

POLITICAL POLARIZATION ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Political polarisation unveils the degree of divergence of opinions regarding political matters in society and might, in turn, rely on the development of economic outcomes. Political polarisation builds policy gaps, obstructs governance and impedes policy implementation. The paper delves into the complex issues of political polarisation in Pakistan, shedding light on the deviation of opinions within the society and its subsequent impact on economic consequences. With a nucleus on the lack of political harmony among political parties and political and religious elites' distortion of ideological viewpoints, the research seeks to uncover the root causes of polarization. The study aims to give a comprehensive overview of the issues surrounding political polarisation in Pakistan, suggest strategies that imply curtailing polarisation from society and present insights that can update tactics for encouraging a more organised and inclusive political environment.

Keywords: Political polarisation, political harmony, Governance, Issues, Challenges

Introduction

In Pakistan, politics have been ferrying between dictatorship and democracy, similar to a pendulum since its independence, where slogan politics and political fustian are mainly used to arouse the public. Pakistan is fleeting over another political evolution.¹ Inter and intra-party controversies have scoured the reputation and legitimacy of both parties and leadership. Political parties have been accused of corrupting the parliamentary democratic system by expanding influence and personal gains, practising corrupt politics and shunning a long-term stand on public interest. Political parties in Pakistan follow the policy of protruding and protecting the interests of their leaders, which eventually fails in the democratic system. Fragile political parties depend more on their leaders as a surrogate of strong party groups. The process of disintegration hastened after the death of Liaquat Ali Khan and Quaid-e-Azam, while the deaths of Nehru, Gandhi and Patel had no such impression on the Congress party.²

Pakistan's politics are based on several central issues, such as the energy crisis, electoral reforms and the conditions of the nation's rule and regulation.

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Various other issues, namely poverty, unemployment, inflation, corruption, health and education, etc., are less critical in party politics.³ These problems are accentuated mainly by trailblazers on roads during demonstrations and media reporting. Legislators use established countries' assemblies to discuss socioeconomic and diplomatic issues, set up legislation and reach solutions. Moreover, in advanced states, parliament acts to separate individuals from dramatisation protests in the streets and supports them in directing their delegates to the parliament.

However, it is detected that in Pakistan, politicians desire to follow the strategy of agitation and dharna to climax the problems instead of using the platform of parliament. Many political parties reasonably participate in parliament but aspire to work as groups to settle road issues. The trend of activism has presented the essentials of ferocity and radicalism in the people, which have led to polarisation. This process is deteriorating democracy and relegating the role of parliament.

Party politics is the political activity that involves the political parties. Political parties are essential in strengthening democracy.⁴ Their role in implementing and forming socio-economic policies, political mobilisation, separatist and insurgent movements, governance and ethnic and working democracy has been the focus of the investigation. Political parties give critical context between the policymakers and social process and influence policies and debates on the flows impacting the interests of different social groups in the parliamentary democracy and political structure.

Polarisation

'Polarization' has been operationalised in various ways and has different meanings. A polarised government means the governing parties have different inclinations over the issue voters care about, such as public goods. The argument could be between the alternative government or the governing parties.⁵ Polarisation also means the degree of political cohesion. According to the article, a government with high polarisation has an irregular distribution of expected stabilisation costs.⁶ A high degree of polarisation intends to capture the low political cohesion, so achieving the optimal aggregate pact would be arduous.⁷

When the radical and opposition factions stop travelling instead of their direct interest in the current political system, the stage is ready for the polarisation of politics between the establishment and revolutionaries. In a less dynamic society concerning political activities, the unification of factions and differences of opinion play a fundamental role that leads to the inclusion of new groups and closer

connections between mobilisation and factions of other social forces. Dissension or polarisation is essential for transforming sectarian politics into party politics.⁸

Detrimental polarisation has made our people wary of 'us and them' groups, impairing social consistency, forming intolerance and fissures and destroying societal bonds. The affiliation of a political party determines social identity. Bizarre language and hate are the new norms our political leaders practice for addressing opponents. Pakistan has worked hard to attain success and state-building since its creation. It has a somewhat developed infrastructure and impenetrable defence, but a struggling economy is immersed in many contests. Over the past 75 years, the nation has perceived various régimes and various mottos to conquest election support by paying less consideration to social justice, nurturing cohesion, equal prospects and integration.⁹

Different Types of Polarization

Political researchers discern between two levels of polarisation: elite and mass polarization. Elite polarisation refers to the polarisation that occurs among formal political actors. These institutions are populated by these actors, politicians and political parties, while mass polarisation relates to society.¹⁰ Every form of polarisation is not detrimental to democratic activities. A particular level of polarisation in a democratic system is not only conventional but also anticipated as it offers electors clear programmatic choices that increase their interest in political practices and stabilise the democratic system. A vigorous polarisation leads to honest political debate with a clear option, acts as a remedy against political disillusionment and encourages political participation.¹¹

The Grounds for Polarization in Pakistan

In contemporary times, political polarisation has made it hard to discern between guidance and manipulation in Pakistan. The foremost cause of polarisation in Pakistan is the lack of political accord among the national parties.¹² The government and opposition find it unattainable to settle the national security issues. State institutions disagree with political parties on various essential concerns. The premier example is seen yearly during the annual budget when the economic policy is posed at parliament for the succeeding year without it being peaceful.

