

Political Polarization: Academicians and Hate Discourse on Campus among Students

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ABSTRACT

This study set forth to understand the role of academicians in shaping hate speech among students on campus. This paper focused on how intolerance prevails on campus which accentuates tolerance and acceptance. This paper investigates the common factors which make academicians and students hostile towards each other and loyal towards their political ideologies. The study used a semi-structured interview framework to help the interviewer to follow certain topics and to explore the factors of political polarization. Because of cultural sensitivities, questions were analyzed and reviewed by some scholars to avoid conflicts. Various questions were asked to elicit participants' opinions political polarization and electoral violence. All questions were worded open ended. The majority of the participants highlighted that politics of differences solely not creates hate speech or outrage in society. The key factor in shaping hate speech is lack of patience and less acceptances to opposite perspective against differences. Students are being discriminated on the basis of language, cultural identities and political affiliations. However, interaction with teacher on social media and debates on different political interests and affiliations prevail politically polarized attitude. Similarly, ideological spectrum plays an important role to assert homogenous ideas among students. Academicians and students need to understand the difference between freedom of expression and moderation of views.

Keywords: Political polarization, partisanship, hate speech, boutique multiculturalism

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, university campuses have become center of intense political polarization and hate discourse among students. Polarization has played a role in reducing freedom of expression on college campuses. Polarization not only undermines the freedom of expression but also disrupts academic cohesion and civic norms (Georgetown Free Speech Project, 2024).

Political polarization has devastating impacts on Pakistani nation and a reason for continuous threats. These security threats circumvent the prosperity of a state which was founded on the noble principles of well-being, peace and democracy (Akhtar, 2009). Zchrint (2011) identifies people ideologies give them recognition which are based on economic, religious, racial and social issues. Pakistani politics jostles between ethnicity, intellectual division and intolerance; Alavi (1971) highlighted the issue of ethnic politics which is weak and the idea of "Punjabi hostility" causes ethnic conflict.

However, hate speech has become a "thick concept" (Pohjonen & Udupa, 2017) with the multiple understandings in Pakistan. There is no accepted definition of hate speech therefore it is tricky to judge the intensity of hate as it varies from country to country. As a result it is hosted by multiple factors and explanations. In this article we investigate how political polarization shapes the hate speech in the context of multiculturalism, ethnicity, partisanship and the polarized ideologies of academicians with diverse political orientations on campus (Conover et al., 2011).

Additionally, this paper focuses on how intolerance prevails on campus which accentuates tolerance and acceptance. Gibson (2009) suggests intolerance vary from its scope to magnitude. Secondly, this paper investigates the common factors which make academicians and students hostile towards each other and loyal towards their political ideologies. Political communication is effective when it is exposed to vast majority otherwise communication with exclusive category of people simply reinforce their knowledge.

Electoral violence can be observed around the globe but it is dangerous when it triggers hate speech and hate crimes. Too often, hate speech is not due to electoral violence but it is contextual. Some contextual factors can be historical or based on prejudices and can be rooted in deprivation of marginalized groups (Mohan et al., 2018).

This context specific reality can be followed by boutique multiculturalism; boutique multiculturalism is an idea of superficial affection with an object. Results of boutique multiculturalism are politics of differences; these differences provide speech codes on campus. These are the political differences which instigate the need of proportional representation of various cultures in classroom and faculty recruitment (Fish, 1997).

Here the question is: is not it against the spirit of free speech? The answer can be counterintuitive as multiculturalism is a baseline issue in educational place. Elections of 2018 in Pakistan were permeated foul language calling opponents shameless and insulting names (Qureshi, 2018). The verbal assault can also be observed in universities, many lecturers are directed not to open such debates which are challenging against students' beliefs or feelings (Johnson, 2000). Campuses enounce values of tolerance, equality and peace but in demonstration intellectualism subsequent as a blind alley (Fish, 1997). It highlights a question how these differences can be answered on a same table? Gutterman (2019) provides answer, hate speech is directed when an argument is presupposed and is not defined on "moral and empirical grounds" and basis of argument are understood "indefensible". Subsequently she gives the solution to avoid intolerance; some affirmations are not worth taking seriously.

