

Causes of Political Polarization in Pakistan from 1947 to 2024

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: May 24, 2024 Revised: June 29, 2024 Accepted: June 29, 2024	Recently, political polarization has been one of the most rampant political processes across the globe. Stable, as well as unstable democracies, have been affected by political polarization. Since its inception, Pakistan has been a politically polarized country. Politicians have further widened the gap based on numerous issues to gain their political goals. Unfortunately, there has been unprecedented political polarization in Pakistan in the last few years. From the political elite to the masses everyone is politically divided. This division has contributed to the culture of hatred, abuse, and intolerance. There are several causes of political polarization including mainstream media, social media, the political elite, and income inequality around the globe. However, in this study, the main causes of political polarization in Pakistan are the media and political elite being discussed.
Keywords	
<i>Political polarization</i>	
<i>Political process</i>	
<i>Pakistan's politics</i>	
<i>Political elite</i>	
<i>Political divisions</i>	

1 Introduction

Political polarization is defined as the process or state in which the political attitude is different from the center and ideological extremes are being followed. Most of the time, political polarization is discussed in the scenario of the political parties. Different political parties have different political ideologies. It is not essential that polarization is dependent on different policies like right and left. People are polarized based on being religious or secular and traditionalist or modern. In addition to this, polarization is divided into two categories ideological polarization and affective polarization. In this study, political polarization at the party level and the public level is discussed. First, the causes of political polarization are elucidated across the globe. Like, media, political elite, and income inequality have been the causes of political polarization. Then, a comparative analysis has been made what are the causes of political polarization in Pakistan. This study explored that media and political elite have been the source of polarization in the case of Pakistan. Further, it explained Pakistan is facing affective polarization and disliking has been moved from the political elite to the public. Society is badly divided, and the process of democracy is under threat in Pakistan. The focus of this study is the explanation of the causes of political polarization, its consequences and solutions will not be discussed.

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2 Literature Review

2.1 What is Political Polarization?

Political Polarization is defined as a process of ideological differences in which people show hatred and mistrust for people of different political views and parties (Adnan, 2022). Representatives from the main political parties become politically divergent from each other but become convergent within the parties (Kim et al., 2016). A gap between the expectations from society and the functioning of the state institutions can contribute to political polarization (Ishaque et al., 2022). In political polarization, political attitudes diverge to ideological extremes.

Political polarization is discussed concerning political parties and the democratic political system. Mass polarization or popular polarization is the division of the electorate based on political issues, ideologies, and policies. It is a very common phenomenon; polities are normally divided. However, the degree of division changes from polity to polity. In some polities, the division is minor, but the division in some polities is deep and larger. There is no middle ground in polities with deep polarization. Thus, these are known as polarized polities.

Normally electorates take sides and see the political opponents as an enemy (political polarization-ECPS, n.d.). Political polarization can be a reason behind political divergence and political violence. Political polarization is very rampant in many countries and a serious threat to democracy.

Recently political polarization has been spread around the world. Many studies suggest that COVID-19 is the reason behind an increase in political polarization. It is a normal practice that people question the policies and system during a crisis. It is always not true that a difference of opinion is wrong. Political discussions and debates are paramount steps in the evolution and growth of democracy (Adnan, 2022).

According to sociologists DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson, Polarization has features of both process and state (Callander & Carbajal, 2022). There are two types of political polarization, ideological polarization, and affective polarization. Ideological polarization is the difference in political beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. Affective polarization is polarization based on the political identity between the in-group and out-group. The liking for political allies and hatred for political opponents is assessed through affective polarization (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021).

Scholars believe that other than the poles the actors in the middle have a great role in polarization. Poles behave based on the size and political strategies of the middle actors. It is hypothesized that poles balk to take extreme positions when middle actors are large. Thus, poles try to get the favor of middle actors (Corrales, 2005).

