Political Polarization in Pakistan:

Implications for Governance and Social Cohesion

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Abstract

Political polarization in Pakistan has deepened over the past decade, leading to the hardening of ethnic, ideological, and political fault lines. This national fragmentation on several lines engenders profoundly adverse implications, resultantly impacting governance and social cohesion. The increasing erosion of public trust in institutions and lack of consensus have almost made the democratic process in Pakistan dysfunctional. This study examines how political polarization has had a profound impact on governance and social cohesion, particularly since 2013. It explores the underlying causes of political polarization coupled with deteriorating social cohesion, including an array of contributing factors such as media role, ethnic-cum-ideological schism, and economic inequality, and analyzes their consequences for governance and national integration. The research employs a mixed-method approach. It integrates qualitative insights with quantitative data, gathered via Google Forms. Diversity has been ensured by including respondents from different backgrounds—professionals, students, and officials. The study findings suggest that political polarization contributes to policy failure, fosters public alienation from state institutions, and exacerbates governance gaps and precipitates societal fragmentation. In this equation, media-driven narratives and intra-elite conflict act as a catalyst by creating a conducive environment for the thriving of disinformation and extremist discourses at the cost of civic engagement. In light of the study's findings, the paper

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concludes with policy recommendations intended for reducing polarization and promoting social cohesion through institutional reforms, improving media literacy, encouraging inclusivity, and focusing on national dialogue. A policy recommendation matrix is provided to guide practical reforms in governance, media regulation, and civil society engagement.

Keywords: *polarization, democratic process, governance, intra-elite, media.*

1. Introduction

Historically, almost all the post-colonial countries have been confronted with multifarious religious, linguistic, and ethnic groups, grounding their sense of grandiosity in their histories and civilizations. Pakistan is no exception to this rule. Since its inception, the political system of the country has vacillated between democracy and dictatorship (Akhtar, 2009). Democracy failed to consolidate its roots in Pakistan, and even the so-called democratically elected governments were not fully democratic in their true spirit. The rise of the cult of personality in political parties never let them attain the stage of political maturity, ending in interest groups that largely look after their own vested interests. This fact hindered the political parties evolution into democratic institutions striving for the welfare of the masses. This underdeveloped political culture has led to affective polarization—dislike of the other party—and appeared as a contributing factor to societal fragmentation. Political polarization dealt a blow to the system and has led to governance gaps as well. It is pertinent to highlight that as compared to India, in Pakistan the process of political polarization started with the untimely death of Liaquat Ali Khan and Quaid-e-Azam, while the demise of Indian leadership, like Gandhi, Nehru, and Patel, had little deleterious effect on the Congress party (Hanif et al., 2024). Divergence of opinion and constructive disagreements are key indications of a thriving democratic system, but if they foster dissent and fragmentation, then they turn into a threat to national integration.

The abundance of conflicting interest groups on Pakistan's political landscape led to the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971. Pakistan has yet to cope with this trauma; a new wave of political polarization, more intense in its scope and threat, took birth, particularly during the last decade. Resultantly, a growing divide has been witnessed among political parties, ideological groups, and regional factions, contributing to increased social fragmentation and political instability. This polarization is fueled by various factors, including historical conflicts, religious affiliations, media influence (including social media), and socio-economic disparities. As Pakistan navigates complex issues such as economic development, national security, and governance challenges, political polarization continues to shape public discourse and exert profound pressure on policymaking. Spontaneity, unplanned strikes, agitations, and even violent protests emerged as key attributes of this new wave of political polarization,

making formal institutions such as parliament and the judiciary both less relevant and stigmatized. In the new wave of political polarization, social media occupied the primary medium for information exchange, interpersonal connections, propaganda, narrative construction, and public influence. On social media people filter out content based on their priorities and form their opinions accordingly. Nowadays, social media is considered to be the major information source, especially for Pakistan's youth(M. M. A. Khan et al., 2023). This paper examines how political polarization has contributed to the governance gaps and posed a real threat to the social cohesion in Pakistan since the past decade. This research will analyze both historical and traditional trends in how political polarization influences governance and social cohesion in Pakistan and how it shapes interaction with the socio-political environment. It explores the main causes of political polarization during the last decade and its implications on governance and social cohesion.

2. Statement of the Problem

Political polarization has engendered significant divisions among various segments of society, resulting in governance crises characterized by inconsistency in policy implementation and dwindling social cohesion. The governance crisis has led to economic and social issues, which have further eroded public trust in state institutions. Moreover, the hostile narratives coined by the media—both traditional and social—have further compounded the situation by deepening societal acrimony and diminishing trust in institutions. Despite numerous efforts by successive governments, i.e., provincial autonomy through the 18th amendment, providing considerable space for political expression, the deleterious effects of political polarization are not only threatening political consistency but also harming social cohesion. Therefore, it is imperative to explore solutions for forging national consensus and fostering social cohesion to minimize political polarization in the country.

3. Significance and Scope of study

The study of political polarization in Pakistan is vital for developing an understanding regarding its implications for governance and social cohesion, policy consistency, political stability, and overall economic growth. It has its bearings on all the factors that play a crucial role in nation building, social cohesion, national integration, and economic development through good governance and equitable dispensation of justice. It is also important because the adverse effects of a polarized society are visible through inefficient resource distribution, bad governance, corruption, injustice, and intolerance, which reduce national productivity and innovation. Political polarization makes it very difficult for governments to focus on core issues of economic development, education, and healthcare through consensus and dialogue.

The aim of this study is to research how political polarization negatively

impacted governance and social cohesion. It will focus on how this issue has caused a trust deficit among different segments of society and deepened the wedge by creating an intolerant society. It will also look into the role of political polarization leading to security problems, which deter local and foreign investment, slow economic growth, and undermine state institutions. The scope of this research is limited to the factors contributing to political polarization in Pakistan since 2013 and its manifestation in different forms. The research will also analyze the main factors that contribute to political polarization, especially differences in ideology, socio-economic inequality, and the role of major political parties, interest groups, etc. At the conclusion of this research, policy recommendations will be established to foster a congenial and conducive environment where various competing stakeholders can come together to resolve their differences for the greater national good.

4. Literature Review

Political polarization has increasingly become the focal point in academia, especially due to its adverse implications on democratic governance and social cohesion. Political polarization is the process that results in difference of ideas of divided groups of political parties with the population (Maqsood Ahmad et al., 2023). Scholarly discussions distinguish between ideological polarization- differences in policy views- and affective polarization- dislike of the other party (Mason, 2018). Carothers and O'Donohue (2019) argue that polarization along ethnic, ideological, religious, and political lines is no more limited to emerging democracies but is equally undermining the democratic processes in consolidated democracies. Various factors such as identity cleavages, populist leadership, media, and elite manipulation fuel it to the breaking point. Fiorina et al. (2011) point out that elite-driven polarization mostly overshadows the existing tolerance in society and most of the time has a trickle-down effect in terms of shaping electoral behavior, public perception, and national narratives, a dynamic relevant to Pakistan's party-driven political landscape.

Lieven (2012) examines that how identity politics in Pakistan undermine the formal institution, reinforce patronatage networks over democratic accountability leading to fragmention of society and put limits on democratic governnace. Sadiq (2024) explains political polarization as the difference of political attitude between the state and the masses which propels masses to follow extremist ideologies. She considers traditional media, social media and political elite as the main source of polarized politics in Pakistan.

The political landscape in Pakistan has changed with the entry of PTI as a third political force when the party came to power in 2018. (Wu & Ali, 2020). Akhtar (2009) argues that the main problem of our young generation is that they have totally misunderstood the concept of "Ideology of Pakistan" but they cannot be blamed for this as political environment is so polarized that the nation is far away from political socialization.Therefore, the increasing tendency of

Balkanization of Pakistani politics can have devastating implications on the national integration of Pakistan. Pakistani society today is moving toward fragmentation   which needs a comprehensive mechanism for enhancing national integration in a befitting manner. (Ishaque et al., 2022).

The concept of social capital is essential for understanding social cohesion in a fragmented society. Putnam (2000) distinguishes bridging social capital, connecting across race, class, or political party, from bonding social capital, in-group identity within an ethnic, religious, or political group. The current political climate of Pakistan indicates a sharp decline in bridging social capital, manifesting in growing public intolerance and diminishing interparty cooperation. Most of the literature aviable on the subject is mainly focused on the causes of polarized politics in Pakistan and explores the consequences for political system and institutional disharmony. This paper contributes to the already existing literature on the subject by particularly focussing on its deleterious effects on governance and social cohesion.