In democratic countries, political polarisation is allied with smaller administrations, but in undemocratic nations, there is no such link between the polarisation and the size of the administration. In present times, the system of

governance is regulated based on the division of power between the principal organs of states, such as the judiciary, executive, and legislature.¹³

Issues of Political Polarization in Pakistan

To understand the rationale behind political polarisation in a country, it is essential to look at the constituents that are censurable to political polarisation in Pakistan. Some of these are as follows.

- **Unscrupulousness and Improbability**

In Pakistan, political nepotism and improbability are the preeminent perils. Out of 175 countries, Pakistan ranks 127 in corruption (Uroos et al)., These evils are present in the judicial system as persistent in any former institution.¹⁴ The country has fallen to the verge of failure due to the influences liable for pervasive internal non-outmoded security hazards, such as poverty, redundancy and analphabetism. Pakistani society has been persecuted by exposure to nepotism and corruption, where the leaders and state authorities are either buying the votes or manipulating the electoral processes. In Pakistan, political corruption causes political polarisation in many aspects, such as political sleaze directed to the disproportionate allocation of reserves, like money for welfare programs or development projects. This may fabricate a gap between those getting boon from corrupt practices and those who do not perpetrate them, leading to polarisation and resentment. In a political system, when corruption is pervasive, it frequently causes accountability deprivation for individuals in authority.¹⁵

- **Sectarian Conflicts**

In Pakistan, sectarian conflict is the foremost destabilising factor in the social, political, religious and security order. The country has been confronting this conflict for the last 27 years, which has resulted in thousands of deaths from bomb blasts and other terrorist acts. In Pakistan, there are heterogeneous people and cultures. The financial system is sprayed, and the governmental institutions are erratic, fragile and weak. The institutions are divided into racial, folkloric, social and spiritual lines. The sectarian and ethnic ferocity has tainted the culture and created the ether of grave political polarisation. The national structure exhibits flunked to produce a feasible political sequence where groups of all regions live collectively or wangle national identity. The unbridgeable division between

central government programs and people has constrained the nation's people from contesting the country's reliability.¹⁶

- **Bigotry and Religious Fanaticism**

Polarisation is increasing with the increase in bigotry and religious fanaticism. Pakistan society is drawing on polarisation and extremism, and hence, violence is also escalating. The murder of Salman Taseer, governor of Punjab, whom his security guard assassinated, reflects his intolerant conviction on changing the law of blasphemy. General Pervez Musharraf said, "Polarization has already made Pakistan all but ungovernable". The sensation of polarisation is startling as the ascent of militant religious extremism in the country. Few political scientists argue that calamity in government policies and deviation on a large scale of issues is pushing society toward polarization.¹⁷

- **Political Rhetoric and Slogan Politics**

Politicians predominantly use political slogans and rhetoric to invigorate people; these praxes are employed in public statements and speeches. In Pakistan, military and civil leaders rely on slogans rather than political substance. The mottos like Pakistan ka MATLAB kiya La Illaha Illah, Pakistan Baan ky rahey gaa were famed before the independence of Pakistan. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's slogan, Roti Kapra aur Makan, is still famous. Asif Zardari's Pakistan Khapay, Imran Khan's Naya Pakistan, Tabdeli aa k Rahy gi, etc., are some hit and glorious mottos of Pakistan rhetoric. These slogans are based on the situation before and after the election campaign to galvanise the public. Pakistani politicians, instead of strengthening democratic institutions, are discussing electoral reforms and the energy crisis on the streets. The dharna politics has demoted the sacredness of parliament and has sapped the faith in democratic institutions.¹⁸

- **Socio-economic Inequities**

Socioeconomic inequities are the underlying ones that undermine the prospect of nation-building. In Pakistan, the current situation does not offer economic opportunities or equal avenues to all. The citizens cannot even relish their socioeconomic rights; the society is polarised with a gap between marginalised and privileged individuals. These constituents are being unheeded in Pakistan, and people are being denied their fundamental rights of education, employment, food, Health, etc.¹⁹

- **Mass Media**

Mass media has grown as an institution in the last half-century. The involution of social media also contributes to political polarisation in Pakistan. Social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp are standard in the country and have become battlegrounds for political colloquies. It has enabled the propagation of misinformation and fake news that leads to polarisation and social divisions in a country. Social media has made echo chambers where people talk about the news that aligns with their opinions and tenets. The abusive hurls against one another on social media have deserted the basic ethics.²⁰