2.2 Causes of Political Polarization

Role of Media in Political Polarization: Biased information spread by media is contributing to political polarization (Yang et al., 2016). The Journalistic standards have declined. Journalism is propagating polarization by removing the margins between opinion and news

and facts and lies (Blankenhorn, 2018). Due to the fragmentation of the media, both ideological and affective polarization have increased (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021).

Mass political polarization is caused by the way the media illustrates the news and facts. Partisan media and selective exposure influence political polarization. The partisan media and selective exposure make audiences develop polarized opinions because they see the news and issues through a partisanship lens. Journalists first select the stories to publish and then do the framing. Framing is the way journalists portray political issues and news, it also creates political polarization (Kim et al., 2016).

Media can influence the judgment and attitude of people on political issues. Partisan media portrays political opponents as extremists and decides on news reports accordingly (Yang et al., 2016). Mainstream media focuses on the differences between political parties instead of social issues. Any news that instigates political conflict can cause mass political polarization.

According to the social identity theory and self-categorization theory, group identity become paramount when differences between groups are strong thus forming perception and judgment. Similarly, politically conflicting news strengthens group identity and further develops perceived and attitude polarization. The media presents party-oriented issues to the public and the mass public perceives these issues with a partisan elite view that promotes political polarization.

Attitudinal polarization is generated by partisan media because people watch the news programs according to their political inclination and they see the issues through a partisanship lens that strengthens their partisan identity. Partisan media can instigate radicalism in extremist citizens. Partisan audiences prefer to watch news channels with similar points of view. For instance, Republicans watch Fox News and Democrats watch MSNBC and CNN (Kim et al., 2016).

Mass media affects public opinion by framing political conflicts or news. Before framing the news, they select the news as per their propaganda and the characteristics of audiences. According to the theory of the framing effect, people process and perceive information depending on how the information was framed and presented to them (Kim et.al, 2016).

The four aspects of any issue are presented in news framing and these four aspects are the definition of the problem, interpretation of the causes, evaluation of moral values, and recommendation for treatment (Robison & Mullinix, 2015). In news framing, the story is organized in a way to provide meaning to an issue. Certain facts of an issue are framed and highlighted in a specific way so a particular type of interpretation can be made. The tools used for framing by media are images, phrases, and words. Thus, the results of framing show that the reaction of people on any issue is dependent on how the conflict is framed and highlighted by the media.

However, framing is also affected by someone's existing knowledge of politics, attitude, psychology, and demography. To get audiences and high-rating news channels to highlight conflicts and controversies instead of consensus or positive parts. Therefore, the issue selection and framing practice of journalists promotes controversies and creates polarization (Kim et al., 2016). Although there are views that both mainstream media and social media do not affect polarization (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021).

There is a huge concern that social media is hampering the process of democracy not just in unstable democracies but in strong democracies like the USA. Partisan media presents politics as a fight between two political archrivals that makes partisan identity stronger and increases polarization (Tucker et al., 2018).

Similarly, **Social Media** provides an opportunity for people to select the news of their choice and to ignore the ones with a different inclination. In this way, people choose the news and opinion they are already inclined to, and this strengthens their preexisting opinion (Kim et al., 2016). Social Media Echo chambers are one of the most important features of social media. Social media echo chambers limit exposure to different opinions and perspectives and favor the inclination toward like-minded groups and perspectives. People get a chance to join groups with similar interests. Group polarization theory states that an echo chamber facilitates people to strengthen their existing views and develops extremism in a group. Blogs and forums work as an echo chamber (Cinelli et.al, 2021).

People can access unlimited information, blogs, news, and webpages online related to their interests and political inclination. On Online forums, communities, and groups different people share different opinions. People intentionally choose to be exposed to more like-minded news. The online environment facilitates perceived polarization by portraying opponents as stupid, absurd, and extremists (Yang et al., 2016). Social media has a significant influence on building the opinion of people. It is becoming a normal practice that people to use social media to get news updates. Twitter is one of the biggest examples that people use to get updates instead of listening to any news channel and reading newspapers. In this situation, mainstream media has adopted the partisan approach more intensely. Resultantly, the masses are getting extremist and biased news and information from both mainstream media and social media and becoming more polarized.

