Factors Contributing to Extreme Polarization of the Society in South Africa

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Abstract

Purpose: The study sought to analyze the factors contributing to extreme polarization of the society in South Africa

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The results show that polarization is strongly path dependent and sensitive to stochastic variation. Second, polarization depends strongly on the initial distribution of opinions in the population. In the absence of extremists, polarization may be mitigated. Noisy communication can drive a population toward more extreme opinions and even cause acute polarization. Finally, the apparent reduction in polarization under increased cultural complexity arises via a particular property of the polarization measurement, under which a population containing a wider diversity of extreme views is deemed less polarized.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The social comparison theory and Robert Tallisie theory may be used to anchor future studies in the political sector. The study results will also benefit other stakeholders such as the policy makers as well as researchers and scholars from different parts of the world. The top management of politics in the country will also use the study findings to improve the society and ensure high and stable performance in all their activities and programs. The study recommends that the adoption of effective social protection development policies in the society will help to improve efficiency in their major operations and activities. This work has implications for understanding the population dynamics of beliefs opinions and polarization as well as broader implications for the analysis of agent-based models of social phenomena.

Keywords: *Extreme polarization, Society, Politics.*

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INTRODUCTION

Polarization refers to the ideological or programmatic distance among the parties in the political spectrum to the extent that the higher the ideological or programmatic discrepancies. The higher the polarization the truth is that party system polarization is a difficult concept to measure (Silva, 2015). In fact, assuming that we would need to know the ideological position of parties and, when possible, also their vote shares, achieving this information for a large number of countries and, especially, for periods far in time results extremely complicated. 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 (Baldassarri,2021). 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. Republicans and Democrats are more divided along ideological lines and partisan antipathy is deeper and more extensive than at any point in the last two decades (Levin, 2021). These trends manifest themselves in myriad ways both in politics and in everyday life.

It is often stimulated by the rhetoric of political leaders who exploit the real grievances of voters. These politicians choose divisive issues to highlight in order to pursue their own political agenda. They might exploit real grievances and anxieties about unemployment or crime, or they may even manufacture a threat, such as Donald Trump calling Central American refugees an invading army (Barbieto, 2021). In extreme polarization, people feel distant from and suspicious of the other camp. At the same time, they feel loyal to and trusting of their own camp without examining their biases or factual basis of their information. Thus they are susceptible to the rhetoric of political leaders aiming to generate votes based on fear of the other Although this is a common phenomenon long identified by social psychology (Phoenix, 2019). Polarization though is a two-way street. political opposition reacts is the second factor explaining the impact of polarization on democracy. If the opposition returns the bitter rhetoric and winner-take all tactics with similar political hardball and demonizing language, they risk locking in place a cycle that leads to entrenching the politics of polarization. dominate, resulting in political gridlock or even violent conflict. Polarization also reverberates throughout the society as whole, poisoning everyday interactions and relationships (Eichengreen, 2018). Partisan conflict takes a heavy toll on civil society as well, often leading to the demonization of activists and human rights defenders. More seriously still divisions can contribute to a spike in hate crimes and political violence.

Before 1994, South Africa was one the most highly polarized countries in the world. White conquest and colonialism had buttressed the domination of a white minority and continuously reproduced poverty and powerlessness among a black majority for centuries(Southhall,2016) After the National Party's (NP) election victory in 1948. Apartheid was to deepen racial divisions and strip blacks of what rudimentary rights they had previously possessed. Yet apartheid was accompanied by capitalist development. Despite official policies to limit black urbanization, along with the ruthless suppression of black opposition, the minority regime was confronted in the 1970s by extensive popular revolt, whose principal locus was in the townships(Southhall,2016). In addition, the regime was drawn into fighting wars against liberation movements in Zimbabwe,

Angola, and Namibia. By the early 1990s, the apartheid state had been forced to the negotiating table. It had lost the anti-communist backing of western powers following the end of the Cold War and its economy was in crisis. Even so, it remained the strongest military power on the African continent, and its opposition, headed by the African National Congress (ANC) recognized it was too strong to defeat. The outcome was a compromise between opposing elites, the essence of which was that the NP conceded to universal rights and a democratic regime, while the ANC accepted a capitalist economy (Venter, 2020). The transition to democracy inaugurated an era of national reconciliation, as political polarization receded. Conflict was largely replaced by peace underpinned by growth rates not seen since the 1960s.

