

# Political Polarization and its Impact on Democratic Institutions

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**Abstract:** *Political polarisation has become a significant concern in contemporary democratic societies, deception potential risks to the stability and functionality of democratic institutions. In modern democracies, political polarisation has grown to be a severe problem that could jeopardise the stability and efficacy of democratic institutions. Furthermore, this abstract investigates the concept of political polarisation and its impact on democratic systems. It explores how divergent political ideologies, deepening partisan divisions, and the rise of extremist movements contribute to the erosion or destruction of democratic norms and institutions. Additionally, the abstract begins by defining political polarisation as the process of ideological difference within a society, leading to increased hostility and decreased cooperation between political factions. It is dangerous how polarisation demonstrates in various forms, such as ideological extremism, regime change, ethnic division, the abstract then investigates the detrimental effects of political polarisation on democratic institutions. Additionally, the abstract explores how polarization can undermine public trust in democratic institutions, eroding their legitimacy and weakening the social fabric or the basic structure and belief of society togetherness.*

**Keywords:** Political polarisation, Democracy, Impact on Democratic, Democratic institutions, Social Media

## 1. Introduction

Political polarisation has emerged as a critical issue in contemporary democratic societies, raising concerns about its profound impact on democratic institutions. The growing divide between political factions, fuelled by ideological differences and augmented through various channels, has the potential to undermine the stability and effectiveness of democratic systems. This introduction provides an overview of political polarisation and its impacts on democratic institutions, drawing upon relevant scholarly references. Political polarisation discusses the process of ideological disagreement and the deepening divide between political groups within a society. It includes the increasing animosity, hostility, and mistrust between opposing factions, hindering constructive dialogue and compromising the ability to find common ground. As noted by (Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018), polarisation can manifest in multiple dimensions, including policy disagreements, cultural and historically determined social or cultural line which divides citizens within a society into groups with differing political interests, resulting in political conflict among these groups on destruction of democratic norms. Moreover, political polarization can destroy public trust in democratic institutions, as citizens perceive them as partisan and biased. A study by Hetherington and Rudolph (2015) found that polarisation contributes to a decline in public confidence in political institutions, weakening the legitimacy of democratic systems. This loss of trust can undermine social cohesion and perpetuate a cycle of polarisation, as citizens become disillusioned with the democratic process. Furthermore, political polarisation can provide fertile ground for the rise of populist and extremist movements. (Mudde, 2019) highlights how polarisation creates an environment conducive to the emergence of populist leaders who exploit societal divisions and intensify polarising narratives. These movements often challenge democratic principles and institutions, threatening civil liberties, minority rights, and the rule of law. To end with my argument on this introduction

possibly discusses potential strategies to alleviate the impact of political polarisation on democratic institutions. Investigating the significance of media, literacy, partisan cooperation, and dialogue encouraging cross - partisan cooperation. The Author, also emphasizes the role of political leaders, media organisations, and educational institutions in fostering a more inclusive and informed public dialogue. Moreover, I suggest that political polarisation poses significant challenges to democratic institutions and it is essential to understand its causes, consequences, and potential solutions crucial for safeguarding the foundations of democracy. By addressing political polarisation, societies can strive towards a more cohesive, inclusive, and resilient democratic system. Furthermore, democratic institutions face severe problems from the last point in this introduction on political polarisation effects this includes ideological divisions, declining trust, and the rise of extremist movements that threaten the stability and functionality of democratic systems. Additionally, in recognising the causes and consequences of political polarisation, societies can develop strategies to mitigate its impact and safeguard the integrity of democratic institutions.

### 1.1 Background

Political polarisation is about the ideological divisions and increasing partisan animosity within a society, leading to a deepening divide between political factions. It is a complicated occurrence influenced by many of factors, including socio - economic disparities, cultural differences, media fragmentation, and political tricks. The impact of political polarisation extends beyond ordinary ideological differences, having significant challenges to democratic institutions.

An influential work on the topic is "Polarized America: The Party of Ideology and Unequal Riches" by (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006). The authors explore the origins and manifestations of political polarisation in the United States,