4.1. Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored in three core concepts: political polarization, social cohesion, and governance. Political polarization is broadly defined as the divergence of political attitudes to the breaking point. Scholarly debates divide it into affective polarization and ideological polarization. Social cohesion refers to the strengths of relationships among individuals within a society and their willingness to cooperate for the collective good. Grounded in Putnam's (2000) framework, this conceptual framework includes bridging social capital (cross-group ties) and bonding social capital (within-group ties). The World Bank (2007) defines governance as "the manner in which public officials and institutions acquire and exercise the authority to shape public policy and provide public goods and services" (World Bank, 2007, p. i). Good governance is essential for development to increase economic growth and strengthen social cohesion. Institutional trust, policy coherence, and political stability are foundational prerequisites for good governance. In the context of Pakistan, this study maintains that affective polarization, driven by interparty rivalries, has weakened the social cohesion and adversely impacted governance. Political polarization obstructs consensus building, erodes interparty trust, and fosters institutional distrust. This self-reinforcing feedback loop between polarization, social cohesion, and governance constitutes the analytical lens through which this study examines Pakistan's contemporary political crisis.

Figure 1

The diagram visualizes the conceptual framework
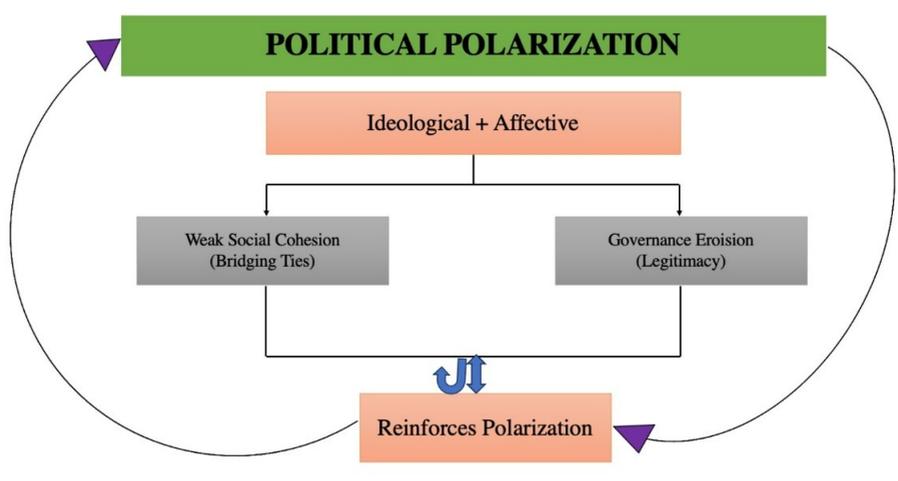
5. Method

This research employs a mixed-method approach. Quantitative data were collected through a survey, while qualitative analysis was conducted utilizing secondary sources. The survey was administered via the "Google Form" application. The choice of Google Form was based on practical constraints such as accessibility, time, and cost-effectiveness. The non-probability sampling technique involves self-selection bias, lacks randomization, has the possibility of researcher bias, and has limited generalization. The researcher acknowledges and addresses these limitations by triangulating the survey results with an exhaustive analysis of the secondary data. It helped to contextualize the survey results and provide further depth to the analysis. A total of 141 respondents submitted their responses. Given the online nature of the survey, the exact response rate cannot be determined. The questionnaire consisted of different questions, and the link was circulated across different segments of society to ensure the representative sample. Efforts were made to ensure demographic diversity in terms of age, gender, region, and occupational background. Participants included students, political workers, government officials, and the common people, whose views were collected on the issue of political polarization and its consequences for democratic governance and social cohesion. Secondary sources of data, such as articles, journals, and editorials of renowned newspapers, are also analyzed to support triangulation. The results of the Google Forms survey have been analyzed and presented in the form of pie charts and graphs to support the study's conclusion.

6. Understanding Political Polarization in Pakistan

6.1. Pakistan's Polarized Politics

Political polarization refers to the process through which the ideas and actions of the individuals are controlled by his/her own predetermined set parameters of myopic vision without tolerance for difference of opinion. It refers to the highest form of divergent opinions on socio-economic, political, religious, and linguistic domains, which cause friction in different segments of society according to their own parochial sentiments and beliefs, leaving no space for tolerance. Political polarization starts from the top and permeates slowly and steadily among the lower segments of society. Since independence, Pakistan has been grappling with political polarization stemming from divisions on religious, ethnic, linguistic, and provincial fault lines, leading to the rise of a highly polarized society. This volatile nature of the political landscape cracked the very fabric of society and social cohesion. The decade of the 1950s was marked by factionalization over language issues, a constitutional crisis, the emergence of dictatorship in the 1960s, and conflicts surrounding the One Unit Scheme, alongside a growing divide between East and West Pakistan, ultimately leading to the disintegration in the 1970s. However, the ongoing confrontation between political elites and civil-military relations continued, ultimately dragging Pakistan into another military dictatorship in 1977. The Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) movement against the violent tactics of opposition parties divided and indoctrinated the followers of both camps, resulting in the ultimate demise of the democratic rule of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. The democratic movement soaked in violence ushered in, the era of General Zia's dictatorship.

The rise of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as a major political force has redefined and intensified a new wave of political polarization, particularly due to its hard-line approach towards the political issues in the country. A new culture of sit-ins, strikes, and protests mirroring as a source of entertainment attracted all segments of society, particularly youth. The rise of PTI is coeval with electoral disputes, leading to a prolonged sit-in in 2014 and political unrest since then. During this period, the PTI-led provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) resorted to violent protests in the form of violent rallies and intermittent dashing to the capital for sit-ins, which fostered an environment of uncertainty for investors and businesses ("Traders, Analysts Criticise," 2024).

After the toppling of PTI government in April 2022, and subsquent post-2024 protest narrative centered on PTI's allegation about not providing level playing field in 2024-elections. However, during PTI's three and a half rule in the country, opposition leaders were treated with iron hand, and imposed
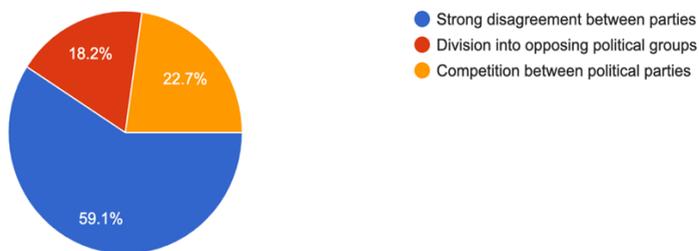
clampdon on press, that earned PTI's founder, Imran khan, the title of Predators Of Press Freedom ("Press Freedom Predators' Gallery," 2021)**.** During his rule, Imran Khan,the PTI's chairman and former prime minister, always boasted about his good relations with the establishment. Following its fall in the face of non-confidence vote by an alliance of opposition parties, PTI instead of sticking to the constitutional course, resorted to street agitations and accused the establishment in allaiance with America of deposing PTI from power. The subsequent resignations from the provincial governments of KP and Punjab further weakened PTI's position and gave the PDM the chance to install caretaker governments in these two provinces. The PTI protest tuned into a violent attack on May 9th on military installions, adversely impacted its party structure, and strenght. Consequently due to massive street agitations, corruption allegations, several cases were registered against PTI chief and he was imprisoned and disqualified from running for office. It is pertinent to highlight that social media's role emerged as another force to be reckoned in narrative construction, and fueling the flames of intolerance and bigotry. The role of different state institutions have also led to political polarization which engendered heart burning and contributed to trust deficit in institutions.

In order to ascertain the role of political parties in political polarization, a survey was conducted through google form in which more than half of respondents 59.1% attributed the friction between political parties as the main cause of political polarization in Pakistan.

Figure 2

Definition of Political Polarization

How would you define political polarization?
22 responses

- Strong disagreement between parties
- Division into opposing political groups
- Competition between political parties

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

6.2. Causes of Political Polarization in Pakistan

6.2.1. Economic Inequalities

Pakistan, a country of over 240 million people, faces significant economic disparities that have far-reaching consequences for governance and social
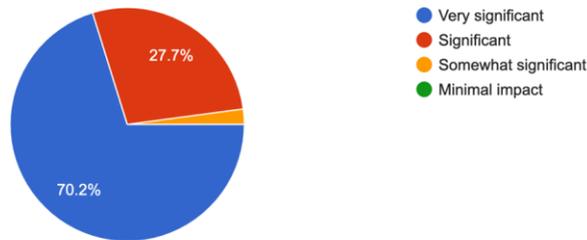
cohesion. Economic disparities have been caused by inequitable distribution of resources, regional disparities in infrastructure development, lack of investment in human capital, corruption and poor governance and dependence on foreign aid. The most powerful determinant of political polarization in a society is income inequality (Akdede & Keyifli, 2019).This situation has far reaching negative consequences of governance structure in Pakistan undermining its democratic institutions, increased corruption, reduced government effectiveness and weakened rule of law.

