

**POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN PAKISTAN: ANALYZING
THE ROLE OF MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES
(2013-2023)**



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(MAY-2025)**

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DECLARATION

I, **Majid Khan, Reg. No.171-FSS/MSPS/F22**, a student of M.S International Relations at International Islamic University Islamabad do hereby declare that the thesis entitled as **Political Polarization in Pakistan: Analyzing the Role of Major Political Parties (2013-2023)** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of M.S Degree in International Relations, is my original work, except where otherwise acknowledge in the text, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any degree from this of any other university or institution.

Signature-----

Date-----/-----/-----

DEDICATION

I dedicate this master thesis to my beloved Parents, whose kindness, unwavering inspiration, and constant support have guided me throughout my studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praise is due to Allah Almighty, the ultimate Sovereign. Research is never the work of a single individual; it draws upon the support and hopes of those around us, especially family and friends. While words cannot fully capture the invaluable role of my parents and family, I offer my deepest gratitude for their unwavering prayers and constant encouragement.

I am also profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Mr. Ihsan Malik, Lecturer, whose guidance has extended beyond academics into numerous aspects of life. My heartfelt prayers go out to all of you. Thank you for making my journey through this master's program a success

ABSTRACT

The study is aimed at understanding political polarization being spread in the post-2013 elections till 2023, investigating factors that individual leaders from PPP, PML-N and PTI tactically used, and exploring reasons as to know why major political parties employ discursive statements. The study adopted qualitative paradigm of study, by keeping Rational Choice Theory of Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (1651) and purposive sampling by... in view. The resource data collected judgmentally from secondary sources such as Google Scholar, books and major newspapers of Pakistan. The critical analysis of the findings attempted to address the three major discursive questions of the research. Political polarization in Pakistan has a long history, resulting in slow growth, weakening democracy, promoting political conflict, and downing economic progress, however, the researched study could have delimited the study to a period of 10 years, taking from post-2013 election era to 2023. Within this era, the study also thoroughly focused on the tactical use of electronic and social media by the said parties' leaders which enables readers to understand how state institutions and political parties failed to halt polarization and promote democracy. At the end, the researcher outlined recommendations for the future scholars.

Keywords: Political polarization, PPP, PTI, PML-N, Instability, democracy, Division of Society.

1. INTRODUCTION

2. Background of the Study

The phrase political polarization is a concept that means an extreme level of disengagement among political parties, covering their personal interests at the cost of the broader national interests leading toward a conflict among them affecting the country as a whole. The relationship of polarization with religious extremism creates a variety of issues like intolerance and exceeding religious violence in a society, yet the ideological or religious polarization between contending groups has been a major source of conflict and one of the impediments in the way of political progress and nation building. In the context of today's Pakistan, it seems unfortunate that political parties struggle for their interest and ignore the national interest. Government officials and the elite class perceive self-interest and ignore important political, economic, and cultural interests. Political parties stand at the peak of extreme-level politics practiced in societies. This polarization has reached a level here where the elites can easily obtain their interests by affiliating with ethnic groups (Akhtar, 2020).

The sole purpose of the creation of Pakistan was based on Islamic ideology. Unfortunately, after the death of its founder Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah the nation went into difference on one side, promoting Islamization and on the other side implemented Western democracy and developed a contrary political system. Owing to this, a clash erupted between Islamic ideologists and the elite influenced by western. Meanwhile, the absence of a common identity led to the division of the society. With the independence of Pakistan, several issues of ethno-religious and linguistic problems happened for the new nation. Since the very beginning the Pakistani society has been divided into different groups on the basis of ethnic, religious, linguistic differences. This new nation was able to get its first constitution nine year after its independence. Arshad et al., 2023 cited, all these issues resulted in Polarization posing both direct and indirect effects on society. At that time bureaucrats, government institutions and political parties failed to create a common ground to progress as a nation.

Meanwhile, due to the polarized nature of the country, no economic model could be adopted for development since. Yet, strengthening federating units through devolution of power and grant for provincial autonomy would have led to economic development and shared responsibilities by all the stakeholders (Ishaque et al., 2022). The first ever direct intervention of the military occurred in Pakistani politics was in 1958 where General Ayoub Khan suspended the

constitution and took over the government. With the support of the top elite class, the general implemented a new economic model. Yet, this military intervention was not a good sign for the country democratic system, becoming the root cause of weakening state institutions and destabilizing domestic politics in the country. The following years saw several political experimentations including the system of Basic Democracy and adoption of a new constitution. The decade long rule of Ayoub Khan brought changes through societal differences. These differences went visible, following his ousting of the power. Meanwhile, the country faced sever crisis while general Yahya Khan, the next top position holder was not in a position to pass by those crisis, taking certain steps which further backed the disintegration of Pakistan (East and West Wings) after the 1970 general elections.

When it lost the eastern wing, the latter declared its independence as a new nation in the name of Bangladesh. To this effect, martial law administrator and President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto after assuming the charge, tried to create national solidarity in the remaining West Pakistan. The nation got its current constitution with consensus of all political forces of the time in Pakistan. Following his removal from power by General Zia-ul-Haq, the country remained under his control until 1987. The following saw emergence of new forces on the political scene of the country in the form of Pakistan Muslim League led by Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. Then, both the PML and PPP, the major political parties of the time, dominated the electoral politics, with both getting chances of ruling twice as premiers until 1999. General Pervez Musharraf took over the control of the country by ousting the premier Nawaz Sharif. His rule as president lasted until 2008, giving power to PPP's led government.

Despite a multi-party democracy, Pakistani political history during 1988-2013 has been giving an oblique picture of only two-party system. This status quo of a quarter century, however, changed in 2013 with the rise of a third major political force called Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chaired by the former premier Imran Khan. The Imran-led PTI promoted the slogan of a corruption free Pakistan, blaming the military institution for failing to conduct elections in 2013, which initiated a mass level political agitation against the government of the premier Nawaz Sharif. Yet a sweep victory for Imran Khan in the 2018 elections a mass polarization further increased in the country. The PTI-led government isolated all other political actors, including at top the leaders of PML-N and PPP, resulting in further societal division. Seeing no signs of political involvement and compromise for three years, the opposition parties removed the premier Khan from power by

constitutional process__ vote of no confidence. The Khan's party took to streets holding public rallies and speeches by the party leader against the into-the-throne new government of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). The military institution's apparent role, first in supporting PTI for handing over power to them and later in its oust from government, affected the dynamics of relationship lying among military, civilian police and the public at large. Resultantly, a scenario of extreme polarization in Pakistan went to the top, bearing further political instability and economic shrink. According to Usman (2023), "Political instability has significant role in Pakistani division of societies and the lack of political institution and immaturity of political leaders." The current conflict between political parties PTI, PML-N, PPP and JUI-F brought an unprecedented increase in political polarization.

Post-2013, the political landscape in Pakistan witnessed significant shifts, particularly with the emergence of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as a major political force. Imran Khan's PTI, which gained prominence by advocating for a corruption-free Pakistan, effectively disrupted the longstanding dominance of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). In the 2013 general elections, PTI positioned itself as an anti-establishment party, criticizing the electoral process and accusing the military of interfering in politics. The growing disillusionment with the traditional political elites fueled PTI's popularity, culminating in a decisive victory in the 2018 elections. However, this victory did not resolve the polarization but rather intensified it. PTI's government, under Imran Khan, faced significant opposition from the PPP and PML-N, which resulted in a highly polarized political environment, where accusations of corruption, mismanagement, and inefficiency were exchanged between the ruling party and the opposition.

During PTI's tenure from 2018 to 2022, political divisions deepened, particularly as the opposition parties continuously challenged Khan's leadership, accusing him of authoritarian tendencies and undermining democratic institutions. The situation worsened when the opposition parties, led by the PPP, PML-N, and other smaller parties, united to form the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). This coalition managed to oust Imran Khan through a vote of no confidence in 2022. The removal of Khan, however, did not lead to political reconciliation; instead, it led to a further deterioration of relations between the military, the political elite, and the general public. PTI's leadership and its supporters engaged in protests and street demonstrations, criticizing the new government of PDM and alleging foreign interference in the political process. These events

contributed to a sense of polarization, where political leaders and their followers became increasingly entrenched in their positions, with little room for compromise or dialogue.

By 2023, Pakistan's political polarization had reached new heights, with the country's political institutions struggling to manage the increasingly divided electorate. The ongoing conflict between PTI, PPP, PML-N, and other political entities left little space for constructive political discourse. In the face of this, the role of the military continued to be a point of contention, with its involvement in the political process being viewed with suspicion by many. The continued instability in the political system, compounded by economic challenges, led to widespread frustration and a deepening crisis of governance. Political polarization in Pakistan had not only influenced electoral outcomes but also significantly impacted the functioning of key institutions, affecting the country's political stability, economic development, and societal cohesion.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

From the early years of its independence, Pakistan has experienced persistent political polarization, a trend that has intensified over time and continues to undermine the foundations of democratic governance. Multiple factors have contributed to the deepening of this polarization, particularly in the post-2013 period. This research seeks to critically examine the complexity of these contributing factors, with a specific focus on the role of major political parties. In this context, the study analyzed the conduct and influence of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), both of which have alternately held power for decades, as well as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which governed the country from 2018 to 2022.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The primary focus of the current study is to examine the prevalence of political polarization in Pakistan. Specifically, the research analyzes the roles of the major political parties PML-N, PPP, and PTI emphasizing their contributions to the deepening of polarization through the pursuit of their respective political interests. Additionally, this study explores the negative consequences of such polarization, aiming to identify the core issues and understand how these dynamics have repeatedly impacted the country. Political polarization in Pakistan has far-reaching effects, influencing the unity of federating units, ethnic groups, democratic institutions, and economic development. This research provides a comprehensive analysis of statements from the aforementioned political parties, offering insights into the broader context of political polarization

in the country. Finally, the study concludes with several recommendations that could guide future research.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the nature and characteristics of political polarization in Pakistan.
2. To examine the underlying causes and dimensions contributing to political polarization in the country.
3. To assess the role of major political parties; PML-N, PPP, and PTI in intensifying political polarization in the post-2013 electoral landscape of Pakistan.

1.4 Research Question

1. What are the defining features and nature of political polarization in Pakistan?
2. What structural and contextual factors have contributed to the rise and persistence of political polarization in Pakistan?
3. In what ways have the political strategies and conduct of PML-N, PPP, and PTI influenced the intensification of political polarization since the 2013 general elections?

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

The researcher has delimited the study to the major political parties of Pakistan with rare touch to minor political parties. The main reasons involved into it were the time constraints and wide resource data related to the research. Therefore, the thorough focus of the study could only focus on the major political parties such as PML-N, PPP and PTI and chose to purposively undertake only those statements of the above mentioned parties-leaders' which directly severed the democratic culture of Pakistan and significantly spread political polarization in Pakistan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Political polarization has played a critical role in deepening divisions among government institutions and political parties in Pakistan. These divisions largely stem from the absence of robust political institutions and the lack of maturity among political leadership. Pakistani society itself is deeply segmented along ethnic, religious, linguistic, and provincial lines, further exacerbating these rifts. As a consequence, polarization has significantly impacted both the functioning of democratic processes and the effectiveness of state institutions.

Historically, political polarization in Pakistan has deep roots. From the outset, the country faced social fragmentation, and this was evident when East and West Pakistan took nine years post-independence to establish their first constitution. Over time, especially following the passage of the 18th Constitutional Amendment, the provinces of Pakistan began to exercise greater autonomy. This devolution of power underscored the importance of strong coordination between the central and provincial governments. However, rather than fostering unity, the decentralization process has often intensified divisions, further fragmenting political parties and weakening institutional cohesion.

According to Lee (2013), who employed cumulative ANES survey data spanning from 1972 to 2004, the impact of elite polarization on various indicators of mass political engagement was systematically examined. By integrating factors such as political alienation, mobilization, and access to information into the estimation model, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the relationship between government institutions and political parties. Lee also explored the conditional effects of individuals' cognitive capacities, particularly how differing levels of education influence citizens' responses to changes in the informational environment. The findings revealed that the effects of rising elite polarization in the U.S. Congress on mass political engagement are ambiguous. Specifically, the study highlighted how both the direction and magnitude of these effects varied depending on educational attainment. This ambiguity reflects the broader empirical complexity surrounding the impact of elite polarization on domestic political behavior.

Similarly, Anwar (2023), in his study "Political Instability in Pakistan," argues that domestic political instability has significantly contributed to the fragmentation of Pakistani society. This division, he suggests, stems from the absence of strong political institutions and the immaturity of political leadership. Among the primary causes identified are the complexities of a

multi-party system, persistent ethnic and religious tensions, strained relationships between central and provincial governments, and repeated military interventions in political affairs. Furthermore, Anwar highlights that inadequate economic policy reforms have led to a "brain drain," with intellectuals and skilled professionals migrating abroad in search of better opportunities.

