

**The Rise of Political Polarization Causes, Consequences and Challenges for  
Democracy in Pakistan**

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**Received:** 15-06-2025

**Revised:** 20-07-2025

**Accepted:** 02-08-2025

**Published:** 12-08-2025

**ABSTRACT**

*The political differences in Pakistan have developed into a severe obstacle that obstructs democratic processes in the country. For several decades the political system of Pakistan has developed partisan divisions which caused a deep split between its voting population and its governmental structures as well as its civil sector. The study investigates various factors behind political polarization in Pakistan while explaining its social and economic results and assessing the impact on democratic institutions. The research investigates historical and modern conditions to reveal the detrimental effects of polarization on political dialogue and public disputes that weaken democratic systems. This study reveals that political polarization intensifies instability throughout Pakistan because it undermines governmental institutions together with citizen trust while corrupting democratic processes. The avoidance of such issues demands extensive reforms which must advance political alignment and minimize partisan behavior and reinforce democratic standards.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Democratic Institutions, Civil Sector

**INTRODUCTION**

Political polarization exists as a critical worldwide matter that both Pakistan and other international nations must address. Political structures in Pakistan have experienced continuous decentralization because institutions developed opposite views on central political matters throughout time. The political leaders and electoral voters have developed deep division because member groups maintain continuous confrontations (Imran et al., 2023). Active photographization has grown during the twenty-first century because of three fundamental components that involve expanding social media power and regional ethnic disunity and political campaigns that question national and religious background.

The present state of political polarization across Pakistan is more than a mere manifestation of contradictory ideologies because it exposes powerful governmental deficiencies and citizens' faith issues with democratic institutions. The rising partisan division in Pakistan's political process creates major consequences for both governmental functionalities and democratic features of the state. High levels of severe political clash lower the government's ability to govern effectively which results in less chances for forming agreements. The intense rift in public opinion transforms public spaces which drives hostility through strong convictions that foster an environment built on distrust.

The political polarization enduring in democratic society affects Pakistan through its growing destructive factional fractures between different political groups. The profound political polarization in Pakistan occurred throughout the last four decades until it reached every section of executive leadership and daily public life within the nation. Political parties now face strong opposition due to their disciple bases instead of using shared decision-making to set aside partisan differences. The increase in political conflicts produces severe harmful effects on administrative governance alongside societal coherence

along with democratic operating procedures. Modern politician-enthusiasts and everyday members of society have joined political polarization programs that used to be a restricted elite practice.

The political polarization in Pakistan goes beyond traditional ideological lines since it stems from historical events forming alliances with social elements and institutional frameworks. Pakistan became a nation where military operations within its political territory remain an integral part of political traditions throughout its entire leadership period. Military coups together with authoritarian rule and insufficient democratic practices starting from 1960 have damaged Pakistan's democratic institutions. Political competition transformed into hostile positions due to historic circumstances leading to more party disintegrations than successful negotiations for mutual solutions. Political antagonism between parties makes voter alliances more severe at the same time that Pakistan keeps facing annual political distrust issues.

Traditional broadcasting systems and digital networks use Pakistan's media system to speed up the creation process of political polarization. The quick expansion of media channels spanning from news networks to social media networks and digital domains produces a surge of political talks which define present-day political discourse. Each news source in Pakistan expresses pro-partisan bias because journalists maintain a preference toward specific political systems (Imran et al., 2023). Several news organizations witness rising society-wide partisanship because audience members deeply investigate their political views yet fail to maintain interest in alternative viewpoints. The site functions as a critical medium because it gives users a space to share edited political messages focused on target political groups through disputable messaging methods. The new media environment developed echo chambers by showing personalized content which matches individual beliefs causing stronger opposition between different political groups.

The active combination of ethnic and regional tensions and sectarian disputes within Pakistan causes its political divisions to reach higher levels. The practice of exploiting political news in sensational ways toward religious and ethnic groups in Pakistan creates extensive social disputes throughout the nation. The constant regional differences continue to persist as the main cause of political conflict specifically between Punjab and the three smaller provinces of Balochistan, Sindh along with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Religious identity functions as a main influencing factor within Pakistani politics because of the country's elaborate relationship with religious identity. During electoral campaigns political organizations choose to represent specific religious sects while doing so they increase religious-based conflicts within the country (Imran et al., 2023). Social and cultural elements establish an unstable political atmosphere which transforms national matters into identity-based and cultural solidarity questions.