Role of Political Elite in Polarization: Elite behavior reinforces political polarization. Voters take cues from the political elite. When people come to know that the political elite is strongly divided, they divert their inclination toward their party irrespective of the argument and its authenticity (Tucker et.al, 2018). First political elite polarizes and then the masses, and the political elite continues to accommodate polarization until they achieve their political goals (Callander & Carbajal, 2022).

Policy preferences, voting behavior, and partisan identities of the masses are consequences of elite polarization. The effect of elite polarization on the mass public is dependent on how the media portrays the political differences of the elite (Robinson & Mullinix, 2015). When the political elite is ideologically distinctive and express their differences openly, it gives a signal to the masses, and they start taking strong party position on the issues. Ordinary people try to align their political ideology with the ideology of their party. Thus, the masses become more polarized based on their party lines (Kim et al., 2016).

People try to find proof for their side of opinions. People believe that their opponents are doing everything with bad faith. People show reluctance to accept the reasoning and evidence of the opponents. These patterns of thinking and biasness directly feed the polarization. People start perceiving their political opponents as enemies and start showing aggression when there is a difference of opinion. This pattern promotes "us vs them" (Blankenhorn, 2018).

The use of aggressive language, extremism, and provoking political opponents show the polarized society. Either incumbent or opponents start taking more hard-core positions (Corrales, 2005). In the USA, elite polarization is a policy deadlock. Elite polarization is framed as problematic. Elite polarization pushes masses towards ideological poles and develops hatred towards opponents and decreases political trust. Over time uncivil and harsh rhetoric has increased by Democrats and Republicans in congress.

Issue polarization and incivility are empirically confused. For instance, during political debates, opponents call each other left-wing or right-wing which is a sign of disrespect but also shows the position of a politician on an issue. Research shows that there are two aspects of elite polarization issue position and incivility and both influence masses and develop political distrust.

Similarly, the elite conflict influences the masses. Attitude polarization among the masses is developed if the elite is polarized on issues but incivility promotes distrust of politicians. Thus, the two aspects of elite polarization contribute to affective polarization in masses. In both situations, people develop animosity and hatred towards the opposite political elite. There is a need to distinguish between issue polarization and incivility. Politicians need to develop a tolerance for political disagreements (Skytte, 2021).

The deep polarization and aggressive attitude develop due to the bad governance system. Good governance means the state and its institutions optimally use its resources to fulfill the needs of the masses, achieve the goals of development, and secure national interests. State institutions are very important for good governance (Khan, 2022).

Role of Income Inequality in Political Polarization: The strong correlation between income inequality and political polarization was first found by McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal. An instrumental variable identification strategy has been used by Voorhies, McCarty, and Shor and they support that as within-state income inequality increases within-state political polarization also increases (Voorhies et al., 2015).

Since 1970, the increase in the political disparity among Americans is related to the rise in the unequal distribution of wealth (Gu & Wang, 2021). If there is income inequality, people are prone to choose political parties with more radical ideologies. For example, either people will support far-right or far-left political parties. However, there are more chances older people can opt for far-right political parties during income inequality. Thus, political polarization increases as income inequality increase irrespective of immigration and job market situation (Winkler, 2019).

Income inequality is used by both media and politicians to gain their interests. For example, partisan media presents the developmental projects of the political party they support. On the contrary, they show the economic and administrative failure of their political opponents. They highlight it aggressively. Similarly, on social media political parties present their developmental work and criticize opponents with evidence. Even leaders of different political parties highlight economic crises and developmental failures of opponents to tarnish their image. Therefore, income inequality and unequal distribution of wealth contribute to polarization and mainly it is used by the media and political elite to deepen the cleavage between the masses.