In his recommendations, Anwar emphasizes the urgent need for the development of strong, independent institutions to support democratic governance, reduce political polarization, strengthen administrative capacity, and address critical issues such as terrorism, extremism, inflation, and unemployment. He further advocates for the adoption of long-term planning strategies aimed at enforcing the rule of law, nurturing democratic institutions, facilitating dialogue among interest groups, and promoting robust parliamentary debate to foster a more inclusive political environment. The study also underscores the importance of incorporating the expertise of qualified professionals in policymaking and governance.

Sarwar et al., (2020) has authored a research article, wherein they investigate the relationship between political polarization, public problem polarization, and the division of media and political parties. The study noted that major political parties had been exploiting media for their own interests in a negative manner. The findings showed the media role fueling the polarization of the country, often by engaging in yellow journalism. Such polarization gets witnessed merely from the way viewers watch certain TV channels, portraying polarized one-sided images with no balanced perspectives. They cited that the Pakistani media has been detrimental for society due to this, influencing the viewing habits of the population. Giving an instance from 2018 general elections, their study focused on media displaying polarization, with Geo and SAMA supporting the MPL-N and ARY supporting PTI. Media has been instrumental, promoting the interests of certain political parties and highlighting major issues, thereby affecting the relationship between the public and the government, their study reflected. Meanwhile, media's main role is to bridge the gap between the government and the public, especially to inform the latter about certain challenges and their solutions a government and its policy makers are supposed to pursue.

Waseem (1983) has cited in 'Political Polarization and Challenges of National Integration in Pakistan' that Pakistani society is divided along ethnic, religious, linguistic, and provincial lines and the ongoing political divisions have further disturbed the government institutions. Mainly, it has explored political intolerance through its finds, aiming at strengthening the national integration

which is a long and continuous process. From federation perspective, the paper suggests that all governments need a focus on the country's economic aspect by strengthening federal units through devolution, granting autonomy to provinces, and motivating all stakeholders to take part in the vibrant and progressing Pakistan. Baqir et al., (2023) contributed study titled "The Rise of Division of Public Ideology and Focus on Recent Years" has it also added to this stance. Mainly, the study explores the crucial role of media in dividing society and government institutions by siding to certain sides of the parties_ some stand by opposition other by government in the parliament, depending on their exceeding interests. The study underscored to this effect that media has been highlighting coverage of the political opponents while ruling parties saves certain audience to raise issues on social media. In this regard, the research findings showed that the government institutions occasionally raise issues via social media, utilizing the monitoring tools to fuel political polarization in Pakistan. There is an interconnected relationship between political parties.

In recent years, ideologies differences, leading to division, has deeply engaged society and sparked debates among the people. Researchers investigate social and political division in society as well as its evolution within online communities. The study has to conclude has examined various aspects of social media polarization in this regard, keeping the politicians and news outlets role in view as long as they attempt to obtain their own interests. This polarization has had a significant impact on democracy and government institutions yet to avoid other things there is a strong need from both the institutions and the politicians to promote democracy and strengthen institutions, addressing major issues via a flourished good relationship among media, political stakeholders and the government institutions.

Akash Arshad (2023) studied the similar impacts of the government institutions, democratic development, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and political instability in Pakistan in his research article titled "The Causes of Polarization and Extremism Across the Country." The study mainly portrayed various groups and elite politicians seeking personal interests, increasing polarization and extremism within society. In this context, the public in Pakistan have severed division within society, a phenomenon not limited to Pakistan but seen globally in places like the US and the UK, resulting in societal disintegration.

Another work tilted 'The Covid-19 Crisis and the High Expectations of the Pakistani People from the Government and the Ruling Party,' by Maleeha Lodhi (2020) studied the central government's intervention and provincial autonomy. Her study focused the lack of confidence

provincial residents hailing regarding the central government. Her study related it to the 18th amendment, saying thereupon provinces were empowered for regional execution, leading to the decentralization of the power with grave repercussions. Her conclusion highlighted the need for a strong relationship between the central and provincial governments, instead. However, people in the provinces still lacked trust in their local institutions, arguing that during the Covid-19 crisis, effective policy-making and strong relations with other states fostered by central government were witnessed by all. Yet, she cited that the division of responsibilities between a powerful central government and a ruling provincial party exacerbated even more the global issue of the political polarization in Pakistan. Notwithstanding, many issues were resolved through dialogues, and the PTI fueled social media, strengthening its party while making the media a potent political tool for further influence of the polarization.

Akhtar, (2009) researched the same perspective in Pakistan titling their work as ‘Political Polarization and Challenges for Pakistani Democracy and Pakistani Society.’ The scholar via this work unfolded how political polarization was affiliating different ethnic and religious groups, along central and provincial lines to merely obtain their interests. This work found the same findings leading to injustice within society when division of the power happened between the opposition parties, government party and the state institutions. Not to speak of these, it also found judiciary tends to support elites and criminal individuals when it comes to political polarization. It traced that historically Pakistan has been divided into two groups: military supporters and politician supporters where military intervention in politics was highlighted at the top leading to political polarization.

The studied article proposed to for the creation of a united nation a long-term policy and democratic development are the most preferred suggestions. The study explored that the military intervention in the country’s politics actually exposes the inability of the politicians’ decisions towards democratic development. The study has instructed provide equal floor and right for all stakeholders, strengthening functional political system, abiding by rule of law and upholding the sacred constitution by all government bodies of Pakistan. In short, it suggested dialogues as key tool for a fostered political environment.

Walks (2006) cited that the recent studies in both US and Canada highlighted a growing divergence in voting behavior and political attitudes between residents of inner cities and suburbs. However, the underlying mechanisms behind this trend remain elusive. The main argument of this

article addresses this gap by presenting a set of hypotheses, offering potential explanations for the differences of the political views between those living in the city and suburban. The work which attempted to drawing on a survey conducted in Toronto electoral districts empirically tested the relative contributions of these hypothesized mechanisms, clarifying the geography of party preferences. The findings indicate that the city-suburban division had not happened merely due to singular explanation; rather, an intricate network of race, ethnicity, and class, was involved into it. With these, self-selection, local experiences and consumption preferences were also effectively involved into it. The studied findings found that the self-selection of left-leaning political party supporters were standing out, while right-wing parties supporters tended to opt for post-war suburban neighborhoods, driven by a preference for private space. There exists slight evidence supporting the influence of housing tenure or the sharing of political information between neighbors as independent factors contributing to city-suburban political differences within the studied district. Conclusively, the paper unfolded the effects of the contextual neighborhood, electoral geography, political parties, and voting behavior in Toronto, while offering valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of urban-suburban political polarization.

Similarly, another paper has examined the correlation between political polarization and public spending, employing the dispersion of self-reported political preferences as a metric for polarization. Their investigated data found a robust association between political polarization and reduced government size in democratic nations. However, no obvious relationship between polarization and government size has been observed in the other than democratic countries. The findings bear investigation against a comprehensive set of control variables, including gross domestic product per capita and income inequality (Lindqvist and Östling, 2010).

Likewise, Piazza (2020) studied hate speeches delivered by politicians is also a statistically significant, and applicable here. According this study, politicians frequently use a hate speech in their people statement to win their hearts, implying a role in the increasing domestic terrorism which is boosting by stoking political polarization. Nevertheless, the relationship between hate speech by politicians and increased terrorism has been affecting the individuals. Both political hate speeches and polarization fuel many other negative outcomes, including political regime instability at the top. Albeit this paper has focused on the impact of hate speech by politicians on terrorism, yet it is still possible that hate speeches resulting in political polarization gather more profound effects on the fundamental political order within societies.

According to Mumtaz, addressing the structural challenges facing Pakistan requires comprehensive reforms of the political system and state institutions. The study emphasizes the necessity of preserving Pakistan's foundational ideology, while also advocating for its separation from rigid Islamist interpretations that may hinder inclusive governance. Citing Karl Marx's assertion that "nations are not forgiven for their unguarded hour," the author underscores the importance of dedicating resources, financial, intellectual, and strategic, to eliminate intolerance from society. Furthermore, the study highlights the critical role of education, asserting that while education for all is essential, targeted educational reforms are especially necessary for segments of society that resist progressive policy changes. These reforms, it argues, are fundamental for any government striving to ensure long-term stability and development (Mumtaz, (2020).

Ultimately, this analysis reveals a significant gap between perception and reality, one that holds particular relevance for understanding the dynamics of collective action in relation to aggregate categories and social identities. Polarization often appears to be more a matter of perception than direct experience, as the everyday lives of individuals are frequently shaped within socially homogeneous and polarized environments. However, these perceived divisions can produce tangible consequences, demonstrating that false perceptions are capable of generating real-world outcomes.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study adopts Rational Choice Theory, as articulated by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651), as its theoretical framework. By applying this framework, the study seeks to analyze and interpret various political phenomena. The analysis draws upon a diverse range of sources, including research articles, book, journal, magazine etc. Through this approach, the study aims to explore the decision-making processes of political actors, utilizing Rational Choice Theory to gain a deeper understanding of political behavior and institutional dynamics.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This research incorporated qualitative method of study, with the data collected from various secondary sources. The researcher has retrieved the definite data from, journals, magazines, and reputed newspaper which the researcher relates to the questions of the thesis. Qualitative, descriptive and analytical method is addressing qualitative aspect of the human problem. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative study is a method wherein which solution to human problems is understood and explored, where emerging questions and procedures are involved, and data are collected through natural setting and inductive way of analysis is used for analyzing and interpreting the meaning of the data. According to Kumar (2011), descriptive study is an approach in which situation, phenomenon, problem, or event is described and nominal or ordinal are used for measurement of variables. It is qualitative in nature as it uses research questions exploring and describing the model Rational Choice Theory. The data collected from various sources have been scrutinized through Rational Choice Theory. Techniques like thematic and content analysis have been incorporated, responding the research questions.

3.3 Theoretical Framework: Rational Choice Theory

To address the research questions, this study employs Rational Choice Theory (RCT), a theoretical framework that views political behavior as the result of individuals making decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis to maximize their self-interest. When applied to the context of political polarization specifically through the analysis of speeches, books, and articles by Pakistani politicians RCT provides valuable insights into why political actors, parties, and voters often engage in behaviors that exacerbate divisions instead of promoting unity.

The origins of Rational Choice Theory (RCT) can be traced back to Thomas Hobbes'

Leviathan (1651), where he argued that political institutions function through the decisions of individuals, driven by a calculation of costs, benefits, and personal interests (Oppenheimer, 2008). However, RCT gained significant prominence as a political science theory during the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, a period marked by the behavioral revolution in political science. Scholars such as Anthony Downs are credited with adapting RCT to the study of party competition and voting behavior, which represented a paradigm shift in the understanding of political actions (Hindess, 2007).

At its core, RCT assumes that individuals are rational actors who make decisions based on an evaluation of costs and benefits in order to maximize their self-interest. This theory posits that voters, for example, make choices that are logically structured and aligned with their personal objectives. According to Harrop and Miller (1987) and Gill & Gainous (2002), RCT asserts that voters act according to rational self-interest, guided by a cost-benefit analysis aimed at maximizing utility. It further assumes that individuals possess the capacity for logical reasoning and carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of their decisions before selecting the option that best serves their interests (Becker, 1976).

In the context of political behavior, Rational Choice Theory (RCT) posits that voters cast their ballots with the goal of maximizing the utility of their vote. Voters assess the performance of a regime or the potential of a candidate or political party to advance their short-term, medium-term, or long-term interests, and base their voting decisions accordingly (Downs, 1957). However, Downs also acknowledges that voting behavior is not always driven purely by self-interest. At times, voters may be motivated by altruistic considerations or a desire to support the broader welfare of their community or nation. Likewise, politicians may make decisions that extend beyond their personal interests, even when such actions come at a considerable cost to themselves. This nuanced perspective underscores the complexity of human behavior within the framework of rational choice, illustrating that the individuals may act in ways that are not always purely self-serving.

3.4 Data Collection procedure

The data collection procedure for this research involves utilizing qualitative research methods through secondary sources, such as books, articles, academic journals, and other scholarly publications. These sources provide a comprehensive foundation of existing knowledge and insights relevant to the research topic. The selection of secondary data ensures an in-depth understanding of the subject matter by examining various perspectives and findings from prior studies. This approach

is particularly useful in exploring theoretical frameworks, historical contexts, and key concepts that have already been established, allowing for a thorough analysis without the need for primary data collection.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research will be mindful of the following: intellectual integrity/honesty, credibility and accuracy of definition.

3.6 Work Plan

Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Literature Review
Chapter 3	Research Methodology
Chapter 4	Nature of Political Polarization in Pakistan
Chapter 5	Root causes of political polarization in Pakistan
Chapter 6	Role of major Political Parties in Political Polarization (2013-2023)
Chapter 7	Conclusion and Recommendation

4 NATURE OF POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN PAKISTAN

4.1 Introduction

The ideology of Pakistan was interpreted by the religious elite aimed at establishing a religion influenced society. Father of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah wanted to make Pakistan Islamic welfare state. Still, the ideology of Pakistan had pushed the country towards polarization of the society and rise of religious extremism in the country. Meanwhile, after the Objectives Resolution, Islam has been potential in establishing Islamic narrative, making the newly born state of Pakistan as an Islamic society (Ishaque et al., 2022). The term political polarization is concerned with the raise of state politics atmosphere, greatly impacting politics at a time where it already undergoes emerging challenges.