Deep political polarization produces extensive negative effects which impact every level of the state. Political parties face extreme challenges in cooperative national decision-making because of how democratic governance has weakened in Pakistan. The current political climate stands as highly polarized which causes standard policy cooperation to disappear between the opposing sides. The country's governing efficiency suffers because political establishments concentrate more on gaining points and attacking competitors rather than fixing national problems. Political polarization creates major distrust between the public and government bodies so politicians face challenges when trying to obtain broad support for their legislative proposals. Nationwide governance functions poorly because political polarization creates such powerful gridlock that it limits executive capacity to implement reforms hence weakens national stability in all its aspects.

Social cohesion stands as the foremost detrimental outcome which arises from political polarization. When political conflicts become stronger the national unity among citizens weakens. People exhibit less national unity while perceiving political opponents rather than fellow citizens (Khan et al., 2023). A decrease in social trust follows the reduction of social cohesion thus harming the operation of a

functioning democratic system. Ethical democratic participation faces severe difficulties from people choosing non-trust in others and their leadership force. Public discourse degradation produces rising political faction hostility until the factions start viewing their opponents as enemies who deserve elimination through intolerable extreme violence.

Particular evaluation of Pakistan's political divide becomes necessary at this time because it follows patterns observed throughout numerous democratic jurisdictions. The historical circumstances and media biases together with Pakistani societal diversity work to boost polarization rates across the nation. Such factors together produce a political system that hinders effective country-wide problem-solving while creating severe social deterioration. The absence of dialogue system between political groups speeds up the splitting of the political landscape in Pakistan.

Politicizing the country of Pakistan requires various interconnected solutions to overcome polarization (Aziz et al., 2023). Politics needs societal transformation toward dialogue-building mechanisms which simultaneously promote tolerant behavior to establish better social understanding among the population. This research investigates both the underlying causes and democratic and stability consequences of political polarization in Pakistan. The study provides detailed analysis to help explain democratic governance effects from polarization and provides solutions that reduce Pakistan's political challenges related to this issue.

National stability faces constant danger alongside democratic institutions because political polarization has become a complex and growing problem in Pakistan (Ahmad, 2022). Political polarization has multiple underlying causes that produce three specific problems such as dysfunctional political processes and social unrest combined with weakened democratic institutions. Complete comprehension of polarization origins alongside suitable solutions serves as necessary steps for securing Pakistan's political stability across future generations. The research describes political polarization mechanisms through evidence-based solutions to handle existing challenges.

This research evaluates the political polarization in Pakistan because it affects democratic operations while investigating the essential factors that lead to this phenomenon. The research examines how political polarization impacts governmental functions while studying its effects on public opinions about governance before presenting the barriers that prevent democratic stability in Pakistan.

### **Research Objectives**

- a) To analyze and identify the major causes of political polarization in Pakistan
- b) To analyze the consequences of political polarization on democracy in Pakistan
- c) To investigate the issues which are posed by polarization to democratic governance
- d) To propose strategies for mitigating political polarization

### **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- a) What are the underlying causes of political polarization in Pakistan?
- b) How has political polarization impacted democratic processes and governance in Pakistan?
- c) What are the implications of political polarization for social cohesion and national unity in Pakistan?
- d) What challenges does political polarization present to the stability of Pakistan's democratic institutions?
- e) What policy measures can be implemented to reduce political polarization in Pakistan?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Public discourse separation within democratic settings has received extensive academic attention throughout the decades especially for its causes as well as its resulting effects and obstacles it presents. More attention has developed in Pakistan about political polarization as it represents a major challenge to the nation's democratic establishment.

Multiple researchers look into the historical and institutional elements that create the deep-rooted political polarization in Pakistan. Arshad et al. (2023) reveals that military meddling in Pakistani politics through continuous takeovers of power has led to harm of democratic values alongside institutional politicization in national institutions based on their research. The military's control has brought about severe party-to-party competition because political actors choose to argue against each other over collaborative conversation. Hanif et al., (2024) states Pakistani political parties make use of religious beliefs and ethnic identities together with national sentiments to increase ongoing political disputes.