Figure 3

Economic disparities contributing to political polarization in Pakistan

How significant do you think economic disparities are in contributing to political polarization in Pakistan?
141 responses

● Very significant
● Significant
● Somewhat significant
● Minimal impact

27.7%

70.2%

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

70.2% of respondents believe that very significant economic disparities are contributing to political polarization in Pakistan, while 27.7% of respondents believe that these disparities contribute significantly, but not as much.

6.3. Bad Governance and Corruption

As per the United Nations (UN), good governance has eight components, which include rule of law, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, participation, inclusivity, effectiveness, and consensus. Pakistan has been at the lowest ebb on all the aforementioned parameters. The main causes of corruption in Pakistan are weak institutions and lack of accountability. It seriously affects governance and social cohesion by undermining democratic institutions and processes. It further leads to distorted policy-making and resource allocation, fosters bureaucratic inefficiencies and red tapism, erodes public trust in government, and encourages crony capitalism and monopolies. It also leads to increased frustration and anger among youth, exacerbates social

inequality and poverty, weakens the social contract between citizens and the state, and damages national identity and pride.

Figure 4

Primary causes and effects of corruption in Pakistan

What are the primary causes and effects of corruption in Pakistan and how do they impact governance and social cohesion?

141 responses

Category	Value
Weak institutions and lack of accountability	134 (95%)
Political patronage, nepotism and cultural norms tolerating corrup…	127 (90.1%)
Economic inequality and poverty.	92 (65.2%)
Erosion of public trust in government and encourageme…	40 (28.4%)
Undermining democratic institutions and policy-making p…	38 (27%)

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

In the above data, 95% of respondents believe that the root cause and effect of corruption in Pakistan is weak institutions and lack of accountability, while 90.1% of respondents reacted that political patronage, nepotism, and cultural norms that tolerate corruption are the root causes and effects of corruption in Pakistan.

6.4. Social Media's Divisive Role in Political Discourse

In the modern world of information explosion, the citizen's information repertoire is mainly composed of social media content, which mostly lacks credible sources and remains fragmented (Al Omoush et al., 2012). This distorted information, accessible to everyone, preprograms the minds of youth and hardens their worldviews, which further polarize the society. Ungoverned social media leads to extremist ideologies propagated by hardliners to attract the maximum audience. It also affects the policymaking process, as extremist voices are louder than peaceful participatory overtures (A. Khan et al., 2023a). Pakistan faces an escalating threat from social media's amplification of divisive rhetoric, exacerbating political polarization and undermining social cohesion (Nisar & AROOJ, 2022). Social media is used as a tool is used as a propaganda and popular way of online political engagement (M. Khan, 2024).

Figure 5

How social media affects political discourse in Pakistan?

In what ways do you think social media affects political discourse in Pakistan?
141 responses
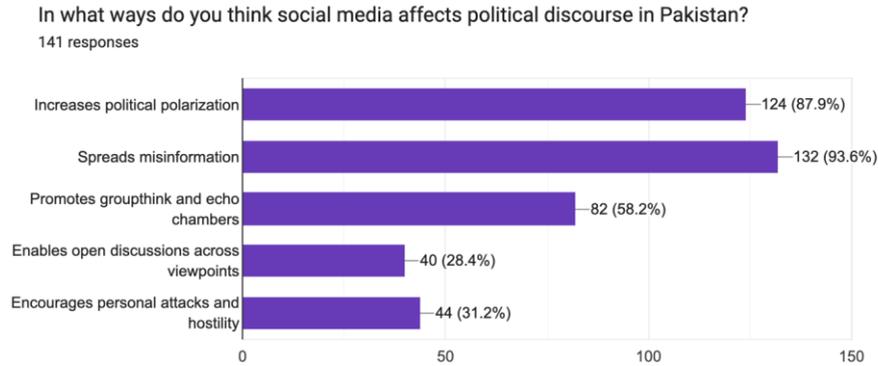
The survey results confirm the literature by showing that 93.6% of respondents think that social media spreads misinformation, while 87.9% think that it increases political polarization in Pakistan. Similarly, 58.2% of respondents selected that it promotes group thinking.

6.5. Social Media's Role in Elections

The role of social media in shaping political discourse has been acknowledged the world over. Imran Khan, chairman of PTI and former prime minister, weaponized social media by challenging his political opponents and informing the general masses about their misdeeds (as per his stance) and their political machinations. He utilized social media for organizing multiple protests, which has always put the rival groups in hot water. The low literacy rate, particularly digital literacy, in Pakistan provided fertile ground for social media-based disinformation, resulting in further polarization of society. Therefore, the unregulated realm of social media in developing countries is turning into an Achilles' heel against the governments, which are already grappling with a plethora of issues(A. Khan et al., 2023).

Figure 6

*Relation of social media with political polarization*
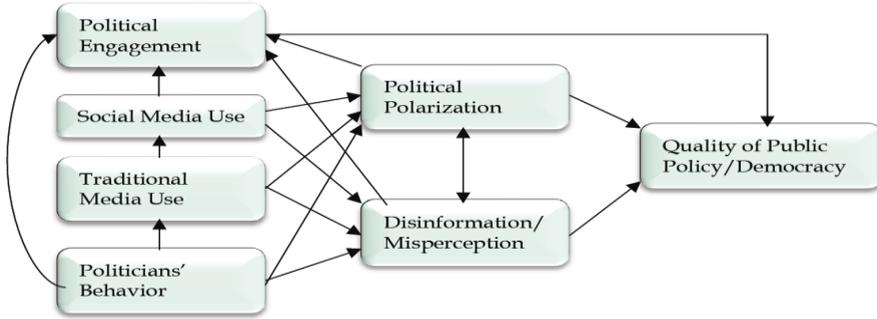
Source: Relationship of Social Media with Political Polarization (A. Khan et al., 2023)

6.6. Digital Literacy

Pakistan has no digital education mechanism, which has contributed to political polarization. It is pertinent to highlight that even in the US major newspapers are carrying out awareness through "news literacy lessons" and educating the masses about how to observe and pick up on fake news, despite of the 100% literacy rate there. Masses are also apprised about the brimming conspiracy theories and cater to the need of youth to learn how to counter the tactics of fake content creators. The government in Pakistan has realized the importance of digital education, and in order to counter the menace of fake news and derogatory memes, many steps are under consideration to curb this latest trend, which is adversely affecting the society at large (A. Khan et al., 2023b).

Figure 7

Relationship of Digital Literacy imposed by Government with responsible behavior of Civilians
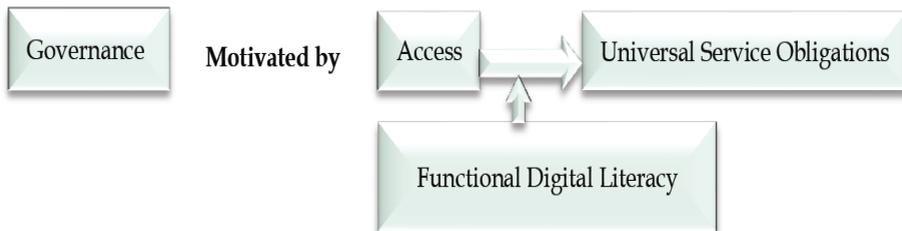
Source: Relationship of Digital Literacy Imposed by Government with Responsible Behavior of Civilians (A. Khan et al., 2023b)
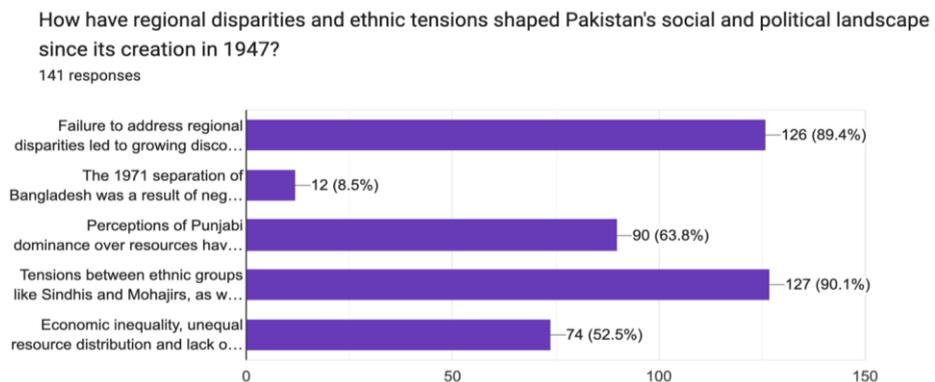
6.7. Geostrategic and External Dynamics

Pakistan has seen many military interventions due to external and internal dynamics, which have further scuttled the evolution of democratic culture in Pakistan. This often leads to increased tensions between political factions and weakens the government's ability to maintain control. External factors like the military intervention in Afghanistan through NATO are a case in point, which contributed to serious internal friction in different factions in Pakistan and polarized the society, especially on religious lines. Moreover, soft-to-hard sanctions, such as the withdrawal of foreign aid or the suspension of diplomatic relations, also contribute to economic-cum-political instability in Pakistan (Nisar & AROOJ, 2022).

