

Political Polarization in Pakistan: Challenges and Way Forward



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Abstract: *People holding contrasting opinions about various Political issues can be termed as Political polarization. It creates hurdles in policy formulation due to vacuum in policy and hampers governance. Polarization consists of various controversies including political instability which ultimately leads to fragmented society. There is negligible harmony among the political parties; opposing viewpoints among the religious gurus, which leads to further polarization among society. This study highlights certain issues emanating due to this polarization and suggests various policy options to mitigate this division. The study devises strategies to form a united and inclusive society which will lead to political harmony in Pakistan.*

Keywords: Polarization, Governance, Fragmented Society, Political Instability

Introduction

The political dynamics in Pakistan had been ferrying betwixt democracy and dictatorship like a pendulum after gaining independence, where there was mainly politics of slogans as well as political fustian to arouse the masses. (Shafiq et al., 2017). Intra and inter-party controversies have abraded the legitimacy and reputation of both leadership and the parties. It is alleged that the political parties were indulging in corrupting the parliamentary system of democracy through excessive influence, pressurizing for personal gains and corrupt politics and the practice of refusing long-term stands for public interest. In the case of Pakistan, the policy adopted by the political parties, protruding the interests of their leaders is bound to fail in a democratic setup. Weak political parties more rely on leaders as an alternate for effective party organizations. The process of political instability expedited after the demise of Quaid-e-Azam and Liaquat Ali Khan; however, the deaths of Gandhi, Nehru, and Patel did not cause such an impact on the Congress party (Khan and Amjad, 2018).

According to Asghar and Usman (2013),

Pakistan has been facing certain issues including electoral reforms and situation of the ruling and regulating conditions of the State. Apart from these issues, issues such as energy crisis, unemployment, poverty, inflation, health, education and corruption, are not so pressing for party politics. There is vast reporting of problems through demonstrators on roads as well as news media. Socio-economic as well as political issues were taken up before developed country parliaments where the bills were framed with proper suggestions. Furthermore, in advanced countries, parliament intervenes to take the people away from dramatization protests on roads and provides them support to make their representatives go to parliament. However, it is found that politicians of Pakistan want to carry out dharna and agitation to peak the issues rather exercising this opportunity of parliament.

The majority of political parties indulge very reasonably in parliament with the hope of working like groups for resolving road-related issues. The trend of activism has revealed the essentials of radicalism and ferocity in the people, has led to polarization. This process is

relegating the role of parliament and worsening democracy. Any political activity which involves the political parties is Party politics. Political parties are necessary to ensure the strengthening of democracy (Beizen and Ingrid, 2004). Their role in creating and implementing political mobilization, socio-economic policies, separatist movements, insurgency, governance as well as ethnic and work democracy was subject to investigation. The political parties can provide crucial context among social processes and policymakers by influencing policies and debates within the flows affecting the various social groups' interests, in political structure and parliamentary democracy.

Polarization in Society

Polarization has been operationalized differently and has different meanings. Alesina et al. (1996) highlights that a polarized government means that there are different inclinations across the governing parties with regards to the issue the voter cares about, like the public goods. Polarization also involves the level of political cohesiveness. The article says that a polarized government has an uneven distribution of the expected stabilization costs. A soaring degree of polarization aims to reflect the low political cohesion so that achieving the aggregate pact should be challenging (Qian and Rong. 2012). When the opposition and radical factions stop travailing rather directing their interests in the political system, the stage becomes ready for the polarization of politics between revolutionaries and the establishment. In a society which is less dynamic regarding political activities, the role of differences of opinion and unification of factions leads to the inclusion of new groups and immediate connections between mobilization and sections of other social forces. Polarization or Dissension is vital for changing sectarian politics into party politics.

Detrimental polarization made people wary of 'us vs them' groups, forming intolerance, impairing social consistency, destroying societal bonds and fissures. Social identity is determined by the affiliation with a particular political party. Hate and bizarre language are the novel norms our leaders exercise for addressing opponents. To attain state-building and success, since its

creation Pakistan has worked really hard. It has a relatively advanced infrastructure and impregnable defense, but an ailing economy is steeped in many contests. In the last 75 years, our country has experienced several regimes and several slogans to support victory elections by giving less emphasis to social justice, equal opportunities, fostering cohesion, and integration (Ishaque et al., 2022).

Varieties of Polarization

Political scientists identify two levels of polarization: elite and mass polarization. Polarization among formal political actors is referred to as elite polarization. These elite institutions are inhabited by political parties and politicians. However, mass polarization is of society (Robinson et al., 2016). Polarization of all types is harmful in no way to democratic acts. A certain degree of polarization in a system of democracy is not only normative but also expected because it offers electors programmatic choices that raise interest of theirs in political practices and stabilize the established democratic system. Milacic and Filip (2021) stated that a strong polarization results in a truthful political discourse with an obvious choice and forms a cure against political disillusionment and incites political activities.