- **Political Turbulence**

The most prominent ramification comes in the face of political flux. It makes it harder for institutions to work in their best capacity. In Pakistan, political instability has hindered the country's progress and development. Various factors contribute to political instability, such as corruption, economic challenges, military interference, sectarian and ethnic issues, etc. These factors have created an unstable climate in the country, making it arduous for the government to maintain permanency and govern efficiently.²¹

- **Economic Context**

The substantive cause of political polarisation in Pakistan is the country's economic situation. Pakistan has long been confronting economic provocation challenges, including inflation, poverty, high unemployment, etc. These challenges result in social inequality, in which the rich become more affluent and the poor become poorer. Inequality has developed a sense of resentment and frustration among the people, which has led to polarisation and the rise of populist movements. This inequality has created deep-seated grievances among low-income people, who might feel the political system is rigged.²²

- **Modicum Respect of the Constitution**

A written text of the constitution delineates the authority of twigs of government. It not only ascertains power constraints for the judiciary, administration and legislature but also clinches that every organisation stands by the moralities in the text. Constitution should be supreme law

and coerces to the rule of law, fundamental human rights and civil liberties. These attributes are mislaid in Pakistan. The constitution is being periodically and frequently abrogated, amended and annulled by the military and civil leadership. However, constitutional ambiguities and flaws concerning federal and provincial rights have severely affected nation-building.²³

Recommendations

- **Espouse Governmental System**

The democratic record of Pakistan is feeble at the root level. Suppose the military administrations are vigilant on the federalisation of decentralisation and power for their legality reason. In that case, the democratic government works in a contrary path and the federal government system in the state is customarily partial. Apart from that, the local government scheme is not a primary concern of Pakistan's presiding elites that impedes citizens' authorisation. It is momentous to strengthen the third tier of government to shape the capability of politicians at the preliminary level and prepare them so they can grasp national and provincial assemblages and execute them efficiently.

- **Persuade Politicians to use Constitutional means to Fiddle with the Issue**

To alter a country's political form of agitation, it is imperative to yield essential steps to accentuate the importance of assembly and revitalise its part through constitutional ways to tackle the problem. The personae of civil society, opposition, media and government are equivalently significant in this regard. Moreover, the government must take befitting action to untangle the elevated issues discussed in parliament for the public's interest. It will act as a self-assurance gauge for the public and wander off politicians.

- **Need to foster Attitudinal Change in Politicians**

States live in the cores of poets but die and thrive in the hands of representatives. The politician's role as a state-building leader cannot be contradicted. A genuine and adroit leader led the nation to upsurge to new heights of growth, while the evil one unswerving them to stone ages. From the perspective of Pakistan, it is necessary to initiate attitudinal

modification in politicians concerning parliament and politics. Politicians should use the parliament forum and perform their part in reinforcing the elected institution.

- **Capacity Empowerment of Communist Parties**

Because of the absence of intellectual, administrative and structural penetration in political parties, frontrunners mainly depend on partisan slogans and rhetoric politics. According to political leaders, using these beguiling slogans to enchant the crowd is easy. It is proposed that political parties must concentrate on structural and organisational restructurings and take prompt actions to facilitate the rational profundity of leaders and followers of the party.

- **Rationalize Pressure Groups**

The government has to negotiate with religious factions and political parties that are not a fragment of parliament to incentivise them to be a part of the elected process. This will support to fortify the parliament.

- **Make use of Solar Energy Sources**

Energy is the sustenance of any nation. Pakistan is presently facing a vast energy crisis wherever the load shedding of natural gas and electricity has saddened people. It has undesirable impacts on economic progress. Due to its sparse gas and oil reserves, Pakistan imports oil to meet its energy requirements. The government has to invest in solar energy resources to help bridge the country's power deficit. Moreover, renewable energy promptly takes electrical energy to inaccessible areas where power transmission is absurd. It is the need of the hour to proactively take steps to deal with the energy crisis by using renewable energy resources, or else it will disturb the country.

- **Invigoration of Democracy**

Pakistan needs a functional democracy where courts of law make decisions without discrimination based on position, authority, and influence. The affluence of admittance to fairness is non-present. Deprived people have to wait for ages till their pleas are heard in court, and sometimes not even subpoenaed in their life, whether they are erroneously associated in the case. The state of matters goes beside the state building, where people are disenchanted and grappling with their problems.

- **Promoting Interlocutions and Reconciliation**

Political parties and government should intend to foster reconciliation and interlocutions between distinct groups to ease edginess and applaud the sagacity of harmony. The government should generate a platform for discussion and invite gatherings to the negotiating table to address regional brawls and promote cooperation.

Conclusion

The paper articulates the critical problems associated with political polarisation in Pakistani society. Political polarization in Pakistan faces a challenging contest, expressing itself in several essential issues that have far-reaching effects on the socio-political structure of the country. The implications of this polarisation are evident in policy conflicts, societal disagreements and governance barriers. The study seeks to explain and understand these issues by examining their origin and impact on the political landscape. By referring to the specific indicators of polarisation, such as social concerns, economic strategies and extensive societal implications, the paper give insights into the nuanced encounters caused by political polarisation in Pakistan.

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