6.8. Divisions on Ethnic and Regional Lines

Pakistan's creation in 1947 brought together various ethnic groups, each with distinct cultures and languages. The country's early leadership failed to address regional disparities, leading to growing discontent. The 1971 Bangladesh separation exemplifies the consequences of neglecting regional aspirations. Perceptions of Punjabi dominance over the country's resources have fueled resentment among minority ethnic groups. The Sindhi-Mohajir tensions and Pashtun nationalism, besides Baluchistan's economic neglect, resource exploitation, and state violence, have put its due share in polarization. In addition to this, regional disparities in the form of economic inequality, resource distribution, and political representation have also exacerbated ethnic tensions.

Figure 8

Regional disparities and ethnic tensions shaped Pakistan's social and political landscape

How have regional disparities and ethnic tensions shaped Pakistan's social and political landscape since its creation in 1947?

141 responses

Category	Value
Failure to address regional disparities led to growing disco…	126 (89.4%)
The 1971 separation of Bangladesh was a result of neg…	12 (8.5%)
Perceptions of Punjabi dominance over resources hav…	90 (63.8%)
Tensions between ethnic groups like Sindhis and Mohajirs, as w…	127 (90.1%)
Economic inequality, unequal resource distribution and lack o…	74 (52.5%)

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

The survey conducted exhibits that 90.1% of respondents think that tensions

between ethnic groups like Sindhis and Mohajirs, as well as Pashtun nationalism, have affected social cohesion, while 89.4% of respondents reacted that failure to address regional disparities has led to growing discontent among ethnic groups.
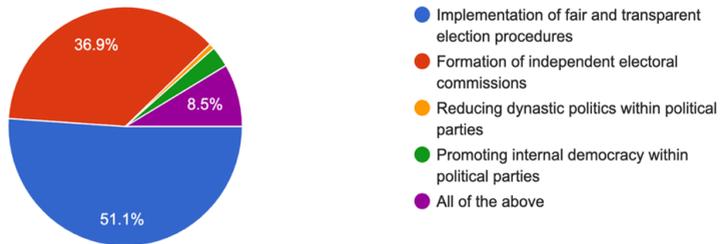
6.9. Electoral Loopholes

Pakistan's electoral process has always been controversial for its lack of transparency. In the country's total of 12 elections, except for the 1970 elections, all other polling processes led to clashes and consequent tension over the election results. The political parties in Pakistan failed to fix this situation, which is a major cause of political friction in Pakistan. All the developed countries have improved their electoral laws and introduced the latest technologies for free and fair elections. The basic prerequisite for a successful democratic system is the holding of free and fair elections. Unfortunately the successive governments have never tried to address this root cause of political polarization, which has prevented the evolution of a democratic culture in Pakistan. Instead, the parties in power have always tried to use the loopholes in the electoral system to their advantage.

The following chart amply testifies the fact regarding the role of electoral process in Pakistan and the need for remedial measures.

Figure 9

Electoral reforms that reduce political polarization in Pakistan

Which of the following electoral reforms could help reduce political polarization in Pakistan?
141 responses

- Implementation of fair and transparent election procedures
- Formation of independent electoral commissions
- Reducing dynastic politics within political parties
- Promoting internal democracy within political parties
- All of the above

36.9%
8.5%
51.1%

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

6.10. Controlled Democracy

True democracy is based on the principles of rule of law, accountability, and justice. In contrast, Pakistani democracy has been predominantly overwhelmed by power politics, personalities, injustice, inequity, and centralism, which has stunted the progress of democratic values. The vested interests of all stakeholders have created the impression that democratic values are underdeveloped due to lack of education, hence giving rise to the concept of

controlled democracy. While fundamental factors such as the role of the higher judiciary, the authoritarian style of politicians, and the interference of state institutions have never been considered appropriate for collective efforts (Akhtar, 2009b).

The idea of controlled democracy is espoused by certain groups on the pretext that democracy requires maximum education and literacy rates in the general masses, which are lacking in Pakistan. Therefore some military rulers, like General Pervez Musharraf, were proponents of controlled democracy in Pakistan. General Musharraf introduced the concept of the National Security Council (NSC) for oversight over government. Through this oversight body, the government had been dominated by the military establishment (Ahmed & Afridi, 2014).
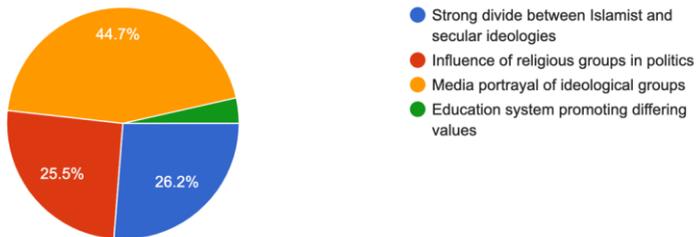
6.11. Ideological Rifts

Pakistan, an Islamic republic, has been grappling with deep-seated ideological differences since its inception. The divide between Islamist and secular factions has significantly impacted the country's politics, society, and governance. Pakistan's creation in 1947 was rooted in the Two-Nation Theory, which posited that Muslims and Hindus constituted separate nations. This ideology emphasized Islam's role in governance and politics. However, the country's early leadership, particularly Muhammad Ali Jinnah, envisioned a secular and inclusive Pakistan. This ambiguity set the stage for future ideological conflict. This ideological divide has led to intolerance and instability, which have adversely affected governance and social cohesion.

Figure 10

Primary cause of political polarization due to ideological difference

What do you believe is the primary cause of political polarization in Pakistan due to ideological differences?
141 responses

- Strong divide between Islamist and secular ideologies
- Influence of religious groups in politics
- Media portrayal of ideological groups
- Education system promoting differing values

44.7%
25.5%
26.2%

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

44.7% of people think that media portrayal of ideological groups is the primary

cause of political polarization in Pakistan due to ideological differences. While 26.2% of respondents reacted that a strong divide between Islamist and secular ideologies and 25.5% of respondents think that the influence of religious groups in politics is the primary cause of political polarization due to ideological differences.

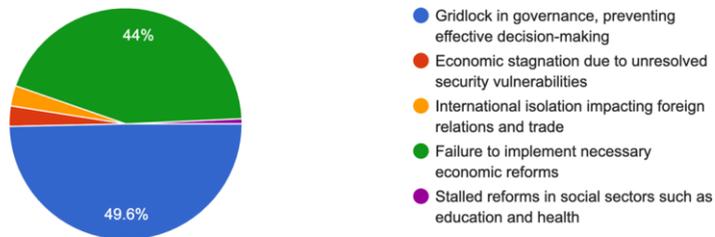## 7. Polarized Politics and the Erosion of Governance Structures

7.1. Political Stalemate and Policy Paralysis

Pakistan, a nation of over 220 million, is grappling with debilitating political polarization and social fragmentation. This toxic combination has resulted in policy paralysis, crippling the country's ability to address pressing challenges. Political polarization in Pakistan due to the aforementioned causes has paralyzed the whole governance paradigm in Pakistan, which has led to economic stagnation, security vulnerabilities, social injustices/disparities, and international isolation. Due to these problems, the government has been unable to address pressing issues like the energy crisis, economic reforms, terrorism, and reforms in social sectors like education and health.