According to Hanif (2024) the critical problems associated with political polarization in Pakistani society have severed challenging contest. As essential issues, such tendency poses far-reaching effects on the social political structure of the country. The impacts of this polarization are evident in policy clashes, societal disagreements and governance barriers. The study has sought to explain and understand these issues by examining their origin and implication on the political landscape. Referring to specific indicators of polarization, including political concerns, economic strategies and extensive societal implications, this research has attempted to precede insights into the political polarization in Pakistan.

Pakistan has experienced in-depth political instability and severe polarization for years, with frequent changes in government, fall of democratically elected bodies and a history of decades of three-time military coups. In recent years, these challenges have been compounded by intemperate political tensions, ethnic rigidities as well as the rise of immoderate political and social intolerance (Danish 2022).

To define political polarization, it becomes clear that it is a process of ideological differences where people reflect disloyalty and mistrust in people carrying contrary political views and parties with them (Adnan, 2022). Representatives from major political parties go divergent politically from each other yet become convergent within the parties, securing their interest (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 (Maqsood et al., 2024).

Political polarization from the conclusive perspective of the above cited scholars can be

further understood as it mainly concerns with the politically immature leaders in the democratic country of Pakistan. Furthermore, mass polarization is the division of the electorate bodies based on social and political problems, ideologies, and policies. Under this notion, political parties are normally divided into various groups, changing social dynamics.

In some countries such division is rare, yet in other frequent. There is no ground in country with deep polarization. Thus, these are known as polarized countries. With the grave demise of the founder of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah political polarization went on like a wild fire across the country. Since then, political polarization in Pakistan has been significant and a growing problem, affecting its social and political fabric, governance, and democratic system, leading to its mark in the 3rd world countries. This polarization, featured by imaginable division between political parties, their supporters, and domestic power bases, has been influenced by a whole set of factors, including historical conflicts, ethnic and sectarian divides. Yet media, major political parties, military regimes and religious groups in politics have added more to this misery.

4.2 Ideological Division

The ideology of Pakistan was interpreted by religious elite merely led to the establishment of a religious society where marginalized sects feel threatened as compared to the constitutently protected majority of the secular state. In any case, it was never aimed to make Pakistan a theocratic state. Since the current status of the state has been contrastive to what the great leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah had aimed, the Pakistan's ideological divisions can therefore be broadly categorized into Secularism vs. Islamism.

Secularism emphasizes on the clear separation of the religion and the state protected modern rights for minority. It is more of a western-inspired governance structure. Islamism (integration of Islam) into governance and law, Shariah-based legal system, Islamic values and principles guide the policy Liberalism. Conservative liberalism emphasizes freedom for individuals, fundamental human rights, social progress, modernization, market-driven economy, conservatism preserving traditional values, social norms, limited government intervention in economic protection. In the case of nationalism vs. regionalism flourished in Pakistan, the former emphasizes on the Pakistani identity, centralized governance and a strong state military while the latter focuses on the regional autonomy, decentralization, recognition of ethnic, linguistic diversity and a greater provincial control over resources. In this case of left-wing vs. right-wing influence, the former is mainly focusing on the socialist, communist ideologies, emphasizing economic

equality and social justice for all and supporting anti-imperialism as well as anti-capitalism, while the latter is desiring capitalism, free-marketing ideologies, emphasizing individuals' enterprise, elevating national pride and promoting traditional social values.

Coming back to the context of Pakistan, major political parties like PTI carrying populist/Islamist influence, PML-N supporting centrist/conservative paradigm, PPP promoting liberal/socialist ideology, and notions stage certain consequences. These repercussions include the followings complex and multifaceted challenges: political polarization, overall instability, social tensions, conflicts of economic stagnation, difficulty in addressing the state's pressing issues (terrorism, corruption), bridging the divide through inclusive dialogue, representation of education, critical thinking, economic development, social welfare, strengthening democratic institutions, encouraging civic engagement and tolerating Pakistan's ideological divisions. Nevertheless, understanding these differences is crucial for the country's challenges to be timely addressed with a fostered inclusivity and harmonious society for all (Sarwar et al., 2020).

4.3 Religious Politics

Din and Siddiqui (2023) explored the relationship between religion and political polarization in Pakistan. Their findings suggested that the deepening of political divide and social fragmentation in Pakistan occurred via politicizing religion. According to them, religion can act as a unifying force, yet it has been exploited as political tool, and therefore misused. To address these challenges, prioritizing the promotion of pluralism and interfaith dialogue is a must for the policymakers by taking certain measures against extremism and sectarianism. Additionally, it is essential to strengthen institutions, promoting democracy and human rights as it helps to create a more inclusive and cohesive society. Their work cited that religious freedom is an important issue in Pakistani politics, urging the government to take more proactive steps to protect the citizens' rights, regardless of their religious beliefs. Their research concluded that the Pakistan's Sunni-Shia divide has political implications and certain religious parties aligning with certain sects, promoting polarization further. This is sometimes exacerbated by external influences and has occasionally led to violence, according to them. Their studied work gives the following framed crux in line with religious politics in Pakistan.

4.3.1 Influence of Islam

Islamic Republic of Pakistan's constitutional status, Shariah, legislation as well as judiciary have been influenced by Islamic political parties such as Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-

Islam- Fazal (JUI-F) carrying them a record majority of 70-80 per cent and exploiting madrasas and mosques for their political interests; Bareilvi and Shia applying more mystical, tolerant approach in the politics are carrying 15-20 per cent of the total religious parties in the politics; and, Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs religious Parties, fall in the minor religious political parties (Siddiqui 2023).

4.3.2 Issues

The religious political parties have staged several issues for Pakistan which include blasphemy, controversy with laws, often misusing Shariah with no compliance on debates on Islamic law, implementation of sectarian violence, Sunni-Shia clashes regarding minority rights protection, representation of Islamization with respect to the implications of social, cultural and state economy, (Siddiqui 2023).

4.3.3 Impacts on Politics

Religious political parties have borne significant impacts on the political climate of the country. At times, they influence electoral vote bank Policy decisions, with a staunch demand of Islamic considerations in legislation. Furthermore, social and moral issues, cultural censorship, foreign policy devastation and ruined relations with Islamic countries stood as bone of throat to Pakistan. Due to their involvement in the politics, Pakistani Islamic character which led to several challenges like extremism, radicalization, terrorism, sectarian division, violence on minorities, intolerance of accepting diversity and modernization has been questioned. Moreover, balancing Islam with progressive democratic values which put the country in compatibility with Islamic principles is now standing as another major problem to Pakistan, (Siddiqui 2023).

4.3.4 Reform Efforts

In order to promote the religious parties and make them democracy oriented, Pakistan needs to introduce Islamic moderation, promoting tolerant interpretations. It also needs to bring reforms in religious education alongside modernizing madrasas' curriculum to counter extremism in the country. Moreover, efforts to combat radicalization and bring inclusivity in politics for minorities are also needed. Strengthening democratic institutions of Pakistan for an extremism-free political landscape also needed as it influences politics, society, and identity of the nation. On the whole, addressing these challenges, promoting inclusivity and bringing moderate Islamic values are crucial for stability and progress of the country.

4.4 Provincialism

All of Pakistan's provinces have been pushing for greater provincial autonomy, a demand that has contributed to the country's political polarization. The issue of provincial autonomy has long been a major obstacle in Pakistan's constitution-making process. Powerful entities like the military and bureaucracy favored a strong central government because operating at the provincial level was more challenging for them. They were backed by non-representative bureaucrats-turned-politicians who shared similar interests.

Additionally, Muhajir politicians, who had migrated to Pakistan during partition, prioritized ideological unity over regional sentiments. Having no roots in the land of Pakistan, their painful memories of migration and strong anti-Indian sentiments shaped their political stance. They supported a strong central government and a powerful military to ensure Pakistan's security and prosperity against India. However, this push for a strong central authority clashed directly with the demands for greater provincial autonomy, fueling ethnic and regional tensions not only in smaller provinces but also in the largest province of the country. This struggle for power among provinces and ethnic groups gave rise to new regional parties, often driven by vested interests.

In 1954, the integration of West Pakistan's provinces and states into a single administrative unit, known as the "One Unit," was implemented through an executive order. This move was intended to create parity between the two wings of Pakistan (East and West) but instead sparked further discontent among smaller provinces. Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra argued that this unification would promote national integration, eliminate provincialism, reduce administrative costs, and simplify the constitution-making process. He believed a unitary government was the best solution for Pakistan, though he acknowledged the impracticality of unifying the two wings due to the 1,000-mile distance between them. Instead, he proposed unifying the western wing, showing little regard for the growing demand for provincial autonomy. This approach ignored the regional struggles against the "One Unit" scheme, which many saw as an attempt to suppress their voices.

The federal government, dominated by Muhajirs and Punjabis, further alienated other provinces by sidelining them from central decision-making. Similar policies in India under Indira Gandhi had already led to the rise of non-Congress and regional parties, as national parties were seen as neglecting regional aspirations. In Pakistan, political leaders who later founded regional parties argued that national parties had failed to address the unique needs and aspirations of their regions. This growing sentiment highlighted the need for regional parties to advocate for local interests and

ensure their voices were heard in the broader political landscape.

4.5 Sectarianism

In Pakistan, sectarian conflict is the key factor that destabilizing social, political, religious and security order. Having a heterogeneous society in hand, Pakistani people who contribute into democratic culture from their various roles in different organizations, the financial system has been significantly downed, and the governmental institutions have been too weakened to find direct specific solutions for overall prosperity. This has been severing with the passage time and now institutions are divided into racial, folkloric, social and spiritual lines. The sectarian and ethnic ferocity has tainted the culture, creating ether of grave political polarization in Pakistan. The national structure has seemingly failed to find a feasible political sequence where all regional stakeholders enjoy a collectively and promote national identity. Such division between central government programs and the people has halted the nation from contesting the country's reliability (Raja Amir Hanif 2024).

4.6 Irresponsible Role of Mass Media and Social Media

When the general population is exposed to polarizing information on various media platforms, it causes individuals to align with certain political parties, expecting loyalty from those parties' lawmakers. This exposure to polarizing content has led to an increase in disagreements, which are now often linked to racial and economic factors. The consumption of such content has contributed to political and societal division (Tewksbury & Riles, 2015). As a result, people become more politically polarized due to the nature of the content they encounter on media regarding political issues. Polarized material on mass media outlets can set a standard for individuals' beliefs (Farooz, 2023).

According to Hindman (2008) extended this discussion by highlighting the role of the internet, which connects individuals and seemingly fosters groups with similar ideologies. As a networking platform, it also enables interactions with various politicians, often leading to surprising relationships. According to empirical research on new media and polarizing opinions, the internet tends to create partisan individuals, encouraging partisan polarization rather than popular polarization. Lee and Chan (2016) studied how individuals are exposed to fake content and biased information through new media platforms. These users are influenced by material that reinforces their views, often accepting misleading information as truth while dismissing opposing viewpoints. As a result, individuals begin to believe more in misinformation, something that was less prevalent before the rise of these platforms, when polarization of public opinion was more

grounded in accurate information on partisan topics.

With the rise of private media and an increase in social media platforms have furthered political polarization. Media outlets often take partisan positions, serving to the ideology of certain political groups, while social media foster divisive rhetoric, spreading misinformation and hate speeches (Taber and Lodge, 2006) Ali Khan (2023) has said that political polarization is a multidimensional phenomenon which is influenced by various actors, including politicians and the media stakeholders.

According to another research however, most of the voters said they never switched their party allegiance because of content they saw on social media, especially from various political pages (Sehrish and Rehmat, 2023). According to the study of Arshad et al., (2023), media and political polarization have a well-connected relationship. Media shapes public opinion and is influencing political discourse in Pakistan. In recent years, there has been growing concern about the impact of media on political polarization and its negative reflection on the state democracy. One of the key ways in which the media has contributed to political polarization and extremism is by providing extremist with a platform for divisive voices which includes both traditional media outlets and all social media platforms. Via these platforms, negative and impactful voices have been rigorously spread to wider audience.

In Pakistan, there is a history of media outlets promoting a particular political agenda, and this has only been intensified in recent years. Many media outlets are on pay roll or owned by powerful individuals or may be groups with their own political interests, leading to biased reporting and the promotion of a particular agenda. This has led to a situation where people are increasingly polarized and divided along political and religious lines. Extremist groups have also used the media to spread their message of hate and intolerance, which has contributed to the rise of violent extremism in the country. The impact of media polarization and extremism on democracy in Pakistan has been significant. It has led to a situation where people are less willing to engage in constructive political dialogue and are more likely to resort to violence and extremism to achieve their political goals.

The media's role in shaping public opinion has also impacted the country's democratic institutions. When the media promotes highly criticized negative elements of a political agenda, it can lead to a situation where the government is less accountable to the people and is more likely to engage in corrupt practices. This way, the media has played a significant role in political

polarization and extremism in Pakistan. The impact of this trend on democracy in the country has been significant, and it is crucial to address this issue if Pakistan is to strengthen its democratic institutions and promote greater social cohesion.