Reasons for Polarization in Pakistan

In the current era, it has been challenging to distinguish between advice and manipulation in Pakistan because of political polarization. Political accord is the primary cause of polarization in Pakistan; national parties have no political accord (Kukreja and Veena. 2003). The government and opposition cannot agree on issues of national security. There are disputes between state institutions and political parties over many necessary concerns. This prime example is seen every year with the annual budget wherein the economic policy is put before parliament for the subsequent year being an amicable affair. In democratic nations, political polarization is affiliated with small governments, whereas in undemocratic states, the polarization is not linked to the administration size. In contemporary periods, the system of governance is controlled

according to the fragmentation of power between the chief institutions of states, which are judiciary, executive, and the legislature (Leftwich and Adrian, 1993).

Polarization Issues in Pakistan

To get an insight into the rationale behind political polarization of a country, it is necessary to pinpoint the constituents that are censurable to political polarization in Pakistan. Some of which are discussed as follows:

a. Corruption and Dishonesty

In Pakistan, improbability and political nepotism are the preeminent perils. Pakistan ranks 127, out of 175 countries, in corruption. These evils exist in the judicial system also as chronic in any of previous institutions (Uroos et al., 2022). It has deteriorated to the brink of collapse because of the influences responsible for a widespread internal security risk that includes poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy.

The Pakistani society has been persecuted through the exposure to corruption, nepotism where the state authorities and leaders are either manipulating the electoral processes or buying the votes. This political corruption leads to political polarization in many aspects in Pakistan, such as political sleaze directed toward the disproportional allocation of reserves, for example, money for development projects or welfare programs. This can create a divide between those who are benefiting from corrupt practices and those who do not, leading to polarization and resentment. In a political system, widespread corruption often results in the deprivation of accountability for individuals in positions of authority (Javaid and Umbreen, 2010).

b. Slogan Politics

Politicians heavily utilize political slogans or rhetoric for mobilizing; the activities are used in various kinds of public speeches. In Pakistan, the slogans are more believable than the political content in which military and civil heads gamble. The slogan, *Roti Kapra aur Makan*, coined by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is still in circulation. Some other popular and successful mottos of Pakistan's oratory include Imran

Khan's *Naya Pakistan*, *Pakistan Khapay*, *Tabdeli aa k Rahy gi*, etc. These are based on the context after and before the election campaign to galvanize the public. Instead of strengthening democratic institutions, Pakistani politicians are discussing energy crisis on the streets, electoral reforms and the Dharna politics has relegated the sacredness of parliament and sapped belief in democratic institutions (Shafiq et al., 2017).

c. Socio-Economic Inequalities

Socioeconomic disparities are the very ones that destroy the hope of nation-building. In Pakistan, currently, there exist no economic chances or a fair opportunity given to all. The citizen cannot even utilize his rights to socioeconomic advantage; this society is split with some marginalized people and others in privileged conditions. These participants are going unheard in Pakistan, and the citizens are not being supplied their basic rights related to education, employment, food, Health, etc (Farooq et al., 2016).

d. Conflicts of Sectarianism

Sectarian conflict is the most destabilizing factor in the religious, social, security and political order in Pakistan. The country has been undergoing this war for the last 27 years, causing thousands of deaths through bomb blasts and other acts of terrorism. Pakistan has people and cultures heterogeneous.

The financial system is pluralistic, with dysfunctional, weak, and fragile governmental institutions. The institutions are bisected on folkloric social, racial and spiritual lines. The ethnic and sectarian ferocity has sullied to the culture and produced the ether of grave political polarization. The national structure has been flunked to generate a feasible political sequence where groups of all regions live together or wrangle national identity. The unbridgeable division between central government programs and people has restricted the nation's people from fighting for the country's dependability (Hilali and A.Z, 2002)

e. Prejudice and Religious Fanaticism

Polarization is increasing with the increase in religious fanaticism and bigotry. Pakistan

society is drawing on polarization and extremism, and hence, violence is also heaping. General Pervez Musharraf said that Polarization has made Pakistan, ungovernable". The feeling of polarization is shocking as the rise in the rate of militant religious fundamentalism in the state. The very few political analysts think that disaster at governmental levels and a radical change of track on many different subjects are forcing the people's direction to polarize in its view (Atran and Scott, 2021).

f. Media's Role

Mass media has expanded as an institution over the last half-century. Social media's revolution also brings about political polarization in Pakistan. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp have become standard social media networks in the country, becoming battlegrounds for political colloquies. It has enabled the propagation of misinformation and fake news to facilitate polarization and divisions along social lines in a country. Social media has created echo chambers where people discuss the news that suits their opinions and tenets. The base ethics have been deserted by abusive hurls against one another on social media.