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examining its relationship with economic inequality and the role of political elites in worsening divisions. The argument is that the polarisation affects the political elites and shapes public opinion and policy outcomes, potentially undermining democratic governance. Moreover, (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018), have investigated how political polarisation undermines democratic institutions in their book "How Democracies Die" They draw attention to severe polarisation that undermines democratic norms like respect to the law, protection of civil freedoms, and commitment to democratic values. The impact of political polarisation on public trust in democratic institutions is explored in the work of (Hetherington and Rudolph (2015) in "Why Washington Won't Work: Polarisation, Political Trust, and the Governing Crisis. " They analyse the decline in public confidence in democratic institutions and the implications for effective governance. Hetherington and Rudolph argue that polarization can undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions, leading to political disengagement and a breakdown in democratic processes. The rise of populist and extremist movements in polarized political environments is a significant concern. (Mudde's book (2019) provides insights into the relationship between polarisation and the emergence of far - right populist movements. Mudde argues that polarisation creates conditions conducive to the rise of populist leaders who exploit societal divisions, challenge democratic norms, and promote exclusionary ideologies. Furthermore, in article on political polarisation and its effect on democratic institutions, I argue the point that political polarisation contributes to the ideological division of society, where people and groups have sharply divergent political beliefs and values, even if political variety is a given in democracies, extreme polarisation can hurt democratic institutions. Many scholars including myself believe that Polarisation often leads to a decline in trust among citizens and in democratic institutions. When political factions become deeply divided, they may view their adversaries as enemies rather than fellow citizens with different perspectives. Possibly the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic institutions could be jeopardised by this lack of trust. Additionally, when political parties or ideological factions refuse to compromise or engage in constructive dialogue, it becomes difficult to pass meaningful legislation or address pressing issues. This can lead to policy paralysis and need progress on critical societal challenges. Furthermore, as my article makes clear that democratic institutions depend on checks and balances to maintain accountability and avoid the deliberate exercise of power. Polarisation, may wear down the checks and balances. Partisan allegiance may take superiority over the need to hold public servants responsible, enabling them to behave without consequence. Finally, addressing political polarization and alleviating its impact on democratic institutions requires collective efforts. Besides encouraging respectful dialogue, promoting media literacy, and fostering inclusive political participation are some ways to bridge divides and strengthen democratic norms. Additionally, promoting policies investigating cooperation, such as electoral reforms or initiatives that encourage bipartisan collaboration, can help mitigate the negative consequences of polarisation on democratic institutions.

## 2. Literature Review

Political polarisation has become a prominent feature of contemporary democracies, raising concerns about its impact on democratic institutions. This review aims to explore the scholarly research on political polarisation and its democratic institutions. The review will highlight crucial studies that have examined the effects of polarisation on trust, governance, checks and balances, media, social cohesion, and populism. Political polarisation, the widening ideological gap between opposing groups, has become a defining feature of many contemporary democracies. This trend has raised concerns about its potential harm to the health and functioning of democratic institutions. This review examines the existing literature on political polarisation and its impact on democratic institutions, highlighting key arguments, evidence, and ongoing debates. Moreover, growing income inequality and limited economic mobility can fuel resentment and distrust between social classes, translating into political division. (Piketty, 2014), I argue further that there is evidence of fast social and cultural change, including immigration, secularisation, and societal constructions of gender rights. These developments can lead to cultural anxieties and sharp divisions, which then show up as political polarization. The rise of social media platforms has facilitated the spread of misinformation and political extremism, contributing to a more polarised public discourse. (Bail et al., 2018), Moreover, deeply divided legislatures help finding common ground and passing legislation, leading to political paralysis and a declining in government effectiveness. (Gent, 2019). Moreover, increased Political Lack of respect and rising polarisation can lead to more hateful and disrespectful online and offline discourse, undermining civil society and political cooperation. (Pew Research Centre, 2020). Additionally, independent redistricting commissions can also assist in avoiding politically influenced partisanship in the divided election districts, which could lead to more competitive elections.

### 2.1 Political polarisation

Political polarization refers to the division of society along ideological lines, where individuals and groups hold strongly contrasting political beliefs and values. It is characterised by an increasing ideological distance between political factions and a reduced willingness to find common ground or engage in constructive dialogue (Fiorina, M. P., Abrams, S. J., & Pope, J. (2005). Additionally, Polarisation often occurs between political parties, with members of each party becoming more ideologically homogeneous and viewing the other party with scepticism or even hostility. This division can lead to increased partisanship and a focus on party loyalty rather than issue - based decision - making. Equally important, the Polarisation can result in the rise of ideological extremism, where individuals and groups adopt more extreme positions and reject compromise or moderation. This can lead to a lack of willingness to engage in constructive dialogue and can hinder effective governance. Moreover, with the arrival of social media and mass - produced news consumption, polarisation can be fuelled by creating compelling sounds that people are more likely to be accessible to information and viewpoints that

align with their existing belief, reinforcing their ideological position and limiting the contact with alternative perspectives. Furthermore, Social, political and cultural identity in political polarisation can be influenced by shared identities, such as race, religion, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. People may align their political beliefs with their social identities, leading to heightened divisions and a focus on group interests rather than shared goals. Finally, it is essential to note that political polarization is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes and implications, and its signs can vary across different countries and contexts. Therefore, addressing political polarisation requires efforts promoting respectful dialogue, bridging divides, and fostering a sense of shared values and objectives.