3 Analytical and Methodological Approaches

This study is a descriptive analysis in nature. The causes of political polarization are taken from the literature, and they are compared with the causes in the case of Pakistan. Based on the comparative analysis the more appropriate causes of political polarization in Pakistan are discussed. According to the literature on political polarization, media, both mainstream and social media, political elite, and income inequality are the predominant factors in the rise of political polarization. When the literature on political polarization in Pakistan is studied, the media and political elite are the major reasons behind political polarization. Therefore, this study focuses on and compares the role of the media and political elite in escalating political polarization. This study elaborates on how the attitude and rhetoric of the political elite have divided the masses politically. In addition to this, it explains how social media and mainstream media are portraying news to create a divide among the citizens of Pakistan.

4 Findings

4.1 The dynamics of Political Polarization in Pakistan

The current situation of Political polarization in Pakistan is very convoluted because most people do not show civility and acceptance for agreeing to disagree. Since its Independence, Pakistan faced polarization by the political elite on numerous issues like constitution development and the functioning and power of different political institutions. Recently political polarization is unprecedentedly high in Pakistan because 60 percent of the population of the country is youth, and it is involved in political debate. Political polarization is deep in Pakistan because most of the population is young. They are active on social media and unemployed. They criticize the politicians on social media for societal issues mainly economic crises. At the individual level, intolerance for political opposition is very common in Pakistan.

This year, high inflation, public discontent, political instability, a no-confidence motion against Imran Khan, the role of powerful institutions, and a damaged economy aggravated the political polarization in Pakistan (Adnan, 2022). The current clash of “Us vs Them” and “bad vs good Politicians” has divided Pakistani Society (Sohoo, 2022). Polarization has divided Pakistani society into “Us vs Them”, and damaged social cohesion and social bonding and propagated intolerance (Ishaque et al., 2022).

Pakistani society is divided on one of the main political issues of this time whether Imran Khan was ousted due to a foreign conspiracy or a new coalition government. The ouster of Imran Khan insisted youth express their disapproval of military and opponent political parties. People were already polarized; this incident manifested the divide. In addition to this, Pakistan is polarized in the name of religion and discrimination towards minorities. Pakistan is going through a state of cut-throat political polarization (Adnan, 2022).

Political Polarization is deepening with every passing day in Pakistan. Political polarization deepens because the public did not like the way the regime changed in April 2022. Secondly, Nawaz Sharif has been convicted numerous times but leading official government meetings from the UK is disapproved by people. 60 percent of the ministers of the current government are either bailed or have criminal charges. The public openly disapproves of them (Naz, 2022).

Trump's style of politics is in play in Pakistan. Pakistan cannot afford self-centered politics during the economic and governance crises (Shahzad, 2022). Undoubtedly, political polarization has significantly increased in Pakistan. According to the V-dem data, the political polarization in Pakistan in 1948 was -2.8 and in 2021 it was -0.31. (Source: V-Dem team, 2021)

4.2 Who is Moving the Process of Political Polarization in Pakistan?

In the situation of Pakistan, the most thought-provoking question is who is creating poles and making others follow the poles. Are politicians creating polarization and voters are following them and voters are polarized, and politicians are further deepening it? The answer to this question goes back to the history of Pakistan. The early years after the independence of Pakistan were very critical. The founding father died very early creating a leadership crisis. Army and bureaucracy interfered in politics. There has been rampant corruption, constitutional crisis, and bad governance since the beginning. State institutions like judiciary and executive never got a chance to develop. The growth of political institutions and the political process got hampered. Democracy has been an unachievable dream of Pakistanis.

So, there has been political instability and bad governance in Pakistan and people were never content with the political system. Unfortunately, in the last few years, economic crisis became worst. Pakistani currency devalued and the highest-ever inflation has been experienced by Pakistanis. The Pakistani economy is at the edge of collapse for the last few years. The average inflation rate from 1960 to 2021 was 8.2% per year. In 2021, the inflation rate was 9.5%. By November 2022, the inflation rate went to 23.8%. According to the UNO's Human Development Index, Pakistan is at 139 number out of 179. Pakistanis believe that traditional political parties, political instability, weak democratic values, dynastic politics, and corrupt politicians are the reason behind the turmoil in Pakistan.