According to Ishaque et al., (2022) the media functions as an agent that intensifies political polarization in society. Private news channels together with social media platforms provide users broad unrestricted speech despite distributing partisan political information. Media organizations today choose clear political binary terminology that pushes readers toward single political positions without effective display of complicated public opinions. Sadiq (2024) establishes that populist rhetoric used by authoritative political figures created substantial political divisions throughout America.

Public attitudes towards polarization in Pakistan have followed the same direction as political elites leading to electoral district fragmentation according to alal and Hassan (2025). Extremist political stance choices made by parties cause voters to strengthen their convictions hence diminishing opportunities for negotiation and mutual understanding. Imran et al., (2023) demonstrates how political polarization destroys national unity by allowing only party agendas to supersede collective interests.

Academic sources reveal multiple negative aspects which emerge from political polarization. Polarization creates systemic weakness because it generates political deadlocks that prevent governments from implementing effective policies according to Ali et al., (2025). Khan et al., (2023) demonstrates that polarization as a phenomenon creates disharmony across society which results in fragmented social unity and enhances intolerance levels and extremist movements. Anwar, (n.d.) states that institutional distrust among the public results from polarization which destroys democratic system functionality.

### **Historical Context and Institutional Factors**

A significant body of literature attributes the rise of political polarization in Pakistan to the country's historical trajectory, particularly the repeated military interventions in politics. According to anif et al., (n.d.) political instability and polarization spread because the Pakistani military runs political matters and controls national politics. Through repeated use of martial law the military has damaged political institutions and disrupted democratic processes as well as deepening political separation between members of Pakistan's political elite. Most modern political parties function as opponents through competing rather than democratic collaboration because their main goal seems to unseat rivals instead of focusing on policy development. The historical records in Pakistan have established a partisan political system centered on direct competition where any benefit achieved by one group triggers negative consequences for the other factions and sustains extended divisions inside the Pakistani political domain.

According to Aziz et al., (2023) the political system of Pakistan suffered additional deterioration since the country failed to establish a mature political party system. Pakistan possesses political parties which exist

as personal entities instead of institutional systems because these groups revolve around individual leaders more than political ideologies. The political pattern has become severely split because affiliations rely more on personal loyalty toward leaders than to actual political documents or systems. The existing fragmentation worsens political polarization since each party develops strongly separate worldviews that remain difficult for other parties to agree upon. The phenomenon of personal appeal-based politics has gained prominence in modern times such that political figures including Imran Khan and Benazir Bhutto have achieved electoral success instead of building enduring ideological movements.

The inability of Pakistan to establish adequate mechanisms of checks and balances allows political elites to manipulate social divisions thus damaging prospects for a unified political dialogue. The political elite in Pakistan continues to employ divisive tactics such as exploiting religious and ethnic categories and regional identities in order to maintain power according to Ahmad, (2022) therefore enhancing polarization. The combination of identity politics use and lacking democratic institutions produces a political space where fights dominate over developing agreements.

### **Media and its Role in Amplifying Polarization**

The media functions as a major contributing element behind growing political polarization throughout Pakistan including both traditional media outlets and online digital outlets. During the process of political polarization the power of media over public thinking deserves special acknowledgment. Maqsood et al., (2024) show evidence that Pakistani media follows clear partisan interests wherein major television channels and newspapers tend to endorse specific political parties or factions. Profit-driven motives have prompted media outlets to employ shocking emotional expressions when they report about political subjects so they can reach their partisan audience rather than present neutral unbiased perspectives.

Private news channels that appeared during late 1990s together with widespread social media growth of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube transformed Pakistani media substantially. The role of social media in creating Confirmation bubbles that display content which confirms user beliefs has received attention from Malik et al., (2025). The online discourse about politics continues to grow more divisive because political organizations instruct their supporters to share partisan content against opponents. The "filter bubble" concept described by Rehmat and Manzoor, (n.d.) creates challenges for citizens to encounter divergent viewpoints which deepens their ideological commitment to their beliefs.

