

Polarisation past and present

Umair Javed

The writer teaches politics and sociology at Lums.

MANY are voicing **concerns** about **political polarisation** in an **uncertain** and charged political environment. A **frequent** question asked and answered is the degree to which polarisation has increased. A related question is what is the **root** cause of polarisation itself. One common answer to the first is that, yes, it has increased and is **unprecedented**, and to the second, it is because of Imran Khan's recent **rhetoric**. These answers are **worth** evaluating.

So what is political polarisation and why should we be concerned with it? Polarisation usually means an increasingly **zero-sum** disagreement of political views on policy issues and, more dangerously, on the very rules of the political system. Examples of polarisation could be if politicians or citizens disagree on the status that should be given to **immigrants** or religious minorities; or whether the conduct and results of an election are **deemed** fair.

Such polarisation can take place between among political party leaders and their associated politicians. Or a second form that it can take is the more **widespread** variety, ie between regular citizens **belonging** to different social, economic, or political groups. In many cases, the first type of polarisation leads to the second type.

Why should polarisation be a matter of concern? In any democracy, agreement on basic rules of how someone is elected and how someone is taken out of office is necessary among all **competing** والے مقابلہ کرنے والے actors. Otherwise, the system does not function. It is also important that a range of **divergent** مختلف views – within **appropriate** مناسب limits – be allowed to exist in the political system in order to provide representation. Otherwise you end up with an **autocracy** آمریت and, in most cases, lots of violence among those who are being **excluded** خارج کردیا .

What is causing this polarisation among politicians and among citizens?

What we are looking at in Pakistan today is both types of polarisation these days – the one between politicians themselves and the **spillover** پھیلنا of that among regular people. Politicians are at each other's **throats** گلے پڑ گئے all day on TV, on jalsa stages, and on social media. Imran Khan disagrees with the rules of the system and repeatedly talks about the **illegitimacy** ناجائز، غیرقانونی ہونے of the current government, due to the **alleged** طقرر پر foreign **conspiracy** سازش, and the illegitimacy of other parties due to their corruption. In the past, he was on the receiving end of the 'selected' **jibe** مذاق from the current ruling **coalition** اتحاد.

What feels more dangerous is polarisation between supporters of different parties. Social media these days is essentially a **spectacle** تماشا of competing trends and the exchange of abuses. **Anecdotally** مختصراً, we hear about family ties and friendships put under pressure because of differences

over who people support and the degree to which they think a certain party is worth supporting and how loudly.

So just how dangerous is this polarisation? In terms of actual ideas, it seems to be a bit **shallow** ظاہری، سطحی. The only ideas that are currently flashpoints are, firstly, the degree to which anti-corruption is important for development, and secondly the right to vote for **overseas** بیرون ملک citizens. The rest is a **debate** بحث about competence قابلیت and who can **implement** broadly similar policies and run institutions better than the other. Even the support for a new presidential constitution – a typical drawing room/WhatsApp talking point – does not actually make its way to the political **manifesto** منشور of PTI.

Another measure of polarisation is whether voters of one party would think of voting for another. Past survey data shows that voters have switched **loyalties** وفاداریاں between 2013 and 2018. When asked if PTI wasn't available as an option, a **plurality** اکثریت of their voters said they would vote for PML-N and vice versa. And if the power of **influential** با اثر electables is still **intact** برقرار, that means voters are likely to vote for whichever party these candidates join. It means they may not believe in party identity as much as others do on social media. This will become clearer whenever elections are held. If there is an **upsurge** اضافہ of party-based voting that goes against expected **outcomes** نتائج in different **constituencies** حلقوں, that would be a big **indication** اشارہ of political polarisation.

So what is causing this polarisation among politicians and among citizens? The factors are relatively straightforward: PTI

positions itself as an **anti-status quo** حال صورت party and its leader does not **deem** سمجھنا the opposition to be an acceptable presence in the political system. Its entire brand here is based on denying political **legitimacy** حیثیت to others, which is **bound** پابند to increase polarisation.

But there is another cause of polarisation as well, which is the **frustration** مایوسی of regular citizens due to their **unmet** پوری نہ expectations from traditional **political** parties. There is **palpable** واضح anger at the economic crisis, at the lack of **transparency** شفافیت in politics, at the continued existence of **dynastic** خاندانی leaders, and at the lowly status of the country globally. **Stoked** بھڑکانا by a populist politician or not, these are real, deeply felt frustrations and ones that are being voiced loudly.

Finally, is this polarisation **unprecedented** بے مثال? The short answer is no, it is not. The 1960s and 70s were a far more polarised time, when ideological **conflicts** تنازعات between socialists and **conservatives** قدامت پسند in Pakistan over the nature of the economy, as well as the **ethnic** نسلی conflict between East and West Pakistan over the nature of the federal system, took place.