Somer & McCoy (2018) said democratic crises produce political polarization. They further said political interests instigate harmful impacts of political polarization like protests and mass mobilization. Pakistani society has always been polarized based on religion, sects, and ethnicity. However, Political polarization was never that deep. This process of polarization started when Imran Khan became politically strong by the 2013 elections because he addressed the real issues of Pakistani society and targeted the existing political system and politicians. He accused politicians of corruption and bad governance. Pakistani people especially young and educated were already tired of the system and strongly believe in his accusations. They started to incline towards him. He lost elections in 2013 but he won in 2018 and made a government. His followers had great expectations of him. Even the staunch followers of other political parties shifted towards him because they believed he was not corrupt, and that he would bring change. Unfortunately, he failed to deliver. Other opponent political parties made a coalition named Pakistan democratic movement PDM and removed him with a no-confidence vote.

In this situation, loyal followers of Imran Khan got angry and started protesting. They even used social media to abuse opponents. On the other side, those who gave Imran Khan a chance, or other party supporters were not happy with him because he could not manage the economic crisis. There was discontent among the Pakistani nations, they were not happy with the status quo. Due to democratic crises and bad governance, there was already minor polarization. Imran Khan saw the discontent and unhappiness and appealed to people with that

and fueled deep political polarization in Pakistani society. Similarly, other political parties also have been using strategies to polarize people towards them. Thus, politicians instigated political polarization in Pakistan.

4.3 Role of Media in Political Polarization in Pakistan:

Social media provides a platform for people to share their political views without having acceptance. Social media inflames political polarization because generally, people do not respect opposite political views. Social media is facilitating the process of empowerment of individuals to express their support and discontent over a political issue. Social media bombards people with information and propaganda of their interest and this increases intolerance (Adnan, 2022). Political parties have social media teams that defame political opponents and use abusive language. As cyberspace lacks accountability, supporters of political parties use demeaning language for their opponents. Instead of engaging in constructive debate and exchange of opinion, people indulge in heated arguments. Social media is providing a platform for the exchange of abuses in Pakistan (Javed, 2022). Scholars suggest that the excessive usage of the internet can increase political polarization. The internet provides a platform to develop and engage in groups and communities with similar ideologies and minimizes the chances of interaction with opposite ideologies. So, political arguments and dialogue with same-minded people strengthen the existing political beliefs (Sarwar et al., 2020). Ali et.al., (2021) conducted a study to empirically test the relationship between the usage of social media and political polarization in undergraduate and graduate students from the universities of Lahore, Pakistan. The results show that social media engages citizens and leads to political polarization. In addition to this, the findings of this study state that social media enhances party loyalty and creates biasness towards out-groups. Therefore, political engagement and party loyalty deepen political polarization. The use of social media has become violent and uncontrollable in Pakistan. That is instigating intolerance and violence in the political behavior of the masses in Pakistan. Even educated people are unable to differentiate between right and wrong. Social media has been weaponized to secure political gains, but it crossed the lines and started criticizing state institutions like the military and judiciary. Masses of Pakistan are performing the task of enemy agencies by openly passing derogatory remarks to the army (Shahzad, 2022). Imran Khan and his supporter are indulged in aggressive social media campaigns. Imran Khan has been live-streaming speeches for youth. PTI has used social media very systematically. PTI has dedicated social media cells across the country (Gizbert 10:50).