Waldron (2012) states two characteristics of this kind of speech: the first is to humiliation of members of other groups and the second is to provide boundaries to in-group by attacking the out-group. The predetermined effects of hate speech are damaging therefore its rationale is to control and restraint. Pohjonen and Udupa (2017) argue that legal discourse and scholarly discussions are different but disparagement in hate speech makes them alike.

Political polarization also works on ideological spectrums, as Zschirnt (2011) finds that the terms liberal and conservative have become symbolic and have meaning in politics. However, literature suggests that polarization is in human nature and it becomes more intense when ones enter into a group. Competitive elections make voters to hate the other party and instead of brining the citizens on discussions making them disengaged (Miller & Conover, 2015). Such association with a political party and rejection of opposing party ideologies convert-can foster intolerance and escalate into expression of hate speech.

Research Questions

1. How do you personally have understanding of political polarization?
2. Have you ever experienced conflict in classroom on political affiliations with teachers?
3. How do you think academicians inculcate hate speech on campus?

METHODS

Study Design

The researchers used qualitative methods to explore how political polarization shapes the electoral violence in the context of multiculturalism, ethnicity, partisanship and the polarized ideologies of academicians with diverse political orientations on campus (Conover et al., 2011). The philosophical foundation of this study

is based on constructivism. Constructivism refers as the set of beliefs which are product of socially constructed reality rather than relies on external factors (Stake, 1995).

Data Collection

The researchers conducted one to one in depth interviews (Collis & Hussey, 2005; Yin, 2010) for this purpose interview guide was used as data collection tool consisting of semi structured open ended questions (Yin, 2010). The sample size of this purposive study was based on redundancy and saturation point (Mason, 2010; Diehl, 2013), when researchers realized at a certain point no new information were yield they stopped data collection process. The interviews were conducted in the respondents' first language, Urdu, and continued from 40 to 60 minutes. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded and research notes were taken. Respondents represented diverse political affiliations.

Data Analysis

The interview guide was developed on some deductive codes which were rooted from the idea of "boutique multiculturalism" (Fish, 1997). In this research, participants constructed their reality which they experienced on campus. Because of cultural sensitivities, questions were analyzed and reviewed by some scholars to avoid conflicts. Various questions were asked to elicit participants' opinions political polarization and electoral violence. All questions were worded open ended.

Study Findings

The findings of the study revealed three major themes regarding political polarization and hate discourse on campus. First, *contesting differences* highlighted that polarization is not only rooted in ideological differences but in the lack of patience and acceptance. Second, *diversity and ethnicity* emerged as key factor that how ethnic factors lead to discrimination and hate within universities. Finally, *pre-supposed biases* demonstrated that pre-supposed beliefs and knowledge shape the reality.

Table 1
Themes and Codes Based on Qualitative Analysis

Theme	Supporting Text	Deductive Codes
Contesting Differences	Politics of differences ensues from discrimination. Though the role of academicians in promoting hate speech is crucial.	Student-teacher polarization, Online hate, politics of differences
Diversity and Ethnicity	In universities diversity should be welcomed but they are a place of intellectual censorship where hate speeches are disseminated	Ethnic discrimination, Role of administration, Social media polarization
Pre-supposed Biases	Hated arguments made me rigid I try to stand on my point rather to lose.	Ideological rigidity, prior knowledge and biases, intolerance in discourse

Contesting Differences

The majority of the participants highlighted that politics of differences solely not creates hate speech or outrage in society. The key factor in shaping hate speech is lack of patience and less acceptances to opposite perspective against differences. Campuses are places where diverse opinions come with versatility of experiences. One participant stated, *“Politics of differences ensues from discrimination. Campus speech codes either these are hate codes or collaborative codes are product of differences. As far as the role of academician matters it varies from classroom environment to the campus administration”*.

