and governments became inefficient. Divided media narrative further polarized democracies. Similarly, populist culture do more harm than good. Although it increased representativeness, however it undermined governance. By making executive more powerful, authoritarian tendencies grew further, threatening democracy. Extra-constitutional adventures became normal and criticism flourished. Populism also influenced the accountability and judicial processes. A deep relation exists between the political polarization and populism culture. Both support each other but cause an unconsiderable harm to democracy. Democracy is weakening across the globe due to these, that undermine democratic process by promoting societal division and weakening rule of law.

Before discussing the weakening of democracy due to political polarization and populism, it is important to understand these terms. "Democracy" is a system of government based on popular sovereignty, rule of law, system of checks and balances and strong institutions. Democracy does not merely mean voting ^{right} of people rather it means respect for opposing views and constitutional limit on power. While "Political Polarization" means having politically different views to the extent that people see their opponents as enemies rather than rivals. They are totally divided into opposite camps. Lastly, the term "Populism" means "of the people" or "representative of the people". Although it apparently seems good but it is based on popular narrative whether right or wrong. Populism is a biggest threat to state institutions and also to democracy.

Political polarization works as a driver for weakening democracy. ~~A~~ Social and political division among people weaken

the democracy. ~~Social~~ Political polarization increases societal divisions to the level that people are considered in totally opposite camps. If one is considering its camp right then there is no way for the political reconciliation, between the two. For example, political polarization in America is so much that there is even no marriage possible between a republican and a democrat. Similar holds for other social and political matters. In this way democracy cannot flourish in such socially and politically divided environment.

Political polarization also undermines the trust in democratic processes such as elections. Political opponents do not consider each other to be worthy of taking part in elections. If it happens so, they refuse to accept the results of election. Such polarization can be seen everywhere now from the champion of democracy states like USA (where the electoral results were considered to be rigged) to. The

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developing democracies like Pakistan and India where every election result is considered to be tampered. All this erodes the trust of public on the democratic process like elections, weakening the democracy.

Rise of sectarianism is another outcome of political polarization. Rise of sectarianism and ethnic politics is much more common in developing countries. For example, in Pakistan the Peoples Party is considered to be the party of Sindh while Muslim League is considered to be the political party of Punjab. This promotes sectarianism and flares up the separatist tendencies. Pakistan has already faced the consequences of such sectarianism in the past in the form of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) separation. Sectarianism emerges out of political polarization when one group considers itself to be marginalized. Therefore, political polarization in the form of sectarianism is a biggest threat to democracy.