g. Economic Challenges

The deep cause behind Pakistan's political polarization lies in the economic situation. Pakistan has been facing an economic provocation challenge since a long time, be it inflation, poverty, very high unemployment, etc. These challenges cause social inequality wherein the rich become richer, and the poor get more impoverished. Inequality has ingrained resentment and frustration among people, thereby creating polarization and triggering populist movements. This inequality has inculcated deep-rooted grievances among low-income people, who might feel that the political system is rigged (Berg and Manfred, 2021).

h. Political Instability

The most important implication is in the face of political flux. It makes it harder for the institutions to work at their best capacity. In Pakistan, the country's progress and development have been hindered by the lack of

political stability. Contributing factors to these challenges involve corruption, economic circumstances, military interference, sectarian and ethnic concerns, and the like. The circumstance fosters a difficult climate in the country for the government, making it challenging for permanency and proper governance (Arooj and Nisar, 2023).

i. Constitution

Authority of government is described by a manuscript of the constitution. It not only fathoms power constraints for the administration, judiciary, and legislature but also attests that every organization in the text stands by the moralities. It must be supreme law and coerce to the rule of law, civil liberties and fundamental human rights. In Pakistan, these characteristics have gone missing. The Constitution is frequently and periodically amended, abrogated, and annulled by leadership. Yet, flaws and constitutional ambiguities relating to provincial and federal rights have terribly harmed nation-building (Farooq et al., 2016).

Recommendations

a. Molding Politicians' Attitude

As a state-building leader the politician's role can't be contradicted. A true and astute leader takes the nation to boost new horizons of growth, whilst the bad one, pushing them to the age of stone. From the point of view of Pakistan, it is pivotal to start and implement attitudinal modification in people concerning politics and parliament. Politicians should make use of the parliamentary forum to perform their role in reinforcing the elected institutions.

b. Adhering Governmental System

Pakistan is weak, at the grassroots level according to the democratic record. The local government plan is not a major issue of concern of Pakistan's ruling elites that hinders the citizens' empowerment. It is significant to strengthen the third tier of government in order to mold the abilities of politicians at the preliminary level and to prepare them to face the situations so that they can grasp provincial and national assemblages and finish and execute

them amicably and efficiently. It is necessary to devolve the power up to the grassroot levels.

c. Constitutional Means

To change the political form of agitation of a country, it is required to sacrifice essential steps to emphasize the importance of assembly and renew its part through constitutional measures to deal with the issue. The roles of opposition, civil society, government and media are equally important in this regard. Furthermore, the government should take suitable action to disentangle the issues raised at parliament for the common interest. It will serve as a self-assurance gauge for the public and wander off the politicians.

d. Capacity Building

Lack of administrative, intellectual, structural penetration in political parties, leaders at the front mainly rely on partisan slogans and rhetorical politics. These political leaders use these beguiling slogans to entice the crowd. It is proposed that political parties focus on structural and organizational restructurings and take urgent steps to make the rational profundity of followers and leaders of the party.

e. True Essence of Democracy

Pakistan is need of a working democracy where the law courts take decisions without any discrimination and biasedness based on authority, position, and influence. The wealth of access to justice is absent. The deprived individuals are made to wait for centuries until the ailing voices are heard in courts, and sometimes not even called out in their lifetime, whether erroneously linked in the case. Such is the state of matter where people seem disenchanted and wrestling with their life problems.

f. Use of Pressure Groups

The government needs to negotiate with political parties and religious factions that are not a part of parliament to incentive them to be a segment of the elected process. To fortify the parliament this will serve as an aid. They can play active role in political awareness and making informed public opinion in Pakistan.

g. Alternate Sources of Energy

Energy is the main ingredient supplementing a country's economy. Pakistan is currently under a severe energy crisis all over, where the natural gas and electricity load shedding has frustrated people. It impacts the country's economic development adversely. Due to the shortage of sparse gas and oil reserves in the country, Pakistan has to import oil to satisfy its energy consumption. The government must invest in solar energy sources to mitigate the power shortage in the country. Furthermore, renewable energy immediately directs electrical energy to Far flung areas where the transmission of power is impossible. It is a requirement of time to proactively work for the energy crisis using energy resources which are renewable, or else it will muddle the country.

h. Politics of Reconciliation

Political parties and the government should intend to bring interlocutions and reconciliation between different groups to reduce differences and praise the wisdom of harmony. The government must provide a forum for discussion and call-in groups to the table talk to settle regional squabbles and enhance cooperation.

Conclusion

The paper highlights the critical issues linked with political polarization in the Pakistani society. Pakistan is witnessing a challenging contest in terms of political polarization, where it is reflected in many essential issues with wide effects on socio-political structure of the country. The impact of this polarization are seen in societal disagreements, policy conflicts and governance barriers. This research explains and understands the issues at hand by exploring their origins and impact on the political landscape. It sheds light on specific indicators of polarization like social concerns, economic strategies and vast societal implications. This is going to give insight into the nuanced confrontation caused by political polarization in Pakistan.

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