Figure 11

Impact on governance regarding gridlock and policy paralysis

How does political polarization impact governance in Pakistan, particularly regarding gridlock and policy paralysis?
141 responses

- Gridlock in governance, preventing effective decision-making
- Economic stagnation due to unresolved security vulnerabilities
- International isolation impacting foreign relations and trade
- Failure to implement necessary economic reforms
- Stalled reforms in social sectors such as education and health

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

7.2. Lack of Cooperation among Political Parties

Reduced cooperation among political parties in Pakistan has significantly impacted governance in the country, leading to political instability, slowed social and economic development, and increased polarization. The lack of cooperation has resulted in a weak governance framework, low coordination between different actors, and puny institutional capacity, exacerbating challenges in governance. One of the primary challenges is the inability to pass crucial legislation due to the lack of consensus among parties. This has led to
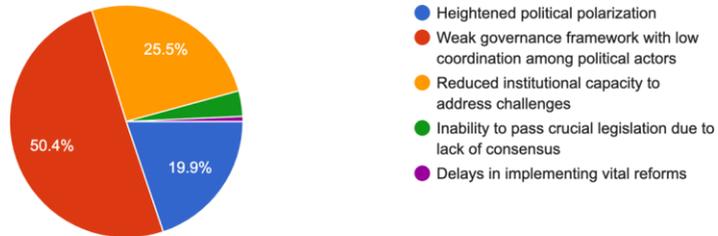
delays in implementing vital reforms, hindering Pakistan's progress. The 18th Amendment, for instance, has created fiscal space issues for the federal government, highlighting the need for exhaustive research and debate before proposing policies.

Figure 12

Primary impact of reduced cooperation among political parties in Pakistan

In your opinion, what is the primary impact of reduced cooperation among political parties in Pakistan?
141 responses

- Heightened political polarization
- Weak governance framework with low coordination among political actors
- Reduced institutional capacity to address challenges
- Inability to pass crucial legislation due to lack of consensus
- Delays in implementing vital reforms

25.5%
50.4%
19.9%

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

The Google survey reveals that 50.4% of respondents believe that low coordination among political actors weakens governance, and 25.5% think that it reduces institutional capacity to address challenges.

7.3. Conflict and Instability

Pakistan's conflict and instability have severely undermined governance, as they have caused economic stagnation and reduced investment, created social injustices and disparities, and eroded the rule of law in Pakistan. It has also weakened democratic institutions (Parliament, judiciary), increased the establishment's influence, caused bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption, and reduced law enforcement agencies' effectiveness. This polarized environment has engendered many issues, including but not limited to creating societal unrest, a trust deficit in state institutions, governance crises through frequent changes in government, and exacerbated economic crises in the country.
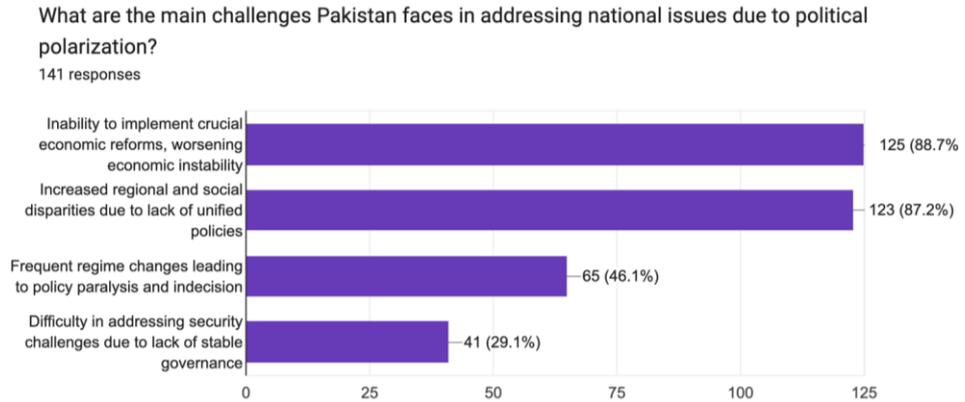
7.4. Lack of Focus on National Economy and Security Challenges

Political polarization has confronted Pakistan with many challenges, due to which the economic situation of the country has been on a downward trajectory over the past decade. This crisis has led to poor governance, which has engendered regional and social disparities. Frequent regime changes have also

led to policy paralysis and indecision, which further erodes public trust in the system. Pakistan's political polarization has crippled its ability to address pressing national challenges.

Figure 13

Main challenges in addressing national issues due to political polarization

What are the main challenges Pakistan faces in addressing national issues due to political polarization?

141 responses

Challenge	Value
Inability to implement crucial economic reforms, worsening economic instability	125 (88.7%)
Increased regional and social disparities due to lack of unified policies	123 (87.2%)
Frequent regime changes leading to policy paralysis and indecision	65 (46.1%)
Difficulty in addressing security challenges due to lack of stable governance	41 (29.1%)

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

The graph shows 88.7% of respondents think that political polarization impedes the ability of government to implement crucial economic reforms, while 87.2% selected that it increases regional and social disparities.

7.5. Erosion of Trust in State Institutions

Pakistan is experiencing a governance crisis stemming from political polarization. The public trust has been eroding in state institutions due to the weak judicial system and faulty election process, besides media biases. This has undermined democratic institutions, eroded public trust and confidence, and increased political violence and extremism.
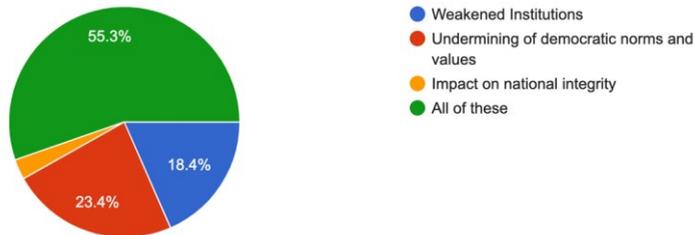
Figure 14

Impact of Polarization and Extremism on democratic Institutions

How Polarization and Extremism impact the democratic Institutions?
141 responses

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

In the pie chart, 55.3% of respondents believe that polarization and extremism weaken democratic institutions and undermine democratic norms and values.

7.6. Rise of Extremist Groups

Political polarization in Pakistan has created a fertile ground for extremist groups to emerge and flourish. The country's history of political instability, ethnic and linguistic divisions, and ideological differences between secular and Islamist groups have all contributed to an environment in which extremist ideologies flourish. It has adversely impacted governance as the country's weak institutions, including its government, judiciary, and law enforcement agencies, have failed to address the root causes of extremism.
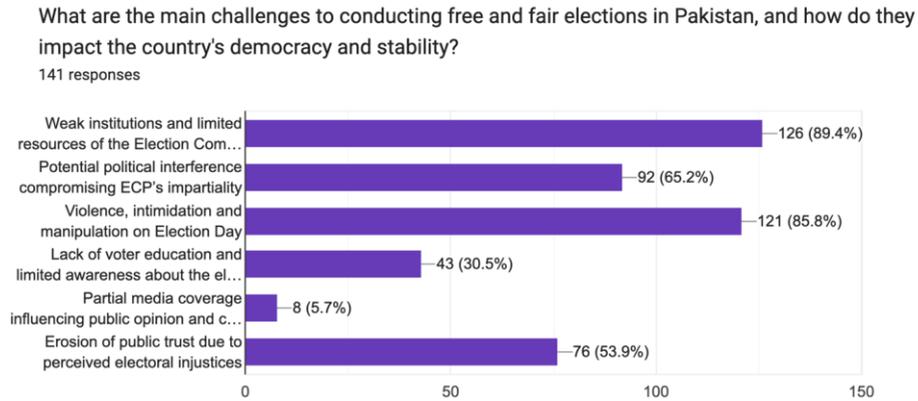
7.7. Challenges in Conducting Free and Fair Elections

Conducting free and fair elections is crucial for the promotion of democratic culture in the country. However, in Pakistan there are many challenges in conducting free and fair elections due to weak institutions. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) faces challenges in ensuring impartiality and transparency due to limited resources and interference by elitist groups. In addition to this, threatening and manipulative tactics on Election Day also put a question mark on the authenticity of the electoral process in Pakistan. Lack of voter education and limited awareness among voters about the electoral process and their rights also lead to disenfranchisement. Partial media coverage also influences public opinion and undermines the credibility of the electoral process. This leads to erosion of trust, because flawed elections can fuel mistrust among political parties, leading to increased polarization and social unrest. It is also pertinent to mention that perceived electoral injustices discourage citizens from participating in the democratic process. Disputed

election results further escalate tensions between parties, potentially leading to violence.

Figure 15

Challenges to conduct fair and free elections

What are the main challenges to conducting free and fair elections in Pakistan, and how do they impact the country's democracy and stability?

141 responses

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

The graph indicates that 89.4% of people identify weak institutions and limited resources of the ECP as a key cause of electoral impartiality, while 85.8% point to violence, intimidation, and manipulation on Election Day. Additionally, 65.2% cite potential political interference as a contributing factor.
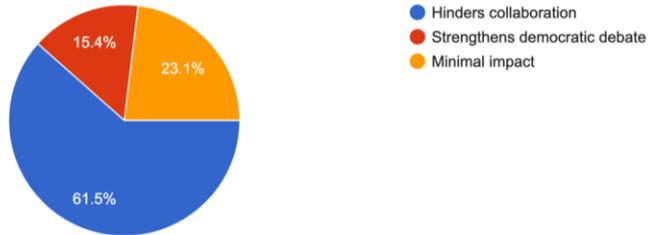
7.8. Governance under Political Strain

Political polarization has weakened governance in Pakistan. The government has been unable to effectively address key social and economic issues due to political divisions, which has further eroded public trust in the government. Political polarization has significant implications for governance, and it has become increasingly difficult for governments to continue with public interest projects and policies in a politically charged environment. In the same Google Forms survey, a question regarding the impacts of political polarization was asked, in response to which 65.5% of people think that it hinders collaboration between different political parties, which impedes the government from carrying out public interest legislation and working wholeheartedly for the economic prosperity of the country.