The Pakistani media according to Farooz, (2023) functions as a major force which enhances disharmonious political discussions. Talk show hosts who often reveal their political preferences follow a practice of speaking aggressively with personal criticism instead of presenting policy details during disagreements. Political coverage today mainly exists as entertainment instead of constructive political discussion so it fails to promote educated political discourse. The media environment described by Khalil, (2024) creates political division as well as embraces political tribalism that consolidates personal allegiance to political leaders or parties into defining social identities.

### **Ethnic, Religious, and Regional Divisions**

Political conflicts in Pakistan become complete without analyzing the national divisions between religious affiliations and ethnic backgrounds and geographical regions. The nation comprises Punjabis Sindhis Pashtuns Baloch Muhajirs and religious minorities such as Hindus alongside Christians. The political opposition in Pakistan depends on ethnic, regional, and sectarian identities for raising support while creating deeper partisan gaps as Cheema and Hashmi, (2021) explains. Identity-based political campaigns worsen regional rifts which are most prominent in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to their strong ethnical backgrounds.



The implementation of religion as a political method has intensified division within Pakistani society. The religious parties in Pakistan employ religious and sectarian statements according to Ullah et al., (2025) to gain support by declaring political conflicts as sacred battles over true Islamic teachings. Scrutiny of Pakistan's dual support for Sunni and Shia community members has intensified because violence-seeking extremist groups are actively altering Pakistan's political landscape through intimidation tactics. The religious politicization creates partisan divisions which reduce possibilities for political cooperation between parties because it makes compromise more challenging to achieve.

Regardless of vast geographical differences across Muslim regions there is increased political differences that lead to polarization. Pakistan's provinces incur tension mainly between Punjab and all smaller provinces consisting of Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Arshad et al., (2023) reveals that Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in Sindh alongside Balochistan National Party (BNP) have escalated ethnic and regional divisions after adopting parochial agendas which prioritize regional autonomy and rights against central government policies. Political polarization in Pakistan became more pronounced after regional political parties gained power at the expense of breaking up the previous political structure.

### **The Consequences of Political Polarization**

The heightened political partisanship in Pakistan leads to deteriorating operations of its democratic system. The debilitating flaw of political institutions ranks as the main downside of polarization. According to Hanif et al., (2024) political polarization acts as an impediment to parliamentary parties developing coalition alliances. When political parties engage in partisan conflicts the national problems that require resolution get pushed aside while the government devotes attention to maintaining interparty tensions thus delaying necessary solutions for education initiatives against poverty as well as security measures.

The democratic institutions lose public trust because of political polarization according to Ishaque et al., (2022). When citizens lose their faith in governmental institutions they develop diminished interest in democratic laws and practices because state management becomes ineffective. High polarization levels increase the likelihood that populist followers together with extremist belief systems will seize control of democratic governance leading to system instability.

According to Sadiq (2024), political polarization produces adverse impacts on social ties as it causes distrust between citizens while promoting hostility in community relationships. Political identity gains in strength make it extremely difficult for individuals to establish shared perspectives through meaningful dialogue. National unity fails due to social fragmentation that triggers political conflicts to trigger violent battles between protesters during riots and protests.

### **Research Method**

The mixed methods research design will be employed to study political polarization in Pakistan as the primary research methodology. The research will merge qualitative approaches with quantitative techniques as a complete research strategy to gain full understanding of the subject. The interview process maintains a semi-structured format that lets participants express opinions freely but guarantees sufficient assessment of regional separations historical elements and media influence factors. The qualitative approach gathers historical experiences from Pakistani individuals who show signs of political polarization to uncover previously unknown elements of this social issue.

Interviews that focus on political analysts and journalists and political-party representatives and ordinary citizens analyze psychological and sociological aspects of political polarization in Pakistan using qualitative research methods.

**Quantitative Methodology:** The research will distribute surveys to members of the Pakistani population during an assessment which will collect informations regarding political perspectives along with party identification alongside media usage behavior and political polarization assessment. The research will conduct surveys to measure the levels of polarization throughout diverse social groups with special attention to differences across geographic areas and among people with different economic standings and educational backgrounds. Statistical analysis of the collected data will help reveal patterns related to the present variables.