## 2.2 Democracy and its characteristic

Democracy is a system of government in which power is entrusted to the people, who exercise it either directly or through elected representatives. It is characterised by political equality, popular sovereignty, and majority rule, as well as the protection of individual rights and freedoms. In a democratic society, citizens can participate in decision-making, express their opinions, and hold their leaders accountable. (Huntington, S. P. (1991). The other key characteristics of democracy is political participation which encourages active citizen participation in political processes. This can take place the form of voting in elections, engaging in public debates, joining political parties or interest groups, and participating in peaceful protests. Some scholars believe democracy promotes pluralism, recognising and respecting diverse opinions, beliefs, and interests. It encourages tolerance and peaceful coexistence, even in disagreement or differing perspectives. This includes the separation of powers among different branches of government (such as the executive, legislative, and judicial branches) and mechanisms for accountability, such as independent judiciary and free media. (Schmitter, & Karl, (1991). Throughout history, different forms of democracy have changed, including representative democracy, liberal democracy, and participatory democracy, each with its differences and interpretations. The specific characteristics and practices of democracy may vary across countries and cultures, reflecting local contexts and values. Moreover, some researcher including myself believe that democracy is often seen to achieve political stability, protect individual rights, foster economic development, and promote social justice. However, it is not without challenges on the issue such as political polarisation, corruption, voter indifference, and unequal resource distribution which can threaten democracy's functioning and integrity.

## 2.3 Impact on the Democratic System

The impact on a democratic system possibly discusses various factors or events that influence the functioning and stability of democracy. Usually some common factors can have an impact on democratic systems this includes levels of political polarisation that can tension democratic systems. For instance, when political parties and factions become deeply divided and unwilling to find common ground, it can obstruct effective governance, compromise, and the ability to address pressing issues. (Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D.

(2018). Moreover, additional factors of economic inequality may have implications for democratic systems. For instance, when wealth and resources are concentrated in the hands of a few, could undermine political equality and create disparities in political influence. This can lead to a perception that the system favours the interests of the wealthy and erodes trust in democratic institutions. (Norris, P. (2011). Equally important, it found that corruption possess a significantly challenges democratic systems. For instance, when public officials engage in corrupt practices, it undermines the rule of law, wears public trust, that can break democratic processes. Moreover, efforts to combat corruption and promote transparency and accountability are essential for maintaining a healthy democratic system. Additionally, the rise of populism can impact democratic systems this is because Populist leaders often seek to consolidate power, undermine democratic institutions, and polarise societies by appealing to popular grievances and anti-establishment sentiments, perhaps this situation lead to the destruction of democratic norms, suppression of dissent, and concentration of power. (Scheduler, A. (2002). Moreover, I add on that the advancement of technology have influenced this, including the rise of social media which has both positive and negative impacts on democratic systems. On one hand, they can enable greater access to information, facilitate citizen engagement, and promote transparency. On the other hand, they can contribute to spreading misinformation, echo chambers, and manipulating of public opinion, undermining the integrity of elections and public discourse. An additional value I may want to contribute is external interference in the democratic process such as foreign influence campaigns and election meddling, which can undermine the integrity and legitimacy of democratic systems. As an Author, my final contribution is the influence of social movement which significantly impact the democratic process by raising awareness, mobilizing citizens, and advocating for change. Movements focused on civil rights, gender equality, environmental issues, and other social justice causes can shape public opinion, influence policy debates, and push for reforms within democratic systems.

## 2.4 Democratic institutions

Democratic institutions discuss the formal structures and mechanisms that support and facilitate democratic governance within a society. These institutions play a crucial role in ensuring the functioning of democracy, protecting individual rights, promoting citizen participation, and maintaining checks and balances on power. (Grugel, & Bishop, (2014). Moreover, democratic institutions work together to ensure a system of governance that respects the will of the people, protects individual rights, promotes accountability, and facilitates peaceful transitions of power (Elgie, R. (2013). However, the strength and effectiveness of these institutions can vary across countries and regions, and they often help with problems such as corruption, polarisation, and destruction of public trust. Supporting and strengthening democratic institutions requires ongoing efforts to endorse democratic values, promote civic education, and safeguard the integrity of democratic processes.

Basic democratic institutions:

### 1. Executive Branch:

- 1.1 Headed by the president or prime minister.
- 1.2 Responsible for implementing and enforcing laws.
- 1.3 Includes the executive bureaucracy and agencies.