Similarly different participants shared their experiences and added: *“Politics on campus is more likely connected with administration. The roles, procedures and education policies given by higher authorities determine the codes of speech”*. Conversely, some participants’ views were different and very unique to create research codes. One participant said: *“though the role of academicians in promoting hate speech is crucial. Interestingly, their role shifts from formal classroom to social media”*. That was an interesting development in data collection. The participants continued:

“Somehow, teachers are playing role in promoting polarized behavior among students. Let’s suppose I support X ideology or political party and my teacher is in favor of an ideology or party Y. it might be we are not interacting in classroom on political affiliations. The role of social media is ignored here. Now almost teacher and student interact on Facebook and no one can stop us from sharing our views. That is the place where informal interaction among students and teachers shape polarized behavior. This informal interaction always gives the reason to a student to make interaction on political basis with their teachers on campus”.

Another participant narrated: *“Polarization of hate speech might start on social media but its consequences are being faced on campus. Most of the time arguments on Facebook or other social media forums turn into outrageous discussions with teachers. In the war of words, students forget the respect of teacher and teacher put the tolerance aside”*.

The political differences play a vital role in polarization and hate speech on campus. This polarized attitude may or may not develop on campus but in many ways students teacher interaction is a key factor in dissemination of hate speech.

Diversity and Ethnicity

In Pakistan every field is comprised of multi-ethnicity, where every institute and group is influenced by ethnicity. Our universities are also under influenced of ethnicity. Students are being discriminated on the basis of language, cultural identities and political affiliations. As one of the participants narrated:

“Entering in universities with a hope of some scholarly discussions and satiety of philosophical thirst has been vanished. Universities are formal places where you enter to learn the politics of interest much you have strong background as much successful in universities. Class system, privileges, and foul language can be observed there. This is the flaw of system which is making everyone money minting machines. Then why should educational places be exceptional?”

A participant from Pakthun ethnicity added,

“In universities diversity should be welcomed but they are a place of intellectual censorship where hate speeches are disseminated. Administration is responsible for hate as most of the time teachers’ work to save their jobs. They are less likely involved however social media is something where students and teachers interact in polarizes manners. However, that interaction follows in campus which affects the relationship of teacher and student”.

Furthermore, our universities have lost the true meaning of education and they are making students tactful.

Pre-supposed Biases

Pre-supposed arguments and pre-built ideas are a source of conflict. However, the intensity of hate arguments and discussions are based on pre-understanding of topic. Most of the respondents were on the view how we perceive any argument and how we neutralize it, depends on the prior knowledge. As one of the participants mentioned:

“Hated arguments made me rigid I try to stand on my point rather to lose”.

Almost all participants were on same point that intensity of hate speech is determined by prior knowledge, ideologies and political association. A participant shared:

“My great grandparents are following XYZ party and their ideologies. I know their ideology very well and that is why it is not easy to change my views or accept that the other political parties are better than that.”

Overall, this demonstrated that prior knowledge and preconceived beliefs shape the intensity of hate speech.

DISCUSSION

This study used boutique multiculturalism as an underlying concept to explain political polarization on campus. The current study considered a tradition may die and particular minorities fail to get representation on campus. Politics of differences may cherish unique distinctiveness of other cultures and ideas (Fish, 1997).

Partisanship and polarized attitude on campus illustrated freedom of expression empowers the societies (Sun, 2014) but on campus freedom of expression spread intolerance and lack of acceptance. Ethnicity plays an important role in shaping hate speech as Hamza Alvi (1990) highlighted in Pakistan “Punjabi hostility” is dominating, the data showed that students of other ethnicities were witnessing the discrimination on campus.

Guterman (2019) said hate speech is directed when an argument is presupposed and is not defined on “moral and empirical grounds” and basis of argument are understood “indefensible”. Similarly, data showed pre-assumed understanding of any topic or idea lead to deleterious speech. Political polarization is in nature of human whenever a person attaches with a group or ideology (Miller & Conover, 2015). There the role of ethnicity becomes more important that when students and academicians with different ethnic identities enter into an educational place. Academicians hold positions of authority that allow students to shape their perceptions by imparting their philosophies and ideologies.

CONCLUSION

Increasing intolerance in society and lack of acceptance is one of the factors of polarized attitude on campus. However, interaction with teacher on social media and debates on different political interests and affiliations prevail politically polarized attitude. Similarly, ideological spectrum plays an important role to assert homogenous ideas among students. Academicians and students need to understand the difference between freedom of expression and moderation of views. There is a very thin line of differentiation to acceptance of other opinion and shaping arguments of others.

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