A content analysis of political media discourse focusing on news channels and social media platforms will determine the level of polarization within current political discussions. A survey will be performed on political broadcasts and social media posts together with articles while investigating political communication styles.

**Sampling Strategy:** To guarantee representation across different geographic areas and societal classes with varying political identities the researcher will utilize stratified random sampling technique. A sampling method that reflects Pakistan's population's diversity identifies all opinions about political polarization within the country.

### **Data Analysis**

Different methods will be used to analyze the collected qualitative and quantitative data as follows: Thematic analysis will serve as the method of qualitative data analysis to reveal patterns among interview responses. A data coding process will establish response categories to identify core factors behind political polarization which involves historical elements together with media effects and regional traits. The qualitative analysis of data will utilize NVivo software for organization and analysis purposes.

The survey data will undergo statistical analysis through description methods along with chi-square tests and regression analysis. Evaluation of political polarization within the study will allow researchers to understand relationships between media consumption, socioeconomic status, and political affiliation variables. The statistical software program SPSS together with Stata will be utilized to complete these analyses.

A qualitative coding analysis technique will evaluate the political media content to assess how the stories frame and sound in their coverage. The researcher will divide media content into specific categories to show how political topics are shown and how much these reports amplify political divisions.

Multiple analytical strategies enable researchers to provide complete understanding about the origins and effects coupled with hurdles of political polarization in Pakistan while delivering quantitative alongside subjective data.

### **Recommendations**

Results from this research suggest these suggestions would help Pakistan manage its political polarization issues:

### **Electoral Reforms**

The government of Pakistan needs to adopt electoral system changes which support increased participation of minority groups alongside smaller political organizations. By implementing proportional representation voters would experience decreased winner-takes-all systems that could promote political party alliances instead of interparty hostility.

### **Media Regulation and Responsibility**

The mass media stands responsible for forming the thoughts and perceptions that society accepts. News organizations need to provide unbiased exact reporting of political matters to their audience. A strengthened press should implement higher journalistic values while governmental laws should control political content that divides society.

### **Promoting Political Dialogue**

The government needs to organize periodic platform meetings involving all political parties to enable truthful sharing of point of views. Better political leader cooperation results in developing trust between parties and enables enhanced national political conditions.

### **Civic Education**

The government needs to create specialized educational programs which would combine democratic instruction together with tolerance-building methods and compromise abilities. Schools and community-based educational programs will prepare Pakistani citizens to understand the electoral system.

### **Encouraging Cross-Party Coalitions**

The state organizations need to support East Party Coalitions because these alliances work on essential national matters through collaborative cooperation. When this method is deployed it enables coalition formation for fighting polarization throughout national communities.

### **Strengthening Democratic Institutions**

For democratic institutions to operate without political supervision they need increased support to achieve total independence before they can function autonomously.

### **CONCLUSION**

The heightened political divisions in Pakistan create significant risks which damage the fundamental democratic structure of the nation. The growing political polarization throughout Pakistan prevents authorities from handling major national problems such as poverty and social distribution and national defense issues. The rise of political polarization leads to serious national and governmental disruptions which damage Pakistan's collective unity. The nation needs all political authorities to join forces with media institutions along with civil society organizations to develop a politics-based framework for controlling polarization. The research document examines all factors dealing with polarization before proposing solutions to establish democratic stability across Pakistan.

Multiple origins of political polarization in Pakistan create widespread destruction to democratic institutions throughout the country. The historical background of the country facilitates rising polarization which media formats and public institutions intensify across the nation. Political polarization at high levels leads both government officials and citizens to run into difficulties with national problem-solving while also weakening citizens' trust in democratic institutions. The analysis identified three main consequences from polarization because it leads to worsening social conflicts and fragile government



leadership along with splitting the national unity. Strategic reforms combined with political dialogue as well as societal education enable Pakistan to decrease political polarization and enhance its democratic institutions. This study directs citizens toward battling polarization as they strive to maintain Pakistan's democratic system through its operational findings.

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