Unfortunately, Pakistanis are unable to experience unbiased and neutral information and political opinion in mainstream media as well. Channels openly support political parties and promote political polarization. Some people criticize news channels that support any specific political party. However, some people prefer to watch biased news (Adnan, 2022). If media is socially and politically polarized, its consumers ultimately get affected based on their party affiliation. Politically polarized media shows news and content to create a positive image of a particular political party. Content credibility is used to check the polarization of media. Content credibility means a news channel is showing unbiased content. (Sarwar et al., 2020). Exposure to polarized news is the process that leads to a political divide. Media can influence the cognition process of the audiences. Media can make audiences aggressive and violent for their ideologies. Hostile Media Effect HME is a perceptual theory in which audiences can perceive information against their preexisting views. In 2001 in Pakistan a private news channel named Geo News was launched earlier there was only one state-owned news

channel. The launch of a private news channel was taken as the beginning of a well-informed nation, educated, and democratic nation. When Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf PTI demonstrated protests and sit-ins in Islamabad, Pakistani media got polarized. ARY News, Express News, and Sama TV took the side of PTI, and Geo News remained on the side of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz PMLN. While Dunya News and Dawn News remained neutral and less polarized. In 2014 Daily news reported that most of the talk shows and current affairs programs provide one-sided and biased reporting (Sarwar et al., 2020). When Imran Khan was ousted in April 2021 and PDM Pakistan democratic movement made government, people used social media to express that they do not accept imported government. “Imported Hakumat Na Manzoor” meaning “Imported Government unacceptable” became a popular trend on social media. PTI supporters used this trend to condemn foreign interference in regime change conspiracy. This trend has been used 5.5 million times on social media. On Twitter, this hashtag has been tweeted more than 3 million times.

4.4 Role of Political Elite in Polarization in Pakistan

Political parties in Pakistan facilitate propaganda generation which further enhances political polarization (Adnan, 2022). A new dimension of polarization in Pakistan is established on the political party affiliation that is promoting violent rhetoric, intolerance, abusive language, accusations, and incivility towards political opponents and instigating violence and disunity. The political elite has been playing a paramount role in polarizing Pakistani society on religion, ethnicity, languages, and ideology. Unfortunately, some political leaders have been instigating the rhetoric of civil war and revolution for their political goals which are affecting the state institutions and frustrating the masses. Pakistan has always been a polarized society. Social identity is determined by political party affiliation. It is becoming a norm to address political opponents with disrespect and hatred. The national integration of Pakistan is affected by the political polarization of the masses. The political culture developed by political parties is undemocratic, intolerant, and autocratic. Normally, political parties play role in national unity and integration because they have connections with the masses across the country. However, in Pakistan political parties have changed their role. The recent pattern of disrespect, long marches, abusive language for political opponents, intolerance, provoking the public against institutions, threatening revolution if political demands are not met, and hate-based violence have disintegrated Pakistani society. (Ishaque et al., 2022). The vested interests of the political elite are contributing to polarization in Pakistan. All political parties are power greedy. Personal differences and contradictions of politicians are creating violence and clashes among institutions. Even there is no middle way to reconciliation (Abideen, 2022). It has become difficult in Pakistan to distinguish between manipulation and guidance. Reasoning and evidence are absent in political debates in Pakistan. It is impossible to arrive at a point of agreement in the fragmented society of Pakistan. The avarice of the political elite has damaged social structure and national cohesiveness. There is a dire lack of political consensus and cohesiveness in major political parties and their leadership. The political elite is unable to negotiate and show agreement on serious matters like national security issues. Even this year the annual budget session in parliament could not proceed peacefully. A no-confidence motion to remove former Prime Minister Imran Khan has escalated the intolerance. There is a clear unwillingness to cooperate with political opponents on national issues (Tariq, 2022). Imran Khan used his ouster to motivate his supporters to join his rallies. During these rallies Imran Khan has been telling the masses after his removal, now the power is in the hands of corrupt politicians who are the reason behind the instability in Pakistan. The supporters of Imran Khan get furious and used the same disrespectful words for political

opponents that Imran Khan uses. Imran Khan is sending the message of the illegitimacy of the government to the public and pressuring the government with rallies and marches. On the contrary, other political parties see the ouster of Imran Khan as democratic and propagate the message to their supporters that Imran Khan is doing dangerous politics and affecting the peace and foreign relations of the country. Supporters of both sides believe their side of the argument is valid. Most importantly, the supporters of Imran Khan do not trust the military and government. Even though both sides have tried to use religion which is very dangerous in countries like Pakistan where religious cards can make serious damage. The main goal of PDM (Pakistan democratic movement) was to remove Imran Khan but they were not prepared to deal with the serious economic issues the country is going through. So, they are not able to take the country out of the economic crisis and give Imran Khan a reason to castigate them. A huge number of urban rallies and marches show the popularity of Imran Khan among the masses (Afzal, 2022).

