**Political Polarization for New Government**

**The incoming government must harness political polariza-tion, if it wants to usher in an era of political stability and good governance**

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Pakistan has been facing the issue of political polarization for more than a decade. Political parties are vying for le­gitimacy by declaring their competitors anti-national ele­ments. Simply putting, political polarization has pitted political groups into a us versus them debate. Last two years have jolted every existing social, political, and economic struc­ture of Pakistan. Political polarization has reached its ideological extreme. The incoming government must harness political polarization, if it wants to usher in an era of political stability and good governance.

It is imperative to decipher why societies face the is­sue of political polarization. A research study conduct­ed by the European Center for Populism Studies(ECPS) offers two interrelated causes. First, when the governments are unable to perform their constitutional duties properly, the masses are alienated and the political divide increases. The moral legitimacy of the opponents is challenged. Second, masses feel attracted towards specific political groups, deem­ing them legitimate. The issue of polarization is exacerbated by social media, mainstream T.V networks, and other sources of social and political debate. Pakistan has witnessed the ne­farious rise of all these factors in recent years.

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Political polarization has proved a debilitating threat for Pakistan. For the last ten years or so, there is absence of any coherent government. It can be linked to the awareness of the masses about their rights and political power; but the response of the state institutions crushed their aspirations. Previously, masses were either apolitical and less empathetic with the political process. The situation has changed, yet the powerful forces of the state have not realized this.

Ostensibly, political polarization jeopardized national de­velopment. Successive governments have miserably failed to offer something tangible to the masses. Pakistan was ranked 133/180 in Corruption Perception Index(CPI) by Transpar­ency International in 2023. In the realm of freedom of ex­pression, Pakistan has been performing poorly. According to Reporters Without Borders(2023), Pakistan is at 150/180 in World Press Freedom Index Ranking. Contrary to it, the health and education sector are also in shambles. It is unfor­tunate that Pakistan tops every international ranking from the bottom. Youth is getting radicalized by this state of affairs. The wishes of the youth to live a decent life are being sac­rificed at the altar of political elites which would have per­nicious impacts on the state in the years to come. The new government must abstain from using the nefarious tactics of political revenge and crushing the dissenting voices.

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The constitution of 1973 has all the remedies in its ambit to cope up with the menace of political polarization. But the big­gest step in this regard would be to implement the fundamen­tal rights enshrined in the constitution. It would eventually erase hatred which is national rhetoric against the political op­ponents today. The new coalition government at the National level and the provincial level must implement the fundamental rights. It is the easiest and the most effective remedy available to cope up with the issue of political instability and accountabil­ity. For instance, the article 10 ensures that no person shall be arrested without legal grounds and to be produced before the magistrate. Similarly, article 10A vividly outlines the right of fair trial. The article 15,16, and 17 provides freedom of movement, assembly, and association. Whereas, article 19 and 19A provide that every citizen has freedom of speech and right to informa­tion. Lamentably, these articles have not been actualized. It is an undeniable fact that when the constitutional values of inclu­sivity, plurality, and democracy would be valued then the issues like political polarization would be dismantled.

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We as a nation have already wasted seven decades. It is right to start a new beginning at the national level. It would be only possible when there is consensus of all political parties and other powerful entities of the state. Political victimization of the opponents must be shunned. The judiciary should decide the cases of political prisoners without any fear and restraint. The principle of justice must prevail. And the executive arm of the government must realize: the use of power is not effective in contemporary times. Overall, national development lies in constructive dialogue, reduction in political polarization, and enforcement on the constitutional and democratic values.

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