### 2. Legislative Branch:

- 2.1 Composed of elected representatives.
- 2.2 Responsible for making laws and representing the interests of the people.
- 2.3 Typically divided into two chambers (e. g., Senate and House of Representatives)

### 3. Judiciary:

- 3.1 The independent branch is responsible for interpreting and applying the law.
- 3.2 Includes courts and judges.
- 3.3 Ensures the rule of law, protects individual rights, and resolves disputes.

### 4. Electoral Institutions:

- 4.1 Responsible for conducting free and fair elections.
- 4.2 Includes election commissions, voter registration systems, and mechanisms for counting and verifying votes.

### 5. Political Parties:

- 5.1 Organizations that represent and aggregate the interests of different groups and individuals.
- 5.2 Facilitate political competition and help shape public policy.
- 5.3 Provide platforms for candidates to run for office.

### 6. Independent Media:

- 6.1 Provides information, news, and analysis to the public.
- 6.2 Acts as a watchdog, holding the government accountable.
- 6.3 Ensures transparency and fosters informed citizenry.

### 7. Civil Society Organizations:

- 7.1 Non - governmental organisations (NGOs), advocacy groups, and grassroots movements.
- 7.2 Represent diverse interests and promote civic engagement.
- 7.3 Contribute to policy debates and social change.

### 8. Local Government Institutions:

- 8.1 Municipal and regional bodies that govern local affairs.
- 8.2 Provide services, represent local interests, and engage citizens in decision - making.

### 2.5 Social Media and Democracy

Social media has significantly impacted on democracy, shaping political communication, mobilisation, and public discourse. It's important to note that the impact of social media on democracy are complex, with both positive and negative aspects. Ongoing research, public discourse, and policy debates are essential to navigate the challenges and opportunities social media presents in democratic societies. Moreover, communication and information sharing on social media platforms have transformed how people access and

share information. Social media follow citizens to express their opinions, engage in political discussions, and access various of news sources. This increased accessibility can enhance democratic participation and enable marginalised voices to be heard. (Sunstein, C. R. (2017). Additionally, I endorse that social media has facilitated the organisation and mobilization of social and political movements. However, social media has played a vital role in events such as the Arab Spring and various protest movements worldwide, providing a stage for coordination, dissemination of information, and rallying support. This will enable direct interactions between politicians and the public, allowing for increased transparency, accountability, and the possibility of participatory policymaking. Furthermore, disinformation and fake News on social media have also been associated with the spread of disinformation, misinformation, and fake news. The viral nature of information on social media platforms can lead to the rapid dissemination of false or misleading content, which can undermine trust in democratic institutions and distort public discourse (Dubois, E., & Blank, G. (2018). Finally, the regulations and governance relating to the role of social media could shape dialogue on balancing freedom of expression with the need to address issues such as hate speech, disinformation, and algorithmic biases in positions of significant challenges.

### 3. Methodology

The study makes use of a literature search on political polarisation that was carried out with a focus on finding empirically grounded social science literature on the impacts and effects of political polarisation and democracy, as well as the literature on democratic institutions, including social media. As an author, I employ qualitative research methods to gather data to thoroughly examine political polarization and the viewpoints of people who have shaped it. Along with secondary data from relevant books, reports, and other scholarly publications about Political Polarisation and its Effect on Democratic Institutions, the data collection also includes data from related subfields that are examining previous research to address new research questions. Additionally, the author looked at the connections between political polarisation, democracy, impact on democratic institutions, and social media.

### 4. Conclusion

As discussed above political polarisation, has negative adverse on democratic institutions, obstructing effective governance, blocking consensus building, and destruction of trust. addressing on this issue requires a complex method that promotes respectful dialogue, supports inclusive decision - making processes, and strengthens democratic values and institutions. By doing so, societies can struggle towards a healthier and more resilient democratic system better equipped to address complex challenges and serve the needs of all citizen.

In addition to political polarisation requires efforts from multiple stakeholders including political leaders who are suggested to play a fundamental role in promoting politeness, fostering cross - party collaboration, and prioritising the common good over partisan interests. Many

scholar including myself, and the Media organisations can be enabled to balanced reporting, fact checking, and civil society organisations and educational institutions can have role promoting civic education, critical thinking, and dialogue across ideological lines to cultivate a more informed and engaged citizenry.

Finally, justifying the impact of political polarisation on democratic institutions requires a commitment to fostering a culture of respectful disagreement, emphasising shared values, and finding common ground. Moreover, by promoting inclusivity, encouraging open and constructive dialogue, and strengthening democratic norms and institutions, societies can work towards preserving and revitalising democratic systems in the face of polarisation.

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