An abusive culture has been raised in Pakistan. Party leaders do acrimonious speeches and call opponents demeaning names. This abusive culture has trickled down to the supporters. In April 2022, violent visuals from Punjab Assembly show the level of hatred and animosity among the political elite. The establishment has always been involved in political manipulation. Political polarization is unprecedented this time because it has penetrated households, streets, and offices. Resultantly, tolerance has diminished in Pakistani society. As political leaders criticize and demean their political opponents, their followers keep resentment and grudge in close relations based on political differences. Unfortunately, Pakistani youth is being used as a political pawn by the political elite (Tariq, 2022). The polarization among politicians is spilling over among the masses. The political elite is criticizing each other on TV, social media, and jalsas. Imran Khan is questioning the legitimacy of the current government based on alleged foreign policy and corruption. Earlier Imran Khan was being questioned by the current ruling coalition based on an allegation of being selected by the establishment. The most dangerous outcome of political polarization in Pakistan is the divide, hatred, and polarization among supporters of different political parties. Anecdotally, family ties, relationships, and friendships are affected based on political differences. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has positioned itself as an anti-status quo political party. PTI and its supporters are not accepting the political legitimacy of their opponents which is escalating polarization (Javed, 2022). Another reason for political polarization is that people are tired of the traditional political systems and dynastic politics (Javed, 2022). The main support of Imran Khan is educated urban youth who disapproved and were disappointed by the dynastic politics of Pakistan (Hussain, 2022). Issueless politics are in practice in Pakistan. Instead of having healthy debates on challenges and political narratives, political opponents are being demonized. Political discourse is confined to derogatory rhetoric for political opponents. Even in the parliament important national issues are not discussed but verbal attacks on opponents are made. Consequently, some portion of the public has become indifferent to politics, and they see politicians as greedy elite fighting for power (Lodhi, 2021). The interpersonal implications of political polarization can be inhumane and derogatory behavior toward political opponents (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021).

4.5 Discussion

The comparative analysis conducted in this study shows that the media and political elite are the reason behind political polarization in Pakistan. As (Hussain, 2022) mentioned the supporters of Imran Khan are educated urban youth who is against corrupt dynastic politics.

In this scenario, the only option they believe in is Imran Khan. Pakistan politicians including Imran Khan and his political opponents are playing the politics of polarization, hatred, and acrimony. They use abusive language for their political opponents. Resultantly, their supporters follow them. They use demeaning language for opponent political leaders on social media and in their day-to-day activities. This culture of hatred and abuse is polarizing society at the household level. For example, if a son is supporting Imran Khan and abuses Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari and the father will be opposing Imran Khan, bitterness develops between father and son. Sadly, political polarization has trickled down to the household level. A lot of family members are politically divided. When political polarization reaches an alarming level, it divides families and relations. In the case of Pakistan, young people follow Imran Khan and use abusive language for political opponents. Most people above 50s do not follow Imran Khan. When their cousins and younger family members blindly follow Imran Khan and use demeaning language for other politicians, the intra-family political divide gets deep. According to a Gallup survey report 2022, 19% of Pakistanis said, all adult men and women in their families do not support the same political parties. While 81% of Pakistanis said all adult women and men in their family support the same political party. Thus, there is 19% intra-family level polarization in Pakistan. 19 out of 100 households are politically divided. Similarly, many news channels are associated with different political parties, and they promote their agendas. The supporters of those political parties when rigorously following those news channels develop their opinion accordingly. Instead of thinking and looking for proof of the news. The literature and evidence of the role of media in political polarization in Pakistan are the same. Biased information and partisan media rise the divide among citizens because people prefer to watch like-minded arguments instead of different ones. Likewise, the political elites have been contributing to polarization in Pakistan and all around the world because they divide their people to gain their political goals.