Social media provides a platform for people to share their political views without having acceptance. It inflames political polarization because generally, people do not respect opposite political views. Social media is thus facilitating the process of empowerment of individuals to express their support and discontent over a political issue (Rabia Sadiq 2024). In the words of Adnan (2022), social media bombards people with information and propaganda of their interest and this increases intolerance.

Due to this significance of social media 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 believe that political polarization gets increased through an excessive use of the internet, as it provides a platform to develop and engage in groups and communities with similar ideologies, minimizing the chances of interaction with opposite ideologies. Therefore, political arguments and dialogue with same-minded people strengthen the existing political beliefs.

If media is socially and politically polarized, ultimately its consumers 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 media's polarization. Here, content credibility means news channel that are showing unbiased content (Sarwar et al., 2020). Exposure to polarized news is a process leading to political divide. Media can influence the cognition process of the audience, making them aggressive and violent agents of their ideologies. Hostile Media Effect (HME) is a perceptual theory in which audience perceive information against their pre-existing views. In 2001, the people of Pakistan got their first private TV channel, Geo News, whereas earlier, there was only one news channel, which was state-owned.

A Similar study was conducted on undergraduate and graduate students at the universities of Lahore, Pakistan. The study mainly focused to empirically test the relationship between the usage of social media and political polarization. The results found in their research showed that social media engages citizens and leads to political polarization. In addition to this, the findings of

this study stated that social media enhances party loyalty, creating biasness towards out-groups. That is how political engagement and party loyalty deepen the very practice of 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 what is right and what is wrong (Sarwar et al., 2020. Ali et al., (2021).

In the view of Maqsood et al., (2024), political polarization is rising globally while Pakistan has been significantly undergoing an increase in this phenomenon. As of now, political elites such as elected politicians and common people are all divided owing to their differences in political viewpoints. Due to their differences of beliefs and attitudes immensely influenced by the use of social media, now Pakistani youth have politically been well polarized. Their study concluded that due to fragmented and high-choice environment in social media the public has shifted away from more even-handed political programming to more adversarial and one-sided broadcasts.

In recent past social media has been weaponized to secure political gains. It however crossed the lines and finally began criticizing the state institutions including but not limited to military and judiciary. A hoard of the Pakistan's nationals is serving on payroll to certain tasks of the foreign agencies by openly passing derogatory remarks to the army (Shahzad, 2022). The PTI founder Imran Khan and his activists are engaged in a severe social media campaign where the former premier has been live-streaming his speeches for his followers. The party 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 to ably make reflective and constructive opinion. Some criticize news channels, claiming they serve as platforms for certain political parties therefore people prefer to watch biased news (Adnan, 2022).

4.7 Civil and Military Politics

According to Fatima Agha (2024), military institution has been a central factor involved in domestic politics, having ruled the country directly through coups and indirectly by through tightening noose around civilian governments, creating division between pro-democratic parties and military supporters. So, this study has witnessed that the civil-military relationship in Pakistan has been severed by the recurrent military interventions in politics, may it be by a direct ruling or back door influence. The study's discussion portrayed such dynamic has admissibly undermined

the democratic process of the state. The findings and discussion cited that such influence has led to challenges for governance, weakening civilian institutions. Their thesis mainly highlighted that many government policies, aspects are getting affected by this sort of influence which also include at the top political landscape, domestic governance, decisions related to foreign policy, appointments for key government positions, and back-end pressure on political processes.

Furthermore, this study has found that the power of the military can discourage civilian political actors, constraining democratic expression ultimately. This intricate relationship adds a layer of complexity to understanding electoral outcomes and power dynamics. The study concluded that in order for Pakistan to establish a more stable and democratic political system, it needed addressing the deep-rooted power imbalance between civilian leaders and the military, foster stronger democratic institutions, by promoting a culture of accountability and transparency at all costs, regardless of any care for the powerful institutions of the state.

4.8 The Lack of Political Consensus

The lack of political consensus in Pakistan has been a significant factor, driving political polarization. Such a sorted polarization halts the spirit of governance, policy continuity, and national unity which definitely affects both the democratic process and the overall stability of any country of the world. The inability of political leaders and parties to come to a consensus on key national issues, including economic reforms, electoral processes, and civil-military relations, has led to an increased polarization as well as a gridlock in the state's political system.

The following key factors are contributing to the lack of political consensus

4.8.1 Historical Political Rivalries

Political parties in Pakistan, particularly the PML-N, PPP and PTI, have long histories of rivalry. Instead of engaging in constructive dialogue to mutually address the state's concerns, they contrastively have often focused on undermining each other, leading to a culture of political hostility. This antagonism often overshadows potential areas of agreement on policy, as political actors prioritize short-term victories over long-term consensus-building.

4.8.2 Civil-Military Relations

The Pakistani military institution has played a potential role adding to the miseries of the current politics standards: Their frequent interventions in civilian governance via coups, direct rule or indirect manners has lagged the state behind in the world of competition while the lack of consensus among political parties on how to manage civil-military relations has even further

increased major issues for the state. To this effect, political parties often accuse one another of being either aligned with or manipulated by the military institution, due to which it both deepens mistrust and prevent meaningful dialogue.

4.8.3 Electoral Disputes and Lack of Trust in the System.

Political parties of the country frequently dispute electoral turnouts, accusing each other of allegation related to rigging, manipulation and alignment in electoral system. The lack of a credible electoral process, trusted by all political actors, halts the establishment of a consensus on governance.

After every general election in Pakistan, the runner-up parties often question the legitimacy of the results rather than reflecting on their own performance and accepting the outcome. This as an undeniable reality has even further been polarizing the political environment, leading to a lack of collaboration in parliament.

4.8.4 Ideological and Regional Divides

Pakistan is a diverse country with ideological, ethnic and regional differences. Political parties often represent specific ethnic groups, regions, or religious ideologies, making it difficult to forge a national consensus. For example, PPP is traditionally strong in Sindh, PML-N in Punjab, and nationalist parties in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). These regional bases of power limit the parties' willingness to compromise on national issues that might conflict with regional interests.

4.8.5 Institutional Imbalance and Judicial Activism

The lack of political consensus is also exacerbated by the overreach of institutions like the judiciary and accountability bodies. For instance, judicial activism, in the case of its getting politically motivated, has led to the disqualification of key political leaders, creating resentment and further polarizing the political landscape. With this, political parties often fail to agree on the role and authority of these institutions, with each side accusing the other of manipulating them for political gain.

4.8.6 Short-Term Politics over Long-Term Governance

Politicians in Pakistan often prioritize short-term interests, such as winning elections or undermining rivals, rather than engaging in the difficult work of building consensus on long-term

national concerns, including economic reforms, security, education, and healthcare.

4.8.7 Economic and Social Fragmentation

Economic inequality and the unequal distribution of resources across provinces contribute to political fragmentation. Provinces with less access to resources and development like Baluchistan and KPK, feel marginalized, inevitably leading political parties to focus on regional issues rather than seeking a national consensus. Additionally, social fragmentation based on class, ethnicity, and religious sectarianism adds to the miseries of the political landscape division.

5 ROOT CAUSES OF POLITICAL POLARISATION IN PAKISTAN

5.1 Introduction

Political polarization has recently become one of the most rampant political processes across the globe where both stable and unstable democracies have been affected. Pakistan as one of the nations of a community has also been politically polarized. Politicians have widened the gap based on various issues aimed at gaining personal political interests. Unfortunately, in the last few years there has been unprecedented political polarization in Pakistan, dividing individuals from political elite to public, politically. This division has contributed to the culture of hatred, abuse, and intolerance. There are several causes of political polarization around the globe which also include mainstream media, social media, class of political elite and income inequality. However, the discussion screened via the media and political elite have significantly led the public to a full understanding of the political polarization in Pakistan.

In fact, political polarization can happen with result of political instability, making executive reforms difficult. Thereupon, it advances owing to the opposing political alliances. Political polarization in Pakistan, where there are significant differences between almost all the political parties and interest groups, has been severed by political instability. The political scene has moreover been polarized as a result of the periodic coups, potentially changing governments and political violence (Anwar 2023).

Political polarization is defined as a process in which political attitude is different from the government in center and ideological extremes are being followed. Most of the time, political polarization is discussed from the perspective of the democratic political parties as they carry with them different ideologies. It is not essential that polarization is dependent on different policies like right and left. People are polarized based on religion or secular and traditionalist or modern lenses. In addition to this, polarization is divided into two categories: ideological polarization and affective polarization. Mainly, this study attempted to focus on political polarization at party level and the public. First, the causes of political polarization around the globe are explored, caused by the involved factors of media, political elite and income inequality. Then, a comparative analysis has been conducted to find specific causes of that. This study tried to explain media and political elite fueling polarization in Pakistan. Furthermore, it intended to explain that how Pakistan is facing affective polarization and as a result disliking has been extended from political elite to public. Meanwhile, society has been badly divided while the process of democracy is under threat

in Pakistan. The focus of this study is also to explain the causes of the political polarization while avoided to trace its consequences and solutions. According to the definition of Adnan, (2022), the term political Polarization is a process of ideological differences in which people show hatred and mistrust for people with political views and parties.

Representatives from major political parties become politically divergent from each other and converging within the same parties as long as their interests are fulfilled (Kim et al., 2016). A gap between expectations from society and functioning of the state institutions contribute to the exacerbating notion of political polarization where political attitudes relate to certain ideologies (Ishaque et al., 2022).

5.2 Identity Politics

Since its independence, Pakistan has been caught in a tug-of-war between forces striving to create a unified national Islamic identity and those reinforcing ethnic, sectarian, and regional identities. Over the years, this tension has escalated into widespread and severe civil strife, marked by devastating attacks on mosques, churches, markets, and even military installations. Militant groups, using various deadly methods, have spread fear and instability across nearly every city and province. While these conflicts are undeniably tied to ethnic and regional divisions, they are primarily fueled by the intersection of sectarian identity and political ideologies rooted in extremist interpretations of Islam.

Scholars studying civil strife often highlight ethnic diversity as a key factor in such conflicts. However, they tend to view ethnic and religious identities as tools rather than root causes of internal strife. This research, however, approaches violent conflict as both a cultural and political phenomenon. While kinship ties alone may not be enough to spark collective action, they play a crucial role in shaping social identities and political loyalties. The study aims to explore the connection between identity and politics as drivers of stability or conflict. Specifically, it examines how cultural and material concerns influence the motivations and agendas of different groups. The researcher refers to this interplay as the "politics of identity," emphasizing how kinship networks and political goals are fluid and shaped by the complex relationship between the state and sub-state groups. This dynamic has a significant impact on conflict patterns in Pakistan.

To better understand these dynamics, the study analyzes three key attributes of political actors—emotional-identity, functional-institutional, and normative-ideological traits—at both state and sub-state levels. By applying this framework to Pakistan, the research demonstrates how

interactions between state and sub-state actors shape ethno-political behavior and influence the state's vulnerability to conflict. The study argues that identity politics has played a moderating role in defining the agendas of ethnic and regional groups in Pakistan. However, when combined with sectarian identities and religious values, it often escalates tensions, fueling extremist ideologies rooted in radical interpretations of Islam.

The research critiques existing explanations of ethnic conflict, which often overlook the role of identity in political strife. Instead, it offers an alternative perspective that highlights the link between cultural and material concerns in driving such conflicts. The study is divided into two parts: the first examines identity and politics at the state level, while the second focuses on the sub-state level. These analyses are followed by conclusions on the factors driving civil strife in Pakistan and the forces that prevent the country from falling apart.

The politics of identity presents a significant challenge for Pakistan. Externally, the country's geo-strategic location and strained relations with its neighbors make it vulnerable. Internally, it faces numerous socio-economic and religious challenges, with religion playing a central role in society. The intricate social fabric of Pakistan is a complex web of issues, and any conflict has the potential to trigger severe, even irreparable, consequences. Pakistan's external vulnerabilities are compounded by internal challenges stemming from its diverse and complex social structure. In this context, identity politics poses a serious threat to both the state and society, leaving Pakistan ill-equipped to handle the challenges it generates.

The discussion underscores that identity politics is a multifaceted global phenomenon with varying impacts on different states. For Pakistan, this challenge manifests primarily in the form of ethnic conflicts. The country's multi-ethnic society has historically been partly suppressed and partly ignored by the federal government, exacerbating tensions. Movements like the Saraiki movement, which seek recognition and rights for ethnic groups, highlight the ongoing struggle and potential threats posed by identity-based politics. This situation reflects the broader challenge of managing diversity and addressing grievances in a way that promotes unity rather than division. (Maryam Hira 2024).

5.3 Economic Inequality

Weak governance structure in Pakistan, which is evident in the deteriorating law and order situation, social inequality, and the lack of equal opportunities for progress and development. This situation has worsened further with the rise of terrorism, which has significantly impacted the

social fabric, frequently leading to heated media debates questioning the effectiveness of security measures. These discussions often intensify societal frustration. Delayed justice, inefficient institutions, widespread corruption, and the absence of accountability are major factors contributing to the general demoralization within society. This environment creates fertile ground for religious divisions and provides space for the rise of provincial and ethnic sentiments, further complicating the political and social landscape.