Figure 16

Impacts of Political Polarization on governance

How does political polarization impact governance in Pakistan?
26 responses

● Hinders collaboration
● Strengthens democratic debate
● Minimal impact

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

7.9. Mega Projects and Policy Inconsistency

It is very difficult for the incumbent government to continue with mega projects in a politically polarized environment, as the opposition parties and rival groups resort to street agitations and protests on a daily basis. They call the government illegitimate by bracketing the elections as rigged. This political instability translates into governance. It is clearly visible in delaying project completion and investment ambiguity in investors. Due to this the local industry is in bad shape, and the investors are fleeing the country for a better and more stable environment. Furthermore, political instability and frequent changes in government often result in the neglect of previous administrations' projects, leading to significant delays in their completion. They divert funds from important projects due to the rivals' tag attached to them. But the ultimate casualty is that important projects are delayed and costs escalate, which adversely affects the national growth of the country. The following table show the details of major infrastructure projects in Pakistan which faced delays due to change of governments.

Table 1

Major Projects delayed due to change of government

Project	Estimated cost	Project Description	Issues faced due to government change
Bhasha Dam	Over USD 14 billion	For water storage	Numerous delay due to changing priorities among government
Lahore Bus	Rs. 29.61	Mass transit	Project Delayed due to

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Project	Estimated cost	Project Description	Issues faced due to government change
Rapid Transit (BRT)	Billion	project for improvement of urban transportation.	political opposition and instability.
Karachi Circular Railway (KCR)	2.002 Billion Dollars	Project for improved public transportation	Delayed due to political disagreements and governance crises.
China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)	62 Billion Dollars (Estimated)	Major roads and energy infrastructure project for overall economic development of the region.	Political wrangling complicated negotiations which adversely affected its execution.
Naya Pakistan Housing Project	Rs.33 billion (Estimated)	A housing initiative aimed at providing affordable housing to low-income families.	Political rivalries and change of governments affected the overall progress of the scheme.
Pakistan Kidney and Liver Institution (PKLI)	Rs. 20 billion	World class hospital for liver and kidney diseases to provide free treatment	Financial and administration audits under new government, questioned initial spending which stops further development
Orange Line Metro Train (Lahore)	Rs. 250 billion	Traffic congestion and pollution in Lahore	Delayed by PTI government in 2018 due to over cost and environment concerns

8. The Social Consequences of Political Polarization

Despite many decades of its existence, Pakistani society could not develop into

a homogeneous whole through a common national identity and shared symbols of national pride. Over the years the bond between state and society has weakened, which is adversely affecting social cohesion. The rapidly widening gaps among different factions are driving a wedge in national unity along trivial parochial lines instead of bringing them close to each other in order to build a cohesive society. It is also pertinent to highlight that successive political governments have also failed in this task and have only looked after their own personal myopic agendas, which led to further discord and a politically polarized environment. The current state of affairs banking on hubris, intolerance, parochial interests, and chaos is threatening the very foundations of the state of Pakistan (Ishaque et al., 2022). The following diagram succinctly summarizes the challenges of national integration and social cohesion in Pakistan.

Figure 17

Challenges to Social Cohesion in Pakistan

Source: Challenges to Social Cohesion in Pakistan. (Ishaque et al., 2022)

8.1. Increased Intolerance and Hatred

Pakistan's entrenched political polarization has spawned an environment of intolerance and hatred, fracturing society along ideological, ethnic, and sectarian lines. As rival parties and groups espouse divergent views, the narrative becomes increasingly confrontational, fueling animosity and distrust. Social media platforms amplify divisive rhetoric, perpetuating hate speech and vitriol. This environment of hate and intolerance has emboldened extremist elements, leading to increased violence and targeting of minorities, dissenting voices, and opposing political activists. The blurring of lines between political disagreement and personal vendetta has contributed to the normalization of hatred, intolerance, and incivility, eroding Pakistan's social fabric and
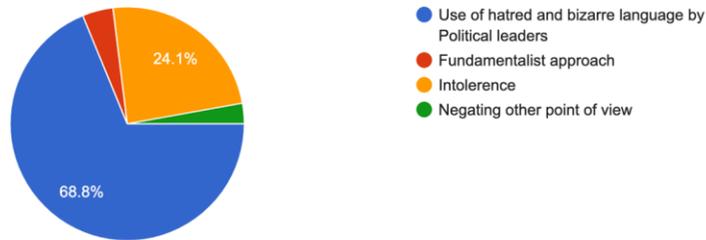
democratic values. As a result, constructive dialogue and reconciliation have given way to entrenched positions, further fueling polarization and undermining national cohesion.

Figure 18

Causes that promote unethical and misbehavior in Pakistani youth

In your opinion, what are the underlying causes that promote unethical and misbehaviour in Pakistani Youth?

141 responses

- ● Use of hatred and bizarre language by Political leaders
- ● Fundamentalist approach
- ● Intolerence
- ● Negating other point of view

24.1%

68.8%

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

In the above pie chart, a question regarding the underlying cause that promotes unethical behavior in Pakistani youth is asked, in response to which 68.8% of respondents think that it is the use of hatred and bizarre language by political leaders, while 24.1% think that intolerance is the main reason that promotes unethical behavior in Pakistani youth.
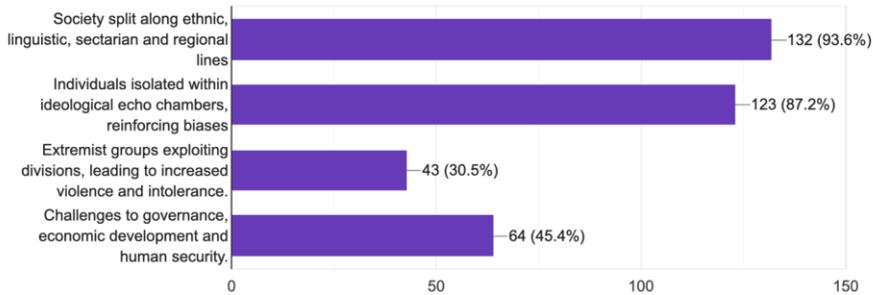
8.2. Social Divisions and Fragmentation

As rival parties and ideologies vie for dominance, long-simmering tensions are exacerbated, and communal identities are politicized. The resultant fissures have created parallel fiefdoms, where individuals interact primarily within their own ideological echo chambers, reinforcing biases and prejudices. Regional disparities and unequal resource distribution further fuel grievances, as marginalized communities become increasingly disillusioned with the political system. The fragmentation has also enabled extremist groups to exploit these divisions, perpetuating violence and intolerance. Consequently, Pakistan's social cohesion has been shattered, undermining national unity and exacerbating challenges to governance, economic development, and human security. As polarization intensifies, the very fabric of Pakistani society is threatened, portending dire consequences for the country's stability and future.

Figure 19

Consequences of social divisions and fragmentation in Pakistan

What are the main consequences of social divisions and fragmentation in Pakistan due to political polarization?

141 responses

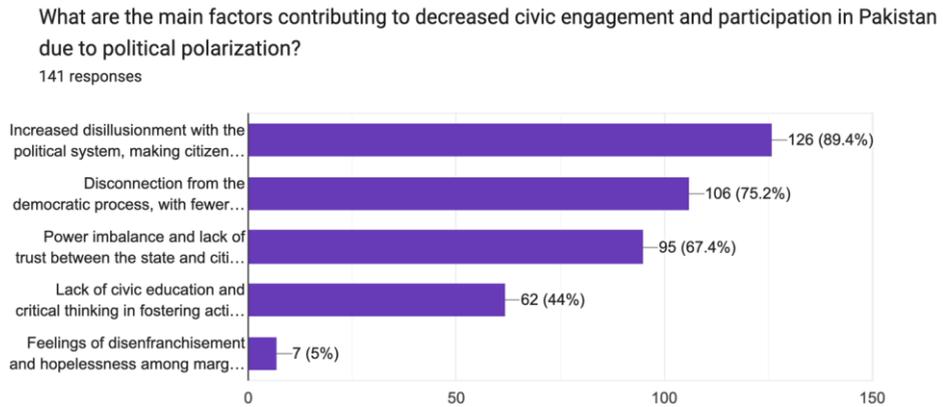Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

The graph illustrates responses regarding the main consequences of social divisions and fragmentation in Pakistan resulting from political polarization. According to the data, 93.6% of respondents identified the splitting of society along ethnic, linguistic, sectarian, and regional lines as the primary consequence, while 87.2% pointed to individuals becoming isolated within ideological echo chambers that reinforce existing biases.