The 1970 and 1977 elections were **bitterly** سختی سے fought, with the former leading to a civil war and **secession** علیحدگی and the latter seeing at least 350 dead over a six-month period. Twenty years later, a decade of polarised politics ended in the 1997 election which saw PPP voters refuse to turn up

altogether due to **disenchantment** ناراضگی with their leadership, but also a flat refusal to vote for the 'other' option. In all past cases, the outcomes of such periods of polarisation have seen only one **entity** ادارہ gain power at the expense of all others.

Reducing the political temperature today may not appear to be in any one actor's interest, but it is actually in the long-term interest of everyone.

The writer teaches politics and sociology at Lums.

Iran deal revival

EDITORIAL

WHERE the nuclear deal between Iran and the **P5+1** is **concerned** متعلق ہونا , a great deal of **fluidity** روانی exists regarding its **fate** قسمت . One day, the world is told that it is 'near death'. Yet soon after, we learn that **negotiations** مذاکرات would resume and a new deal could be in sight. This reflects the high level of **uncertainty** غیر یقینی صورتحال amongst the **stakeholders** فریقین , as well as the desire to revive کرنا the deal and prevent further **confrontation** تصادم between Iran and the West. In the latest developments, the **EU's** foreign policy chief has **reignited** دوبارہ زندہ کیا hope that the deal may be **salvageable** بچایا جاسکتا ہے . Josep Borrell, who was speaking after his **emissary** سفیر returned from Iran, said that nuclear talks had "reopened" and that a "final agreement" could possibly be reached. The Qatari emir was also recently

in Tehran and met the top Iranian leadership, **apparently** بظاہر to convince the Islamic Republic to resume the nuclear talks, which have **stalled** رکے ہوئے since March. These developments are quite positive considering that only a few days ago, serious doubts had been raised about the revival of the deal, which had been **scuttled** کچل دیا گیا by US president Donald Trump's administration in 2018.

At this point in time, it is difficult to predict the fate of the negotiations the EU official has **alluded** اشارہ کیا to.

Engagement between the stakeholders is, of course, welcome; yet, one major sticking point (an obstacle) remains: the American **designation** عہدہ of Iran's Revolutionary Guard as a 'foreign terrorist organisation'. The Iranians are **adamant** اٹل that the **elite** ممتاز لوگ military grouping be removed from the US terrorism list, though American officials, both on and off the record, remain **non-committal** غیر وابستہ. Indeed, the success or otherwise of the nuclear negotiations may come down to this single point. The **Pasdaran** were placed on the terrorism list by the Trump administration, and Joe Biden and his team should consider removing them from there as a confidence-building measure. No doubt, the American president will face **tremendous** زبردست domestic pressure from a huge section of the political class – including from lawmakers within his own party – that is **wary** ہوشیار of **upsetting** پریشان کرنے Israel. Yet if the nuclear talks are to succeed, all sides will have to take bold decisions. Placing the Pasdaran on the list was a questionable move, and has not stopped Iran from **pursuing** جاری رکھنے its regional aims. If the US and its European allies are serious about the **JCPOA's** revival, they need to consider Iranian demands, or else risk

sinking کرنا ختم the deal for the foreseeable متوقع future.

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Political polarization) is the divergence of political attitudes away from the centre, towards ideological extremes. Most discussions of polarization in political science consider polarization in the context of political parties and democratic systems of government. In two-party systems, political polarization usually embodies the tension of its binary political ideologies and partisan identities. However, some political scientists assert that contemporary polarization depends less on policy differences on a left and right scale, but increasingly on other divisions such as: religious against secular; nationalist against globalist; traditional against modern; or rural against urban. Polarization is associated with the process of politicization

zero-sum

: of, relating to, or being a situation (such as a game or relationship) in which a gain for one side entails a corresponding loss for the other side

The **P5+1** countries are a group of nations working together on the Iran Nuclear Deal. The countries include the five permanent members of the United Nations (U.N.) security council, with the addition of Germany. The U.N. security council consists of China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The agreement is more formally known as the Joint

Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Although the deal remains in place, the United States withdrew from the deal in 2018.

EU;The European Union is a political and economic union of 27 member states that are located primarily in Europe. The union has a total area of 4,233,255.3 km² and an estimated total population of about 447 million.

Pasdaran; The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC; 'Army of Guardians of the Islamic Revolution' or Sepâh for short) is a branch of the Iranian Armed Forces, founded after the Iranian Revolution on 22 April 1979 by order of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Whereas the Iranian Army defends Iranian borders and maintains internal order, according to the Iranian constitution, the Revolutionary Guard is intended to protect the country's Islamic republic political system. The Revolutionary Guards base their role in protecting the Islamic system as well as preventing foreign interference and coups by the military or "deviant movements.

JCPOAs

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, known commonly as the Iran nuclear deal or Iran deal, is an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program reached in Vienna on 14 July 2015, between Iran and the P5+1 together with the European Union.