5.4 Media Manipulation

Another study conducted related to Hostile Media Effect (HME) which is a perceptual theory where audience perceives information against their pre-existing views. In 2001 in Pakistan, a private news channel called Geo News was launched before which there existed only one news channel owned by state itself *Political Horizons*, 2(1), 2024 Sadiq 53 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) arranged protests and public rallies in the capital of Islamabad, Pakistani, media got polarized. Thereafter, ARY News, Express News, and Sama TV took the side of PTI, while the Geo News remained on the side of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N).

While Dunya News and Dawn News remained neutral and less polarized. In 2014, Daily news reported that most of the talk-shows and programs about current affairs provided one-sided and biased reporting (Sarwar et al., 2020). When Imran Khan was ousted in April 2021 and Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) made government, people began using social media, expressing that they do not accept imported government (Imported Hakumat Na Manzoor means that Imported Government unacceptable) and it became a trend on social media. Meanwhile, the PTI supporters used this trend to condemn foreign interference in regime change conspiracy. This trend has been used over 5.5 million times on social media. On Twitter platform (now X), these quoted words have been posted for more than 3 million times.

The role of social media provides a platform for people to share their political views without having been acceptance. This platform inflames political polarization because users do not respect opposite political views. It is also facilitating the process of empowerment of individuals to express their support and discontent over a political issue. Moreover, it 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 against them. As cyberspace lacks accountability, supporters of political parties therefore use demeaning language. Instead of engaging in constructive debate and exchange of opinion, people engage in sorted arguments. To this effect, it provides a platform for the exchange of abuses in Pakistan at best (Javed, 2022).

The excessive consumption of internet can increase political polarization by providing a platform to develop and engage groups and communities in similar ideologies and minimize the chances of interaction with opposite ideologies. Therefore, 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 use of social media and political polarization in undergraduate and graduate students from the universities of Lahore. Their results showed that social media engages citizens significantly leading to political polarization. The findings of this study also stated that social media enhances party loyalty, creating biasness towards out-groups; therefore, political engagement and party loyalty deepen political polarization. The use of social media has become violent and uncontrollable in the state of Pakistan. That is fueling intolerance and violence in the political behavior of the masses at large. To this effect, even educated users are unable to differentiate between right and wrong. Social media has been used to secure political gains merely, thereby crossing all the lines and starting criticizing the state institutions such as military and judiciary.

The public of Pakistan are performing the task of enemy agencies by openly passing derogatory remarks to the army (Shahzad, 2022). Imran Khan the PTI founder and his supporter are conducting aggressive social media campaigns. The party founder has been recording speeches for youth. Therefore, this party used social media very systematically and dedicated social media cells across the country (Gizbert 10:50). In fact, Pakistanis are unable to experience unbiased and neutral information and political opinion in mainstream media due to such campaigns.

Moreover, channels are openly supporting political parties and therefore promoting political polarization. Some criticize news channels for this while other prefer to watch biased news (Adnan, 2022). According to Sarwar et al., (2020), if media is socially and politically polarized, its consumers ultimately get affected based on their party affiliation. Politically polarized media always show news and content to create a positive image for a particular political party. They judged the news scripts for their content credibility to check the polarization of media. They concluded that exposure to polarized news is the process that leads to a political divide.

Media can influence the cognition process of the audiences, making them ideological aggressive and violent.

5.5 The Lack of Education

Pakistan's weak governance structure is evident in its unstable law and order situation, social inequalities, lack of equal opportunities for growth, and widespread division and resentment among its people. The rise of terrorism has further worsened these issues, deeply affecting the social fabric and sparking intense media debates that often question the effectiveness of security measures. This has only added to the frustration and disillusionment within society. Delayed justice, inefficient institutions, widespread corruption, and a lack of accountability have all contributed to a sense of demoralization across the country. These conditions have created fertile ground for religious divisions and fueled ethnic and regional tensions, further fragmenting an already struggling society.

5.6 Vested Interest

According to Akhtar (2009), efforts to prevent floor-crossing—where politicians switch parties for personal gain—have been undermined by powerful vested interests and the establishment, which sought to create artificial political groupings. These forces have even overturned laws and constitutional amendments designed to curb such practices. A striking example is the 14th constitutional amendment, which was ultimately rendered ineffective. However, floor-crossing driven by corruption is just one of the many factors that have weakened parliamentary democracy in Pakistan. Other significant reasons include the repeated suspension of the parliamentary system, primarily due to military interventions and the establishment of what was often labeled as "guided democracy."

Pakistan has experienced four military takeovers throughout its history, each time disrupting democratic processes. Additionally, political leaders' relentless efforts to cling to power by manipulating the political system have further eroded institutional integrity. This combination of military rule and political manipulation has led to a steady decline in the strength and functionality of democratic institutions in the country.

5.6.1 Political Parties and their Rivalries

Pakistan's political landscape is dominated by major parties, such as the PTI, PML-N, and the PPP. These parties often represent distinct regional, ideological, or class-based constituencies. PTI under the former premier Imran Khan has appealed to urban middle classes, youth, and segments that are disillusioned with traditional political elites. PML-N has a stronghold in Punjab

and is seen as representing the political establishment, business elites, and traditional conservative forces. PPP, traditionally more left-leaning, has significant support in the province of Sindh and in its rural areas, especially in its base in the Bhutto family legacy. These parties are locked in a fierce competition, where power struggles often overshadowed meaningful policy debate. Each party accuses the others of corruption or incompetence, fueling divisions within society.

5.6.2 Military's Role in Politics

Pakistan's military has played a strong role in the political domain, with multiple coups and decades of direct rule. Even during periods of civilian governance, the military has posed significant influence via back door channels. To this effect, the military institution has its own strategic interests, regarding national security, foreign policy (especially relations with India, Afghanistan, and the US), and control over key economic sectors. Political polarization benefits the military establishment, as it often steps in as an "arbiter" or power broker when civilian governments weaken. At times, the military is seen as backing certain political leaders or parties to serve its own interests.

5.6.3 Economic and Class Divides

Economic inequality is another driver of polarization in Pakistan. The gap between well-off class and the poor majority is clear: feudal class and industrialists significantly control political power often through dynastic politics.

5.6.4 Ethnic and Provincial Divides

Ethnicity is a complex and often divisive factor, rooted in identity and loyalty, and is frequently used to advance the interests of specific groups or individuals. For instance, in the United States, diverse ethnic groups and nationalities have come together to form a unified American identity, sharing common values and equal democratic rights. In multi-ethnic societies, a federal system is often seen as the most practical form of government, as it can accommodate diverse identities and interests (Syed Shah Jawad, 2017).

The success of a federation depends largely on its ability to ensure the participation of all stakeholders and foster consensus among different societal groups. When a federation promotes participatory governance, inclusivity, and a convocational approach—where power is shared among various groups—it can strengthen the relationship between the state and society. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, these principles of consociation and participation have been largely absent. This lack of inclusivity and representation has worsened ethnic conflicts, turning what were once demands for

recognition of ethnic identity into intense and often violent struggles. Almost every ethnic movement in Pakistan has followed this pattern: when legitimate demands were ignored, resentment grew among the people, transforming peaceful calls for recognition into violent confrontations.

The 18th Constitutional Amendment marked a significant shift by decentralizing power and granting more authority to the provinces. While this was a major political development aimed at empowering provinces and reducing the dominance of the central government, it fell short of addressing the needs of marginalized ethnic groups across all four provinces. Instead of resolving tensions, the amendment exacerbated them in some cases. Before the 18th Amendment, conflicts were primarily between the central government and the provinces, often reflecting tensions between major and minor ethnic groups. However, after the amendment, the focus shifted to intra-provincial conflicts, as the amendment lacked provisions to ensure political, economic, and ethnic representation for marginalized communities within provinces.

In essence, while the 18th Amendment was a step toward decentralization, it failed to create a framework that truly addresses the grievances of underrepresented ethnic groups, leaving many of their concerns unresolved and fueling further discord.

5.6.5 Religious Ideology

Junaid Amjad (2022) cited in his book related this confusion, saying ideological conflict and the question of identity are the follow-ups of Pakistan since its creation in 1947. He data urged that many of the state's domestic problems and foreign relations issues emerged amidst this chaos. The big question he posed in the book is did Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, want a state based on Islamic principles where all minorities obtain equal rights. To this effect, he cited that after decades of independence from the British Raj, Pakistan is facing an identity crisis. Islamists claim that Jinnah and his All-India Muslim League (AIML) party wanted an Islamic state__ a country for subcontinent Muslims with a system based on Islamic principles. However, secularists believe Pakistan to be a secular state, and Jinnah had favored it.

This debate that whether Pakistan should have a secular or Islamic state has been furthered over the past several years. Both Islamists and secularists use Jinnah's speeches obtaining a support of their narratives. In fact, during early years of the independence, a fierce debate about national identity and the state's nature kept both these stakeholders engaged, and the country could not chart a viable course ahead. However, in 1949, Islamists had their most tremendous success when they successfully lobbied for and passed the Objective Resolution, (Binder, 1961).

Syed Jawad shah (2017) wrote that religious harmony with interfaith dialogue and accommodation is an essential requirement for national integration, suggesting on this that enduring harmony and sustainable national solidarity can only be built on ethical values which protect human dignity. According to his explanations, religious freedom is a right entitled to every citizen and earnest obligation of every government. He studies deep down called for this freedom to be ensured for them. The study also underscored that underlying issues in Pakistan have been the delegation of religious interpretation to madrassa trained clergy, ultimately providing them with an exclusivity and monopoly over religious issues. This led matters to worsened situations witnessed in post Afghan Jihad scenario, when due to indulgence of external players the religiously divisive forces thrived.

As time went through, sectarianism evolved as the most intricate challenge to Pakistan's security and stability. Meanwhile, seeds of conflict were sown when various religious denominations gave various interpretations of Islamic ideology and insisted on the sole validity of their respective understanding of faith. Conclusively the study has cited that instead of serving as a unifying force such myopic religious, discourse has acted as a constituent of division and disharmony in Pakistani society.

Broadly, religion itself is not dogmatic and anti-innovation, however, discerning interpretations and extremist tendencies in individual behavior sharpened due to the West's attempt to brand Islam and post 9/11 interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Subsequently it resulted in promoting extremism, militancy, terrorism and hatred within Pakistan, complicating the integration process further, and it has enormous potential for national integration therefore mutual respect and religious freedom have significant potential for enhancing national integration.

5.6.6 Weak Democratic Institution

The term "failure" refers to a lack of success or the absence of expected quality. When applied to institutions, it highlights how these critical bodies, which are meant to govern and regulate society, can become sources of significant problems when they underperform. Institutions are responsible for managing procedures and making decisions that shape governance. Good governance, which leads to sustainable development, is the result of effective and functional institutions. As Douglass North explains, institutions are human-created systems that establish rules, laws, customs, and norms to structure political, social, and economic relationships. These frameworks are designed to promote and protect socio-economic order (Syed Jawad Shah, 2017).

Institutions can be seen as the pillars of a state, tasked with regulating and improving society. They vary in form, hierarchy, and function. Formally, institutions include constitutional laws, common laws, and policy enforcement mechanisms. Informally, they encompass interpretations of formal rules, social traditions, customs, and internal standards of conduct. Together, these formal and informal elements create a governance structure that supports strong organizations and orderly societies.

Kemal (2004) adds that institutions define the boundaries within which adjustments can occur, such as setting costs or resource allocations. They also control how state resources are distributed. Institutions can be analyzed in various areas, including political, legal, economic, and social spheres. Organizations, on the other hand, are subsets of institutions that implement specific policies, contributing to governance—or good governance—within the available resources, ultimately aiming for sustainable development.

While sustainable development is essential for good governance, corruption within Pakistan's systems has severely weakened its institutions. If this continues, it could push the country toward failure. As Ishrat Husain notes, states succeed when their political and economic institutions are inclusive and encourage long-term investment and partnerships. Conversely, nations fail when institutions serve the interests of a small elite, using state power as a source of personal gain. This abuse of power leads to institutional failure, poor governance, and weak social and economic progress. The saying "absolute power corrupts absolutely" rings true in Pakistan, where the decay of state institutions has normalized poor governance. Many believe that Pakistan's institutions primarily serve the interests of political elites, who use money, power, and connections to maintain control.

The decline in institutional capacity, arbitrary decision-making, conflicts of interest, and the politicization of public sector management have severely undermined accountability and technocratic efficiency in public service. These issues are at the heart of Pakistan's governance challenges.

Kugelman (2018) further points out that the politicization of the civil service, with unqualified political appointments, perpetuates a legacy of military authoritarianism. The military often steps in as a governing body due to the perceived incompetence and corruption of civilian leaders, further weakening institutions. Politicians' inability to formulate long-term policies, low tax revenues, and a lack of enthusiasm for public welfare initiatives have also contributed to poor governance. Additionally, the state's failure to implement meaningful reforms in institutional and

governance structures has exacerbated these problems. Strong states do not suffer from institutional imbalance or failure, but Pakistan's persistent issues highlight the urgent need for systemic change.