8.3. Decreased Civic Engagement and Participation

Decreased civic engagement and participation in Pakistan is directly linked to the country's escalating political polarization. This polarization has created an environment where citizens are increasingly disillusioned with the political system. As a result, many Pakistanis have become disgruntled with the democratic process, opting out of elections and other forms of civic engagement. The controversial role of social media has further worsened the already fragile spectrum of civic engagement. Besides this, the marginalization of certain groups has also diminished the possibilities of civic engagement. Thus the general populace is increasingly becoming indifferent to electoral processes, and a state of despondency prevails, leading to reduction of public trust in state institutions.

Figure 20

Factors contributing to decrease civic engagement & participation in Pakistan

What are the main factors contributing to decreased civic engagement and participation in Pakistan due to political polarization?

141 responses

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

The above graph shows that 89.4% of respondents think decreased civic engagement has been caused by their disillusionment with the political system, while 75.2% think that it is due to disconnection from the democratic process with fewer people participating in elections. 67.4% of respondents think that it is because of power imbalance and lack of trust between the state and citizens.

8.4. Rise of Violent Extremism

The surge in violent extremism is directly connected to political polarization, which engenders dissent and provides fertile ground for extremist outfits to exploit the situation for their own ulterior motives through recruitment of the disgruntled youth. Governance crises, political instability, economic deterioration, and inequalities are all fodder for the extremist outfits to capitalize on. Thus, there is a continuous trend of decreased social cohesion and societal decay.

8.5. Decreased Trust among Communities

Trust deficit is the major casualty of political polarization, which has led to the creation of hostile groups who are playing with public sentiments along regional, ethnic, sectarian, and linguistic lines. It is pertinent to highlight that this trend is continuously threatening national integration and creating hatred.

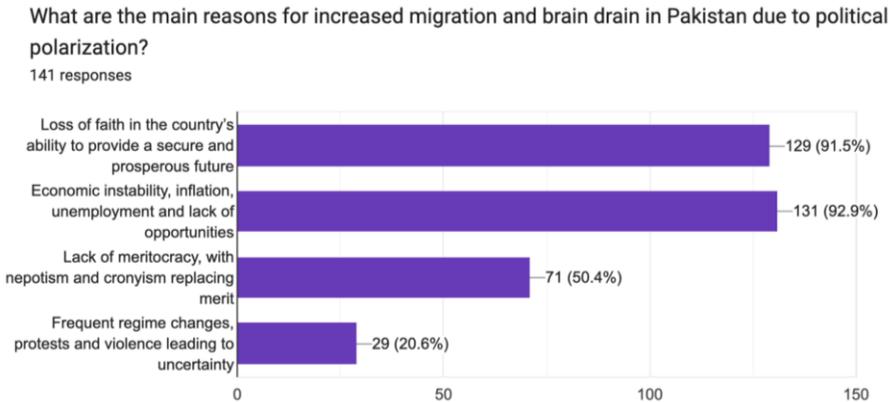## 8.6. Increased Migration and Brain Drain

Lack of meritocracy, nepotism, and cronyism have replaced merit, discouraging talented individuals. Although these individuals do contribute in

the form of remittances, the loss of skilled workers hurts Pakistan's economy. Brain drain undermines Pakistan's ability to compete globally.

Figure 21

Increased migration and brain drain due to political polarization

What are the main reasons for increased migration and brain drain in Pakistan due to political polarization?
141 responses

Source: Survey conducted through google form link: https://forms.gle/6Tne8sxHY2wdtVWc6

In the above graph, 92.9% of respondents think that the main reasons for increased migration and brain drain are economic instability, inflation, unemployment, and lack of opportunities, while 91.5% think that the reason is loss of faith in the country's ability to provide a secure and prosperous future. 50.4% think that lack of meritocracy, with nepotism and cronyism replacing merit, is the main reason for increased migration and brain drain in Pakistan.

8.7. Lack of political Consensus

Political polarization has also diminished the prospects of constructive political engagement and dialogue. Due to rigid political postures and vindictive politics, the situation is compounded further and the ultimate casualty is the governance and social cohesion which is harming national integration and social cohesion.

8.8. Social Divisions

United and integrated societies, cemented through common national identities, are the hallmark for political evolution and economic growth. However, Pakistani polity is in serious crisis due to political polarization, which has diminished the prospects of social cohesion and national integration. Increased social cohesion is dependent on equal opportunities, equal distribution of resources, and ensuring the rule of law, which are all lacking in Pakistan due to increased political polarization.

9. Conclusion

The paper's findings support the conceptual framework proposed at the outset, reinforcing political polarization, particularly affective polarization, as a key driver in governance gaps and social divisions. Since 2013, Pakistan has experienced sustained political instability, undermined effective governance and weakened social cohesion. In this period, the decline in public trust in institutions and the rise in identity-based politics reflect the deterioration in bridging social capital and governance legitimacy. During this period, cyclical and mutually reinforcing relationships between polarization, declining trust in institutions, and weak governance are evident. The crisis has been further exacerbated by a lack of accountability and disregard for the rule of law. Due to the constant tug-of-war between political forces and continuous changes in the administrative machinery, the prospects for long-term initiatives for the country's economic development and their implementation have disappeared. The deterioration of bridging social capital mirrors economic inequality, diminishing public trust, and regional disparities, compounded with a media ecosystem—particularly social media—that imposes elites' narratives from the top. The divisive narratives of elites embolden the public to stage protest culture and street disruption and even further contribute to destabilizing the security and governance apparatus. These findings affirm the core essentials of the framework: polarization not only threatens the civic fabric of life but also reinforces itself through governance gaps and diminished cohesion. Thus, the study affirms the cyclical and mutually reinforcing relationship between the three concepts outlined in the framework.

10. Recommendations

In order to overcome the challenge of Political polarization and its adverse effects on governance and social cohesion, the following recommendations are proposed:

10.1. Strengthening Rule of Law

The first and foremost requirement for reducing political polarization is the enforcement of rule of law in letter and spirit. Society is polarized when there is no respect for rule of law and no fear of accountability. Pakistan has also been plagued by disregard for the rule of law where the powerful have invariably got scot-free and the disadvantaged are always punished. It creates a sense of deprivation which leads to political polarization. Rule of Law helps in building trust between different groups and reduce the perception of discrimination and bias.

10.2. Encouraging Dialogue and Engagement

Lack of consensus among political parties and other factions has been the main cause of political polarization in Pakistan. Almost all the politicians have

adopted a belligerent posture and are in no way ready to reconcile in national interest. Therefore, the establishment being a reality in Pakistan, should come forward in national interest and actuate a compromise among all the factions by clearly specifying the rules of the game, for all to follow. The state institutions can play a pivotal role in this national reconciliation process and it must also ensure its neutrality in order to boost confidence of all the political forces in the country.

10.3. Media Literacy and Ethics

In modern world the, media has assumed a pivotal role in shaping public discourse and molding public opinion. Therefore it is the need of the hour that media and social media should be placed under a regulatory regime wherein fake news and character assassinations are dealt under strict punitive measures. No media outlet or social media user should be allowed to fuel conflict and promote disharmony in the society. Media literacy programs should be initiated on the patter of USA through which the general public may be educated about the positive use of social media. On the other hand media should also recognize its due role and in order to reduce political polarization and friction in society should promote balance and authentic reporting and desist from sensationalizing news items. Through the "media education strategy" the media should educate them about the importance of highlighting the positives for the promotion of harmony in the society. A code of media ethics with proper implementation and accountability regime is required to streamline and improve media's role regarding mass education.

10.4. Fostering a Culture of Tolerance

Tolerance and respect for other differing point of views are the hallmarks of peaceful and harmonious societies. Many countries are composed of diversified groups, races, castes and religious communities but they have capitalized on their strengths and have achieved great heights through diversity. The USA is a mix of different cultures and identities but they have achieved great harmony through tolerance and respect for all the communities. Although Pakistan has many cultural, linguistic, religious diversities but the same can be converted into our strength through justice, fair play, merit and tolerance. This will contribute towards national integration and economic development. The role of education and literacy is of great importance in educating the youth about respect and tolerance for all segments of society. The state should play its due role in promotion of human rights, rule of law, equitable distribution of resource, equal opportunities, decentralization of power and provincial autonomy for peaceful coexistence.