The results of Gallup Pakistan surveys depict the political divide in Pakistani society. According to a Gallup survey, 43% of Pakistanis were angry about the ouster of Imran Khan and 57% were happy. Political leaders have been encouraging their supporters to express their opinions. As the culture of abusive language is ingrained in Pakistani society. When these 43% were showing their anger with rude and offensive language on social media and routine conversations and 57% were expressing happiness in a belittling manner becoming a reason for division in Pakistani society. Moreover, 9 in 10 Pakistanis believe their political party and leadership are better than others. 3 in 4 Pakistanis agree that their political party is not perfect, but it is better than other political parties. So, this attitude of the masses shows that they are affiliated with their political parties. They believe they are better, and opponents are wrong. Once they believe the opposite side is wrong, they show disrespect to them and further widen the gap in society. 98% of Pakistanis agree that politically motivated anger and hatred have increased in Pakistan and there is a need to take steps to reduce this hatred and anger. In addition to this, Imran Khan said political opponents are traitors and as per the results of a survey 40% of Pakistanis agreed that opposition leaders are traitors while 60% did not agree that opposition leaders are traitors (Gallup Pakistan - Pakistan's Foremost Research Lab, n.d.). These surveys expose the political polarization in Pakistan. For instance, Imran Khan protested his ouster, and the media on side of Imran Khan portrayed this removal as injustice and enmity with ordinary citizens. This attitude of both Imran Khan and the media instigated anger in the masses. On the other hand, opponents of Imran Khan presented his removal as a relief to the public and their partisan media also showed the removal positively. So, opponents of Imran Khan expressed their happiness because they were made to see it this way. Furthermore, political leaders of both sides have been telling their supporters that they are right, and opponents are wrong. Like, Imran Khan said the opposition

leadership is a traitor. Mainstream media and social media cells of both sides also have been propagating this blame and insisting people believe that they are right, and opponents are wrong. As a result, 9 in 10 Pakistanis believe their political party is better than others and even 40% of people bought the idea that opposition leaders are traitors. Therefore, the results of these surveys and the literature reinforce the argument that the political elite and media play a predominant role in escalating political polarization.

4.6 The solution to Political Polarization in Pakistan

The solution to political polarization in Pakistan is education, tolerance of political differences, and a culture of constructive debate and discussion (Adnan, 2022). There is a dire need to reverse the pattern of political intolerance and hate-based politics (Ishaque et al., 2022). National interests, national objectives, and societal cohesion should be the fundamental goals of the political elite instead of their political goals, personal preferences, and ego. There is a dire need of political reconciliation among the political elite (Tariq, 2022). Similarly, the neutrality of media can also play a major role in reducing political polarization.

5 Conclusion

Political polarization can be a phenomenon to promote democracy and dialogue between political opponents. Ideological polarization can be the most suitable type of polarization to contribute to democracy and political dialogue. However, the extreme of anything can be deleterious. Extreme polarization can contribute to affective polarization. Affective polarization shows extreme hatred, intolerance, and unacceptance of the adversaries. So, affective polarization is pernicious to democracy and the growth of the political process. In this study, several origins of polarization are explained. Unfortunately, in Pakistan political polarization has failed to promote dialogue between political opponents but has promoted political instability. In Pakistan, major sources of affective polarization are the political elite and the media. The political elite has been using masses and ideologies to achieve their materialistic goals. Political elite has used their ideological differences to create divide between masses. Media is also being used as a tool by political elite to polarize people. Therefore, Pakistani society is facing political disorder due to polarization.

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