5.6.7 Military Intervention

The weakness of political practices in Pakistan has often allowed the military to step into politics. When civilian administrations fail to manage political chaos, the army, as a powerful and organized institution, feels compelled to take control. Military involvement in politics has been a recurring theme in Pakistan's history, whether during the rise of democratic governments or under dictatorial regimes. There are various reasons cited for this interference, including socio-economic challenges, political instability, the army's strong public image, and regional disparities. Over the years, Pakistan has witnessed four major military interventions: by General Ayub Khan in October 1958, General Yahya Khan in March 1969, General Zia-ul-Haq in July 1977, and General Pervez Musharraf in October 1999 (Mughees Ahmad, 2014).

General Ayub Khan was the first to take charge after President Iskander Mirza declared martial law on October 7, 1958. The 1956 constitution was suspended, and both national and regional legislative bodies were dissolved. Ayub Khan assumed the presidency on October 27, 1958, and later formed a commission led by Justice Shahabuddin to draft a new constitution. This constitution was finalized on March 1, 1962, after extensive review and approval by the governor's council.

General Yahya Khan took power on March 25, 1969, suspending the constitution and imposing martial law. He introduced the Legal Framework Order (LFO) on March 30, 1970, to outline the rules for governance. However, his rule ended with the breakup of Pakistan in 1971, following mass rebellion and Indian intervention. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto then took office on December 20, 1971, but his government was overthrown by General Zia-ul-Haq on July 5, 1977. Zia imposed martial law, promising elections within 90 days, but these were repeatedly delayed. Bhutto was eventually executed in 1979, and Zia remained in power until his death in 1988.

The fourth military intervention came on October 12, 1999, when General Pervez Musharraf declared a state of emergency and took control. He introduced the Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) and implemented various reforms to consolidate his power.

Throughout Pakistan's history, military leaders have attempted to reshape the political system into a presidential form of government. Ayub Khan was the first to replace the parliamentary system with his own constitution in 1962, introducing an indirect electoral system. Yahya Khan also aimed to establish a presidential system but failed due to the country's

disintegration in 1971. Later, General Zia-ul-Haq and General Musharraf made similar attempts, altering the constitution to strengthen the president's powers, particularly through Article 58-2(b), which allowed the president to dismiss elected governments. This provision turned Pakistan's political system into something closer to an executive presidency rather than a parliamentary democracy.

Despite efforts by political parties to remove Article 58-2(b) through the 13th Amendment in 1997, Musharraf reinstated it via the 17th Amendment in 2002, re-empowering the presidency. Ironically, many of the same lawmakers who had opposed this provision in 1997 supported its reintroduction in 2002, highlighting the deep-rooted flaws in Pakistan's political system. When legislators prioritize personal gain and political patronage over democratic principles, parliamentary democracy struggles to take root. This cycle of military intervention and weak civilian governance remains a significant challenge for Pakistan's political stability.

6. ROLE OF MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES IN POLITICAL POLARISATION IN PAKISTAN

6.1 Introduction

Political Polarization is the result of a disagreement of political stakeholders among individuals who oppose each other in various reforms related to state economy, politics, society and community. Pakistan has a multi-party system where each carries with it its own manifestos and roadmaps and is willing to address the country's issues from their own perspectives. When it comes to the parties' approach they have shown throughout the history, there come the influential roles of PML-N, PPP and PTI. These parties have put the state in misery and stay on extreme poles against each other in the political system. They most often tussled with institutions like judiciary and military, for example__ removal of PML-N government in 1999 was followed by public siege around SCP in Islamabad__ removal of Nawaz from premiership in 2017 was followed by public rallies across Pakistan__ and Imran Khan's ouster in 2022 was followed by public power shows both domestically and internationally. These parties used social media as a tool via which each party portrayed a public appealing image.

None of the parties in opposition want to appreciate good initiatives that other party in government may have delivered for the betterment of any sectors. Rather, they spread propagandas and develop narratives against each other with the only aim to obtain vote mandate from public. According to Nadeem Akhtar (2011), Pakistan is a multi-party system due to which no one party is likely to gain absolute power alone so they form coalition government. Coalition government weakens democratic situations in the country. Political polarization is a major issue that Pakistan faces the most in the Global South. It is these parties who have staged this issue as they misguide mass with their narratives, propagandas, agendas and allegations against each other.

Had Pakistan not faced undemocratic manners in the past or in the present, which institutional agents and corrupt individuals fuel it further, and conflicts among political stakeholders, there wouldn't have been any polarization in Pakistan. Earlier, the first two parties promoted the mass polarization over the past two decades; however, with the PTI's arrival it also added more to this misery of the state. This research attempts to discuss these three parties with regard to their historical conduct in opposition and government, their conflict with institutions and their influence on media which they severely use against each other just with the aim to raise to government.

6.2 The Role of Major Political Parties in Political Polarization in Pakistan

The three major political parties of Pakistan have been a great part of the country's political

polarization. They are: PML-N led by Nawaz Sharif since party's formation in 1988; PPP formed by Z.A in 1967; and, PTI founded by Imran Khan in 1996. The politics of these parties polarized the political system of Pakistan by prevailing hot narratives against each other which has ultimately severely influenced the public at large. The PPP chairman Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's saying "Udhar tum, Edhar hum" (means, you be there and we be here) divided the two parts of the country into East Pakistan and West Pakistan. This was actually based on the political chaos and a full disagreement of PPP with their counter party leaders hailed in Bangladesh. This led to a mass polarization on the PPP's behalf in the country.

Meanwhile, Bhutto was assassinated, yet with his death in 1979, Benazir Bhutto, his daughter, succeeded him as a party chairperson. Yet with her assassination in 2007, Mr Asif Ali Zardari, her husband and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, her son, soon combined as leaders of the PPP party. PPP and PML-N have led the government in the shape of a family politics for two decades around which becomes a cause of the extremity of mass polarization in the country. PML-N's role is evident dynastic politics, tensions with the establishment and legislative and judiciary battles. In the case of dynastic politics, the party has dominated the politics and oriented it to family politics, reinforcing accusations of monopolizing power while internal party workers delineate from the party and start supporting parties in oppositions (Ahmad, 2018).

In the case of legislative and judiciary battles, PML-N alleges political engineering and the biased rule of judiciary against them which undermine the party's democratic rights (ibid, 2018). On the other end, Nawaz wanted a civil supremacy for all as a matter of democratic process in 2017 while military establishment intervened in the politics which created fracture in political discourse (Ali, 2020). Similarly, PPP has played a positive role in early development of Pakistan yet in recent years its consecutive rule in Sindh and their provincial priorities weakened national interests and patterned fragmentary approach for the province which portrays that PPP is no more a unifying political force (Bilal, 2022).

The PPP party also at times confront with the federal government, changing alliance from time to time in the opposition, which further divide the country's political system. Also, the party's political structure is based on patronage; therefore, it carries with it long-standing associations, consequently, the party faced several cases on charges of corruption alleged by PTI. The corruption allegations against PPP also led to the political divide in the country, (Khan, 2019). On the other end, PTI's extended anti-corruption narrative, electoral strategies and social media influence also

put the country in a big political quagmire. For instance, in the first case, the party showcased itself as pure party, tarnishing political image of the PPP and PML-N via accusing the latter involvement in various corruption cases. This created political hate among major parties whereas constructive dialogue was halted and ultimately political conflicts rose to peak, (Ali, 2020). Further, PTI employed tactics to slam institutions for impartial election results both in 2013 and 2018 general elections. To this effect, they staged public rallies and protests which halted overall political progress of the country, ended up in a huge mass polarization. Likewise, the public perceived them as correct as the PTI party tactically used social media which influenced the mass. The continuous flow of misinformation on social media, the party supporting social media faction monopolized public at large and overall attempted to mislead them. This added more to the worse political system of the country, (Zafar, 2021).

6.3 Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Political Polarization

The Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) major success was the introduction of the 1973 Constitution, unanimously approved by parliament. The implementation of the 1973 Constitution proved a momentous point in the political history of Pakistan. The Pakistan People's Party's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was a powerful politician with progressive ideals, and Jalaluddin Abdur Rahim, a veteran Marxist philosopher (Jones, 2002, p. 89). This centre-left political party emerged from the protest movement against military dictator Ayub Khan's rule (Siddiqui et al 2020, p. 6). The PPP's ideology was shaped by Marxism, Socialism, Maoism and Arab Socialism (Metcalf 2004, p. 229). With its origin in a popular uprising against dictatorship and its centre-left ideology, it has been an essential force within Pakistan's democratic system. He outlined three crucial principles that his political party was committed to follow, which were. democracy as their polity, socialism as their economic program, and Islam as their religion. PPP began using 'Roti (bread), Kapra (clothes), Makan (house)' as its primary slogan during the 1970 election campaign. PPP secured a major success in the 1970 elections, winning against far-right group and become one of the leading political parties of Pakistan. However, it also added more to polarization of the political system of Pakistan: In 1971, the Pakistani military launched an offensive against Bengali nationalists in the East Pakistan, posing a serious civil war which eventually led to its separation and became independent with the name of Bangladesh which showed an extreme level of polarized politics at that time, which was further raised with the Bhutto's deplorable statement, "Udhar tum, edhar hum," (You be there, we be here). Their state-driven economic framework nationalized all the major sectors of the country which was contrastive to the Nawaz's privatization and

liberalization policies. Since no individual stakeholders were unable to realise their financial rights, public felt disappointed with such reforms, (Rasa, 1977, p. 27). The opposition parties especially religious parties' leaders formed Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) and moved for strong protests against Bhutto, accusing him of misusing power and rigging in the 1977 elections. Their criticism on Bhutto from cultural and religious believes shaken the body of his government whereby the martial law's imposition by Zia Ul Haq whose use of Islamism as a tactic to oppress the public at large furthered political polarization in the country which influenced not only politicians but also the public (Fahim and Junaid). When Benazir Bhutto came to power in 1988, there was a political conflict between PML-N and PPP. In her interviews, she used to target Nawaz Sharif on charges of corruption and undemocratic behavior toward public. Her propagandas and narratives brought severe rivalry among political parties. To this effect, Islami Jamhoori Ittehad mobilized against her stance of the ideological divide which led to the end of her government in 1990 when president Ghulam Ishaq Khan imposed article 58 2b.

Overall, there was no sustainable democracy in the country as President Farooq Laghari had accused her government of corruption and misuse of power as during her second term in 1996 due to which the president Laghari terminated her government (ibid, pp. 113-4). In one of her statements, Benazir Bhutto decried Nawaz Sharif, saying, "Nawaz Sharif engulfed money from Taj Company." "He allegedly stole around \$14 billion from the overseas Pakistanis which is their hard-earned money." "He allegedly took maximum money from Meezan and Habib Banks." "He is a sort of his own who never grants to public; rather grape it from the public." These discursive statements were only meant stand out PPP among all other parties for that she used to prevail allegations and political narratives against the PML-N party. Yet in 2007, Benazir's demise in the Rawalpindi led the workers to extremity, accusing both military and the extremist factions in the country for her killing.

During the PPP's government in 2008, the party's low comfort in alliance with the PML-N stood out as a major political conflict between the two parties. PML-N started supporting the lawyers' movement and took to roads, criticizing PPP for reinstating the SCP's judges who were earlier ousted by the then president Perviz Musharraf. Both the parties' leaders criticized each other, with PPP saying the PML-N's not consenting to restore the democratic culture is unconstitutional behavior, which further added to the miseries of the polarization issue, (Nasreen, 2009).

Likewise, the current PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto also denounced the PML-N in his various statements with an aim to elevate his party position in the country. Discursively, he denounced Nawaz Sharif, decrying “Nawaz Sharif was imposed for the third time by the Returning Officers (RO) of the country,” “His appointment as a premier dismantled the democratic process, public interest and the state’s economy,” “He is going to be imposed as a premier for the fourth time and is denouncing Mujai Kio Nikaala,” “He only wants to ruin those who are laborers in the country to obtain his personal interests,” “PML-N’s policy is only aimed at dividing the whole public in groups,” “They protect their politics even by filing cases against judges in the Anti-Terrorism Courts to see their interests are secured at all costs,” and “PML-N kept my father in jail for a period of 11 years which is not fair.” The Bilawal’s statements are only aimed at achieving public solidarity yet making the public morally corrupt which leaves the country in the extreme polarized nature, which ultimately affect the public.

6.3.1 Pakistan People’s Party’s Political Polarization via Media Platform

With rise of the Bilawal Bhutto Zardari as a party chairman, he has tactically exploited social media and electronic media, easily obtaining his party interests. In the party’s ruling in 2008, the party also maneuvered Pakistan Television (PTV) for gaining public solidarity with their government. In recent years, the party delivered its positive image via print media by targeting to mainstream political parties’ leaders. The party chairman Bilawal engaged the youth of the country through his social media statements and could more influentially promoted his party narratives. Yet the excessive negative propagandas that his party leadership has spread have created intolerance and chaos in the political system of the country.