10.5. Encouraging Political Participation

Political participation and engagement is the sine qua non of a successful

democratic system. The government should create awareness about participative politics and respect the power of vote. Violation of political mandate leads to disgruntlement and political polarization which deters citizens from engaging in political process. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the government, civil society, media outlets and academia play its due role in encouraging political participation which will ultimately lead to a more harmonized and peaceful society.

10.6. Empower Democratic Institutions

Political harmony is engendered by true democratic institutions, an impartial judicial system, transparent electoral process and mass education. Therefore, it is proposed that the state institutions should in coordination with all the relevant stakeholders devise a strategy to improve democratic institutions, overhaul the judicial system and ensure transparency and accountability in all the policies of the government to decrease political polarization in Pakistan.

10.7. Promote Economic Equality

Political polarization and instability are the consequences of economic inequality and violation of economic rights. Therefore the government should take immediate steps to reduce economic inequalities by equitable distribution of resources, equal education and employment opportunities, respect for political mandate and rule of law by ensuring accountability across the board. This can be ensured through decentralization of power, ensuring provincial autonomy, introduction of true democracy at the grass roots level and implementation of the uniform education system for all segments of society. The Charter of Economy for economic growth of the country can contribute in promotion of economic opportunities for all.

10.8. Good Governance and Accountability

In order to reduce political polarization, the government must take immediate steps to reform its governance structure and reduce corruption in state institutions. It is a fact that polarized society engenders corruption and bad governance but it is also true that bad governance and corruption has also contributed to a great extent to political polarization and instability in Pakistan. The government needs to immediately tackle this issue by reforming the governance structure and through introduction of an impartial accountability mechanisms. It is also pertinent to highlight that the State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) are a major drain on national economy which has diverted public money to keep these SOEs running instead of spending this on public welfare. The government should immediately get rid of these white elephants to create more fiscal space for social welfare and development programs for the common good of the general masses.

10.9. Improving Security

Besides governance crises and political instability Pakistan has been plagued by security problems due to internal and external factors. During the last two decades Pakistan has borne the brunt of the war on terrorism post 9/11 which has taken a huge toll on Pakistan's economic, material and human loss in the form of casualties sustained by security forces. Volatile security situation has deterred foreign investment and also affected local investment and businesses.

Therefore the government of Pakistan should take concrete steps to improve the security situation by strengthening the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and give it financial and administrative authority to address the scourge of terrorism and security.

10.10. Empowering Civil Society

As Pakistan has endured many challenges in the form of instability and political polarization especially since 2013, therefore, it is high time that all the political factions must join hands and work for national unity and public welfare. Every party has the right to pursue its political manifesto but the overall aim should be in line with creating harmony and public welfare. The government should encourage civil society organizations and other stakeholder to forge a strong nexus for peaceful coexistence through mutual respect, harmony and tolerant attitudes towards divergent point of views.

10.11. Policy Matrix

Policy matrix based on the above recommendations is attached at Annexure-I

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ANNEXURE I: POLICY RECOMMENDATION MATRIX

Strengthening of Rule of Law

Activity 1	KPI	Means of Verification	Funding	Executing Agency	Time Frame
Overhauling the Judicial system	Change in method of induction to the superior judiciary	Act of Parliament	No Cost	Federal Government	2-3 Years
	50% of Vacant Posts filled per year	Recruitment Orders	Federal and Provincial Governments	Federal and Provincial Governments	1-2 Years
	50% of the required Additional Posts created per year to ensure speedy justice	SNE creation	Federal and Provincial Governments	Federal and Provincial Governments	1-2 Years

Activity 2	KPI	Means of Verification	Funding	Executing Agency	Time Frame
Strengthening and overhauling of Prosecution service	Creation of specialized persecution department	Approved Summary by the Chief Minister	Provincial Governments	Provincial Governments	3-6 Months
	% Number of Vacant Posts filled	Recruitment Orders	Provincial Governments	Provincial Governments	1-2 Years
	50% of the required Additional Posts created	SNE creation	Provincial Governments	Provincial Governments	1-2 Years

Activity 3	KPI	Means of Verification	Funding	Executing Agency	Time Frame
Promotion of Alternate Dispute Resolution Mechanisms	% Number of awareness campaigns conducted	Seminars/ symposiums held	10 Million per Year by MOI/Home	MOI/Home Department	3-6 Months
	50 % Number of Vacant Posts filled	Recruitment Orders	Provincial Governments	Provincial Governments	1-2 Years
	50 % Number of Additional Posts created	SNE creation	Provincial Governments	Provincial Governments	1-2 Years

Encouraging Dialogue and Engagement

Activity	KPIs	Means of Verification	Funding	Executing Agency	Time Frame
Establish community dialogue forums in every village council	% Number of forums held and participants engaged	Attendance records maintained in village council by secretary VC	Government budget, NGO funding	Local Government, NGOs	Ongoing
Facilitate academic exchanges and research dialogues	% Number of academic collaborations initiated	Partnership agreements, conference reports	University funding, HEC research grants	Educational Institutions	2-3 years
Develop a national dialogue platform	Platform established and operational	Platform usage statistics	Government funding	National Dialogue Authority	1-2 years

Media Literacy and Ethics

Activity	KPIs	Means of Verification	Funding	Executing Agency	Time Frame
Develop a National Media Literacy Curriculum	Curriculum adopted by % number of educational institutions	Adoption records, feedback from educators	Government budget, international grants	Ministry of Education/Provincial education departments	1-2 years
Conduct media literacy workshops for educators through national media	% Number of workshops conducted and participants	Attendance records, participant evaluations	NGO funding, educational grants	NGOs, Educational Institutions	Ongoing
Organize national seminars on media ethics	Number of seminars held and participants	Seminar reports, participant feedback	Government budget, sponsorships	Universities, Media Institutions	Annual

Encouraging Political Participation

Activity	KPIs	Means of Verification	Funding	Executing Agency	Time Frame
Develop a national youth engagement strategy	Number of youth engaged in political activities	Participation records, surveys	Government budget, international grants	Ministry of Youth Affairs	1-2 years
Organize voter education campaigns for youth	Number of campaigns conducted and participants	Campaign reports, attendance records	NGO funding, corporate sponsorship	Local NGOs, Educational Institutions/LG	Ongoing
Promote women's political participation initiatives	Number women participating in politics	Participation statistics, election outcomes	Donor funding, government support	Women's Rights Organizations	Ongoing

Empowering Democratic Institutions

Activity	KPIs	Means of Verification	Funding	Executing Agency	Time Frame
Conduct training programs for parliamentarians	Number of training sessions held	Training attendance records	LG/ Through collaboration with NGOs	Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs	Ongoing
Enhance the role of civil society in governance	Number of civil society organizations engaged	Partnership agreements, participation logs	Donor funding	LG/Civil Society Organizations	Ongoing
Foster inter-party dialogue and collaboration	Number of dialogues held	Meeting minutes, participant feedback	Federal and Provincial Governments / NGOs/ International donor assistance	Political Parties	Ongoing

Economic Equality

Activity	KPIs	Means of Verification	Funding	Executing Agency	Time Frame
Promote vocational training programs	Number of participants completing training	Certification records, employment statistics	NGO funding, corporate sponsorship	Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA)	Ongoing
Establish microfinance initiatives for low-income families	Number of loans disbursed	Loan records, repayment rates	Microfinance institutions, NGOs	State Bank of Pakistan/Akhuwat	Ongoing
Promote gender equality in economic opportunities	Increase in women participating in the workforce	Employment statistics, gender representation reports	International funding, government support	Ministry of Women Development	Ongoing
Foster small and medium	Number of SMEs	Business registration	Government grants,	Ministry/Departments of Industries	Ongoing

Activity	KPIs	Means of Verification	Funding	Executing Agency	Time Frame
enterprises (SMEs)	/Industrial Estates established	data	private sector investment		

Governance

Activity	KPIs	Means of Verification	Funding	Executing Agency	Time Frame
Devolve powers to local governments	Number of local governments established and empowered	Official gazette notifications, local council records	Government budget, international grants	Local Government Departments	1-2 years
Restructure bureaucracy for efficiency	Reduction in bureaucratic delays and complaints	Service delivery reports, citizen feedback	Government funding	Establishment Division	Ongoing
Promote accountability through anti-corruption initiatives	Number of corruption cases prosecuted	Judicial records, anti-corruption agency reports	NAB/Anti-Corruption Establishments	Anti-Corruption Establishments	Ongoing