In their elections contest in 2013, they presented soft image of the party and divisively used the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s legacy and Benazir Bhutto’s demise to gain majority of votes. Earlier to this in 2010, the PPP government implicitly instructed the PEMRA cable operators to suspend certain private TV Channels (such as GEO News and ARY TV who broadcasted certain footages which affected the PPP’s political image) which halted electronic media and could not facilitate the audience for understanding realities. Moreover, in 2012, PTA blocked 15000 websites which were sensitive to the PPP’s government, which left the public in unawareness, (H. Yousaf and E. Schoemaker, 2013). In the post-2018 elections too, Bilawal tarnished PTI’s political image on social media platforms, making the party demoralized, as his statement included the Imran Khan’s government is “a selected government” which is a ‘fitnah’ being imposed on the nation. These sorts of behaviors toward media and the opponent parties’ followers created a big mess of

intolerance with which public found them in an extreme dissatisfied time with the overall democracy of the country which ultimately spread the poison polarization in the country.

6.4 Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Political Polarization

PML-N has been actively involved in politics from decades. Nawaz's party has quickly become a major political party in the national politics. With the party's success in general elections held in 1990s, Nawaz came to premiership and promoted liberalization and privatization related reforms with a hope to promote the state economy. Yet, the government faced president Ghulam Ishaq Khan's ruling. The president removed Nawaz from the power in 1993 under article 58 (2b). The Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) verdict on Nawaz's case was ruled. The court's order for reinstatement of Nawaz led to a conflict between the president and judiciary, bearing a political turmoil in Pakistan which fueled polarization. Again, the tussle between the two supreme leaders, Nawaz and the Ghulam Ishaq, and the military intervention in the same decade, led to resignation of both the PM and the president in 1993.

This shifted political dynamics and bore considerable issues within the political system as the top political figures opposed each other publically (Yasmeen, 1994, p. 572). The party functioned in opposition in the parliament went on from 1993 to 1997 yet by its arriving in the government after winning general election held in 1997, the PML-N removed Article 58 (2b) under 13th Constitutional Amendment, dismantling the president's power and ensuring stability and continuity of the elected governments (Syed, 1998, pp. 119-120). The military institution intervened in the politics in 1999, resulted in the Sharif's ousting from the government and exiling from Pakistan until 2007. This public perceived it as an undemocratic manner as with the army in government severed the state economy. Meanwhile, PML-N and PPP agreed on Charter of Democracy (CoD) in 2006 in London, decrying the military interference in the government anywhere in the future.

In 2007, upon Sharif's return and taking part in general elections held in 2008, PML-N 92/342 seats in the lower house. Both PML-N and PPP initially formed a coalition government, but polarization beefed up when the alliance of the two fell short owing to two major disputes: as per the first stance, PML-N demanded and the PPP disagreed to the reinstatement of the SCP's judges who were removed by General Perviz Musharraf in 2007; and, as per the second stance, PPP demanded and the PML-N disagreed to appoint a potential president without consultation consensus. Due to the two disagreements, PML-N lowered its support for the PPP and initiated its

own policies from 2008 to the election year of 2013. PML-N in general elections held in 2013, secured the government for the third time with a record 189 seats from 342 seats in the national assembly which shaped family politics again, adding more to the miseries of the political system. Yet his rule was severely targeted by the military institution of the country. He was disqualified by SCP in Panama papers leak, offshore companies and money laundering. In his post-disqualifying statements, Nawaz discursively targeted military institution, decrying that “Sadly, we couldn’t learn any lesson from the past 70 years,” “had there a respect for voters, the state wouldn’t have been divided into two wings,” “We need to bring amendments in the constitutions with a strong focus on the state’s economy,” “It was only aimed to find a state where justice existed for all, equally provided to all 20 million Pakistanis.” These excerpts show that Nawaz was discursively targeting to the judiciary and the military institutions and likely wanting to address terrorism, load-shedding and inflation issues. However, by bringing 18th constitutional amendment in 2010, the federal government transferred powers to provinces which the functionaries of the federal government disputed. The PML-N party remained in the office for five-year, yet faced severe public rallies held by PTI in Lahore and across Pakistan, alleging corruption charges against Nawaz Sharif and PTI moved for cases in the court, henceforth in 2017 SCP and ECP declared Sharif not an honest member of the parliament under Representation of the People Act and Article 62-1-F; therefore, removed him from the premiership. This raised a political conflict between the parties and misalignment with the SCP.

In general elections held in 2018, PTI secured government while Nawaz alleged pre-poll rigging and interference by the establishment. The mass polarization exacerbated when PML-N deprecated PTI with the term of “selected government” due to which the opposition party leaders were put behind the bars for months. Meanwhile, Nawaz in his London speech criticized Imran’s government and the establishment of the state. As time went on, the opposition with the cooperation ensured by the state’s establishment at back-end could move forward and formed a Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) in 2020 against PTI government. They initiated the process of the no-confidence-voting motion against Mr. Khan to disqualify him from the government.

Consequently, Imran was ousted in April 2022 successfully which appeared to be a historic development that never happened ever before. The main factor involved in this quagmire was the personal interests of the PDM members. This chaos led to a major conflict not only among political parties but also between the PTI and the military establishment. To end this, PTI’s

lawmakers were put into jails which further increased instability and mass polarization. In her hate speech, the party leader Mariam Nawaz decried Imran Khan, saying “Muslim League aor Nawaz Sharif ki badqismati yihi ki moqabila aik asay shekhs sai hi ju sheytan b hai aor gaty b, mujai nahi pata kis jangle mai eska tarbiyat hoi hai,” ‘Maini kahata yi fitna khan hai, intishar khan hai, mai es natiji pi puhunchi hu, yi Pakistan ki sabsai bari tabahi hai,’ ‘Judges ko dahmkiya dita hai Khatun judge sahiba ko name ko leki damki detha hai, Pakistan mai yi rewaj hi ki gali do aor faisal lo,’ ‘ Imran Khan na seyasat daan hai aor na enki jamat seyasi hai, balki yi badmasho aor ghundoo ka guru hai.’(S. Farooq, et al., 2024). Likewise, Khawaja Asif also decried Imran’s wedding with Bushra Bibi during her Eddat period, saying, ‘Unai tu sharm nahi ati. Aj aik ki saat shadi krli tha hai tu kal ko aor kisikisath yi fitnah hai ju mulk pi mosalat hwa tha.’ These words depicted Imran Khan’s party as a poison for the democratic governance of the state. If Pakistan lags behind in the Global South and its experiences a severe polarization in the political climate, the only reason is the parties’ harsh criticisms against each other. The only aim they want to obtain is the public solidarity and vote mandate. These politicians dismantle social image of the politicians which directly spread immorality in society and youth on social media platforms exchange hot words with each other simply to support their favorite politicians.

6.4.1 Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz’s Political Polarization via Media Platform

The Nawaz Sharif party is nonetheless taking advantages of the electronic and social media platforms’ frequent use, portraying positive self and negative others. During his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz’s (PML-N) elections campaigns held both in 2013 and 2018, dominated TV breaking news and social media networks which possibly appealed to public and successfully met his political interests. Its interactive polls and Q&A live sessions enabled the party leaders to directly communicate with the public and impressively succeeded in the 2013 elections (A. Asma, 2023). Their discursive use of language where they directly criticized PTI and PPP for their undemocratic behaviors have exacerbated social divide which ultimately affected provincial unity. The PML-N leaders’ allegations against PTI and PPP furthered intolerance and immorality in the public and the nation underwent dissatisfaction with the political system which increased polarization and halted overall prosperity of the country.

6.5 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Political Polarization

According to Tariq Rahim (2023), Imran Khan formally began his political career in 1996, forming his own political group in the name of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) with an aim to dismantle family politics of the two parties (PML-N and PPP) and establish a new political system

termed as ‘Naya Pakistan.’ The party slogan supported movement for justice with a fair accountability for all the corrupt stakeholders, taking from business tycoons to major parties’ politicians. His political career started with one seat in the parliament in the 2002 general election however tactically influencing social media, to which mostly youth (60 per cent of the total population of Pakistan) are logged in, Mr. Khan’s party prematurely earned significant kudos. With the consecutive public rallies, held especially in 2011 and 2014 (which went on for 126 days with a record 0.1 million participants), PTI portrayed a powerful image both domestically and globally. Meanwhile, the polling results for the party improved the party status as it gained a record 35 from the total 342 seats in the parliament during the 2013 general elections (Flamen Baum, Stephanie, 2012). The party leader’s 126 days long march on Islamabad demanded both investigations into 2013 elections that they alleged to be rigged by PML-N, and bringing electoral reforms to restructure the future elections. Blank, Jonah et al. (2014) cited that PTI party utilized RANDA Corporation and other social media platform and hoarded way different support of the young generation.

Imran Khan has had a public appealing rhetoric strategy which ultimately impacted the elections result in 2018 whereby he could possibly form a coalition government, with himself becoming a premier of the government in August 2018 (Wu & Ali, 2020, 513). As per its role in political polarization, spread dissatisfaction in the public, disregarding Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari. In his statements, which show his hate attitude toward traditional politicians of PML-N and PPP, Imran targeted to Nawaz and Zardari, alleging corruption and money laundering against them, which fueled political climate further polarized in Pakistan. For example, his hate speech Imran Khan attempted to blackmail Mariam Nawaz politically by decrying in November 2022, ‘Hm nai qanoni jang larna hai, kionki hmara moqabla mujrimo sai hai, juram paisha logo sai hai,’ ‘Sana Ullah jaisi qateelo sai,’ ‘Nawaz Sharif aor Shehbaz Sharif jaisi mujrimo sai,’ ‘Aor Asif Ali Zardai jaisi bemari sai hai,’ ‘qum kabi enki samni nahi jukiga,’ and ‘Jis nai b en churu ki musallat krni ki kushish ki, wo zalil huga, enki saath tabah huga.’ Through these excerpts Imran Khan publically denounced the opponents’ political stances and convinced the public rhetorically that it is they who were the Achilles Hill of the whole democratic problems.

These remarks spread a hate among the parties’ supporters. Similarly, he also tactically employed an implicit use of religious outlook to seek the public support at large. ‘La Ilaha Ill Allah, yi dwa hamai azad krtha hai, kio zalim, firoon, kio Sana Ullah jaisi qatil aor Sharifoo jaisi mujrim aor Zardari jaisi mafia, qom kabi enki samni nahi jukigi,’ ‘hadith hai ju Prophet S.A.W

1500 saal pehli farmayithi ki ju log choti churu ko jail mai dalti hai aor bari dako ko churdithi hai tu wo log tabah hujathi hai.’ With this religious touch, a severe political conflict has staged in the country which significantly questioned religious parties tarnished the smooth democracy of the country and every citizen felt it to the core as they lost all hopes they expected from the rulers, (S. Farooq, et al., 2024). Likewise, in their public power show held in Sangjani Islamabad, KP Chief Minister Gandapur exploited his counterpart Mariam Nawaz’s personality by publically saying, ‘Maryam, apt u kehrahihi ko hum waha qadam nahi raksakthi. Tu wazih andaz sai sunlo, mai araha hu.’ This was more of a sexist and language that he used to obtain positive appreciation from the public yet weakened public morality and expanded the political polarization.

Imran khan also regularly denied giving National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) to anyone of whom he claimed to the public that it is the need of the hour for major politicians to leave Pakistan and avoid cases filed against them in various courts of the state. His preference to adopt charter of Medina in Pakistan showed him to be a political populist and stronger lawmaker in the parliament, while his rhetorical speeches about it convinced public everywhere and obtained huge public support, (S.S. Khalid, 2022). Imran Khan also challenged the military institution publically by using abusive language against the establishment. His introduction of the digital concept disregarded the traditional concept of the politics mostly led by family politicians of the two parties. His aim was to establish

Riast-e-Madina; whereas, his populist rhetoric, which increased actual political polarization, included discourses on anti-establishment, Naya Pakistan, critique of traditional parties, nationalism and patriotism, human rights, and economic stability. On the whole, the use of these discourses in his political speeches led to the creation of political polarization in Pakistan. His conflictive rhetoric intensified ideological tussle and polarized political and civil military relations. The Khan’s conformational style deepened political polarization in the country and staged significant challenges for both the political unity and economic stability of the country, (G. Sarwar, 2024).

6.5.1 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf’s (PTI) Political Polarization via Media Platform

Media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion yet in recent years it has severely impacted the political discourse in Pakistan. Media outlets serve certain agendas preceded by a particular political party. Its role has therefore influenced public by constructing realities in their mind and has successfully achieved certain interests of the political parties. As a public awareness

platform, its exploitation by powerful elites and consequent impact on the public opinion, individuals underwent a significant divide in the country. As a result, some follow one powerful group, other stand by others (A. Arshad, et al., 2023). In the case of PTI, social media was utilised by Imran Khan during his largest *Tsunami March* on Islamabad, where media campaigned against what they perceived the 2013 elections being significantly rigged by the former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. They spread the rigged elections as propaganda via social media as a result mostly youth admitted to such constructions. Social media is used as a catalyst the party and its campaign on it placed the party at top and got recognized across the globe.

The use of social media by the party emotionally stimulated the youth and its frequent misuse during the public power shows has increased the political polarization in Pakistan, significantly. Therefore, state institutions come in the face of threats and severe political challenges which have not only weakened the political system, democratic culture of the country, but also increased inflation in the country, (T. Tehseem, 2018). Imran Khan's party was the first group that took the advantage of the social media at best by taking experts on the digital world on board. Meanwhile, all the party's social media platform Facebook is liked by a record 6.5 million users and Twitter followed by at least 10.2 million users, (S. Asma, 2023). In a nutshell, the negative use of social media by major politicians spread fake news and propagandas which construct realities and ruin political climate in the Global South of the world which bears polarization.

6.6 Critical Analysis

As per the data collected and put in the chapter fourth, it has become clear that every political party has its own part in the political polarization that the country is facing severely today. While they using hot words on social media and electronic media, they have an aim of achieving their personal objectives at the cost of the national interests. Pakistan People's Party at times bans broadcasting of the private TV channels, PML-N conduct political campaigns for achieving huge vote mandate in the country by exploiting all kinds of resources leaving the state in a series of problems, and PTI target to both of the said parties and publically alleging corruption and money laundering accusations against them. Each of these parties, as per the findings the researcher put in the thesis, accuse state institutions including military and Election Commission of Pakistan for no assuring fare and transparent elections in the country. Their images in the public only aimed at promoting self-identity and ruining rights of the other public parties. The nation has witnessed these allegations, accusations, sieging judiciary or vandalizing military installations are never prosperity oriented actions which each of above mention has attempted.

Positive self-image and negative others-image has put the state's democratic governance in a vulnerable situation. Extremism in policies, rigorous public rallies and public exploitation both in-person and online on social media created the dissatisfaction and intolerance among the whole mass as a result education system ruined, political institution faced challenges, economy severed a break, law and order remained hallucination, constitution underwent brawl among various political groups, terrorist outfits surged their activities in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and fundamental human rights enshrined in United Nation Fundamental Human Rights Document and in the Constitution of Pakistan suspended.

Overall, democracy runs with the consent of the powerful elites which ultimately affected common citizens of the state. Though these parties have always willed and even signed into a document on Charter of Democracy to conduct free and fair elections aimed at promoting democratic culture in the country and respect vote for each citizen however it remained a mere document and never got implemented as it threatened at certain time their political legacy. The problem which is common among all these parties is that these leaders never admit to their wrong way going policies and for that criticizing each other. As a state of the Global South, each party hails certain corrupt individuals who have been convicted in various courts both by national and international courts however never correcting their course which can actually not only promote the national interests and elevate their parties' politics, but also prevail peaceful and prosperous state where each citizen can be entitled to both freedom of speech and bring positive difference in the global world. With their tarnishing behaviors against each other, political system has been shaken as a result foreigners shifted their businesses in other countries while future stakeholders avoided to invest in Pakistan. Not only these all, even there is a continuous flow of the brain drain which left Pakistan in the miseries complicate educational, political, economic challenges. Civil societies have faced the repercussions of these issues ultimately. The need to work on is the change of the system and truly agreeing to the constitutional articles as it will not bring appreciate foreign investments to better promote the state economy but also will promote standardized education and democratic culture in the country. This will definitely put an end to the polarization of the country and Pakistan will become a prosperous and symbol of peace for the rest of the world.

7 CONCLUSION

The study has come to a conclusion that there is multi-party system in Pakistan depending on coalition governments as these parties rarely achieve huge vote mandate in election polls. There are three major political parties named as PPP, PML-N, and PTI. Any Parties play crucial roles in representing civil society, integrating diverse societal elements and addressing public demands. Yet, their performance in the government has been severed by internal issues such as family politics, reliance on feudal structures, and regionalism and therefore various stakeholders form different political parties in the country. As a matter of concern, this led Pakistan to severe political polarization. Political polarization is actually rooted deeply in ideological, religious, and regional division which has been major reason of the weak political history.

In fact, the nature of political polarization in Pakistan is a sever issue. The polarized nature of Pakistani politics has impacted every institution and every citizen. In fact, the ideology of Pakistan was interpreted by the religious elite aimed at establishing a religion influenced society. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah wanted to make Pakistan Islamic welfare state. However, as his stance and perspectives were wrongly interpreted, as a result, the country was pushed towards polarization of the society and rise of religious extremism in the country, (Ishaque et al., 2022). As essential issues, such tendency poses far-reaching effects on the social political structure of the country. Pakistan has experienced in-depth political instability and severe polarization for years, with frequent changes in government. in recent years, these challenges have been compounded by intemperate political tensions, ethnic rigidities as well as the rise of immoderate political and social intolerance (Danish 2022). Representatives from major political parties go divergent politically from each other yet become convergent within the parties, securing their interest (Kim et al., 2016). In political polarization, political attitudes diverge to ideological extremes (Maqsood et al., 2024).

The polarization is having been featured by several factors. These factors include: Media, religion, provincialism, civil-military misunderstanding, lack of political consensus, identity politics, and the lack of education, ethnic and provincial divides. The first reason of political polarization is media. Media, both in terms of social media and in term of electronic media, has divided political parties, their supporters, and domestic power bases which influence historical conflicts, ethnic and sectarian divides. Second reason is religious politics; the deepening of political divide and social fragmentation in Pakistan occurred via politicizing religion. Religion can act as a unifying force, yet it has been exploited as political tool, and therefore misused. Promotion of pluralism and interfaith dialogue is a must for the policymakers by taking certain

measures against extremism and sectarianism. Third reason is provincialism; all the provinces of Pakistan are asking for more provincial autonomy which also adds to the political polarization of Pakistan. Fourth factor of political polarization is the civil-military relationship; in Pakistan, politics has been severed by recurrent military interventions in politics, may it be by a direct ruling or back door influence, (Fatima Agha, 2024). Pakistan's military has played a strong role in the political domain, with multiple coups and decades of direct rule.

Fifth aspect is the lack of political consensus; the lack of political consensus in Pakistan has been a significant factor, driving political polarization. Such a sorted polarization halts the spirit of governance, policy continuity, and national unity which definitely affects both the democratic process and the overall stability of any country of the world. Sixth cause of political polarization is identity politics; Pakistan has been rotten with tension between integrating forces establishing a national Islamic identity and fragmenting forces reinforcing ethnic, sectarian and regional identities. Seventh factor involved into polarization is Economic Inequality; a weak governing structure has been reflected via the practicality of the precarious law and order situation, social deficit, lack of equal opportunities for progress, development and hate among the people. the eighth factor is the lack of education; Pakistan retains a legacy of failed educational reforms, and development plans on the whole. Pakistan has neglected to overcome this legacy, and the negligence of education system for the nation is a large obstacle to the overall growth, (Aziz et al., 2014). The last reason of such polarization is Ethnic and provincial divide; ethnicity is a challenging factor whose character is conflicting instead of being consensual, (Syed Shah Jawad 2017).

The major political parties have been using social media and public at large through campaigns with an aim to portray positive self and obtain huge vote mandate and accomplish their private interests at the cost national policies with foreigners. They tactically use rhetoric and discursive language in this regard as well. The common things lying among all the stakeholders of the politics are they alleged corruption accusations against each other, targeting to each other's personalities, using abusive language about each other. Lack of consensus, historical political rivalry, and bad relations with military institution, disputing electoral results and showing the lack of trust in political system are the means of the major political parties which they use as cards against each other. Through these cards they easily convince the public via the severe use of social media and in the public rallies. For example, in her statements, Mariam Nawaz decried Imran Khan while sayin "Muslim League aor Nawaz Sharif ki badqismati yihi ki moqabila aik asay

shekhs sai hi ju sheytan b hai aor gatyaa b, mujai nahi pata kis jangle mai eska tarbiyat hoi hai,’ ‘Maini kahata yi fitna khan hai, intishar khan hai, mai es natiji pi puhunchi hu, yi Pakistan ki sabsai bari tabahi hai,’ ‘Imran Khan na seyasat daan hai aor na enki jamat seyasi hai, balki yi badmasho aor ghundoo ka guru hai.’ (S. Farooq, et al., 2024).

While in the case of Imran Khan, he said in response, ‘Maryam, meraa naam nahilina, kahi aisa nahu apka husband apsai naraz hujayga. In his other statement, Imran Khan says, Hmnai qanoni jang larna hai, kionki hmara moqabla mujrimo sai hai, juram paisha logo sai hai,’ ‘Sana Ullah jaisi qateelo sai,’ ‘Nawaz Sharif aor Shehbaz Sharif jaisi mujrimo sai,’ ‘Aor Asif Ali Zardai jaisi bemari sai hai,’ ‘qum kabi enki samni nahi jukiga,’ and ‘Jis nai b en churu ki musallat krni ki kushish ki, wo zalil huga, enki saath tabah huga.’ These statements become the sole cards of their influence in the public. Similarly, Maryam also said in her other speech in Punjab, ‘Aj kal tu letters jail sai arahi hai, mai uska name nahi longi, wo roraha hai jail ki andhar sai chehmrti hai ko mujai reha karo mujai reha karo.’ This created a kind of mishap in Pakistan and major parties’ leaders divisively use them to create a soft image for their party concerned and spread hate speech and depreciation against opponents.

These words are only spoken when there is no broader sympathy. Seeing these remarks, people target to each at several time. Consequently, Pakistan saw weak governance, poor law enforcement, societal inequalities, and public disillusionment, worsened by terrorism, delayed justice, corruption, and lack of accountability. Political parties weaponized media to gain support, deepening societal divisions. The education system remains underfunded, with low literacy rates, provincial disparities, and a reliance on elitist private schools or traditional madrassas Political parties use media manipulation, especially social platforms, intensifies political polarization by promoting biased views, abusive rhetoric, and misinformation. This contributes to societal inequality and limits progress.

7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Political polarization in Pakistan has deepened over the past two decades, driven by confrontational politics, institutional mistrust, and media-induced divisiveness. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach to restore political stability and uphold democratic values. Below are key recommendations for future researchers to tackle political polarization in Pakistan.

i) Strengthening Political Dialogue and Collaboration

One of the key recommendations for addressing political polarization in Pakistan is the promotion of continuous dialogue and collaboration among major political parties. Researchers can focus on exploring mechanisms that encourage constructive communication between political rivals. By studying the existing communication gaps, scholars can suggest ways to establish platforms for dialogue that would allow leaders from various political parties to collaborate on common national issues. Strengthening inter-party communication could foster a culture of cooperation over confrontation, reducing the divisiveness that currently characterizes Pakistan's political landscape. Future research could focus on case studies of countries where political rivals have come together to work on shared goals, drawing lessons for Pakistan's political environment.

ii). Investigating the Role of Media in Political Polarization

The media plays a significant role in amplifying political polarization by often portraying political parties in extreme and adversarial ways. Future research should analyze how both traditional and social media outlets have contributed to the political divide in Pakistan between 2013-2023. Researchers can study the influence of biased reporting, sensationalism, and partisan coverage on public perceptions of political parties. It is crucial to identify how media outlets, including news channels and online platforms, can be regulated or encouraged to provide balanced, objective, and fact-based reporting. In turn, this could reduce the polarization fostered by misinformation and propaganda. Future studies could propose frameworks to enhance media ethics and responsibility in shaping public opinion.

iii) Promoting Electoral Reforms to Ensure Fairness and Inclusivity

One of the root causes of political polarization in Pakistan is the lack of trust in electoral processes, which fuels accusations of unfairness and manipulation. To address this, researchers

should explore the need for comprehensive electoral reforms to enhance transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in Pakistan's political system. Future research could focus on improving the role and effectiveness of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in ensuring free and fair elections. Scholars may also examine reforms that could promote greater participation from marginalized groups, reduce electoral fraud, and increase public confidence in the democratic process. Ensuring the integrity of the electoral system could help reduce the negative effects of polarization by fostering a more inclusive and representative political structure.

iv) Strengthening Political Party Internal Democracy

To counteract the rising polarization in Pakistan, it is essential to focus on strengthening internal democracy within political parties. Researchers can explore how political parties themselves contribute to the deepening of divisions and analyze how internal power structures can be made more democratic and transparent. This includes studying how party leaders are selected, how policies are formulated, and how party members are engaged in decision-making processes. By promoting internal democracy, political parties can become more accountable to their members and to the public, potentially reducing the level of centralization of power that often contributes to polarization. Researchers should also investigate the benefits of greater democratic practices in party leadership to ensure that political decisions reflect a wider spectrum of opinions and not just the preferences of a few individuals.

v) Educating Citizens on Political Tolerance and Civic Engagement

A long-term solution to political polarization in Pakistan is the cultivation of a politically informed and tolerant electorate. Future research should explore the role of education, both formal and informal, in promoting political tolerance and encouraging civic engagement among the public. Research could focus on how school curricula, media campaigns, and civil society organizations can help foster an environment where citizens engage with political parties and issues in a respectful, fact-based manner. Educating citizens about democratic principles, critical thinking, and the importance of compromise could lead to a more informed electorate that is less susceptible to extremist views and divisive rhetoric. This would ultimately contribute to reducing polarization by encouraging a more balanced and respectful public discourse.

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