Developments of infrastructure, services, and welfare provided for substantial social progress and the raising of living standards for many in the black community Nonetheless, given the endurance of historic inequalities along lines of race, space, class, and wealth, South Africa remains deeply divided(Nkube,2013). Whites continue to dominate the private sector, while black communities endure astoundingly high levels of poverty and unemployment. Notwithstanding black upward mobility, class divisions remain stark, while the country's spaces remain highly segmented with the large majority of the different racial groupings (Africans 80.5 % whites 8.5 % Coloreds 8.8 % and Indians 2.5 percent) are still living in areas that were racially demarcated and differentially serviced under apartheid. Politically a highly praised constitution balanced majority against minority representation, guaranteed a host of individual freedoms, and dictated a separation of powers (Mashau, 2018). However, simultaneously, apartheid's polarized history resulted in the post-1994 political dominance of the ANC as the representative of the overwhelming mass of the black, especially African, majority population. In turn, this has facilitated the rise of a party-state elite bent on rapid accumulation, high levels of corruption, and a drift toward authoritarianism. Apartheid South Africa was democratized with institutional and electoral arrangements that carried their own seeds of both vulnerability and resistance to repolarization (Hirsch,2018). Although the first post-apartheid presidency under Nelson Mandela avoided the polarizing temptation, successive leaders in the African National Congress used their dominant-party status to grow increasingly hegemonic and self-serving.

Statement of the Problem

The society has become notably more polarized in recent years. Political parties have also become more polarized in advanced economies, most notably in the last decade. The degree of political polarization in a society is a key variable that quantifies the extent to which public opinion is split into two opposing extremes. The global rise of political polarization has fueled concerns about its detrimental impact on politics and society. From an increase in political violence to a decrease in the quality of democracy and governance. The greater the polarization, the more difficult it is to generate a broad consensus among groups with different views in order to undertake reforms that allow society to achieve progress. As such, a high degree of polarization can lead to irreconcilable positions, making it difficult to reach agreements. This can have dangerous consequences for society as a whole. In short, politics is in vogue, and if there is one phenomenon that stands out today it is the high degree of political polarization we are witnessing. This is a phenomenon that has been slowly incubating and which is now an established reality that shows no sign of fading in the short term. Greater polarization can increase citizens' interest in and commitment to politics

but it can also make it difficult to achieve the consensus needed to carry out structural reforms. People want to be unique and have opinions that differ from others, which could lead to more extreme views on a certain subject taking hold.

Theoretical Review

This Study will benefit from the social comparison theory which was proposed by Leon Festinger (1954), the Robert Tallisie theory by Robert Tallisie (2012)

Social Comparison Theory

This theory of group polarization states that people often change their opinions when in a group in order to fit in or to be accepted and to be looked upon more favorably. As outsiders, new members of the group may promote a more extreme view of a topic than the rest of the group previously had. That can push the entire group toward the more extreme viewpoint or the stance that best correlates with the views of the group leader(Steits,2014). Humans have a drive to evaluate themselves by examining their opinions and abilities in comparison to others. The tendency to compare oneself with some other specific person decreases as the difference between that person's opinion or ability and one's own become more divergent (Chae,2015). He continued with the idea that to cease comparison between one's self and others causes hostility and deprecation of opinions. A shift in the importance of a comparison group will increase pressure towards uniformity with that group. However, if the person, image or comparison group is too divergent from the evaluator, the tendency to narrow the range of comparability becomes stronger. People who are similar to an individual are especially good in generating accurate evaluations of abilities and opinions (Suls, 2013). The distance from the mode of the comparison group will affect the tendencies of those comparing; that those who are closer will have stronger tendencies to change than those who are further away. This theory adds insights to our study in that it recognizes grouping as the basis on which extreme polarization in the society that can take place in the sense that individual people change their opinions in a group to be accepted.

Robert Talisse Theory

This theory emphasizes that the democratic ideal demands much of citizens. It demands that they promote justice, that they offer one another reasons in support of their views, and that they do all this while treating one another as equals. it is herein in the demands of the office of democratic citizenship that polarization has its roots(Talisse,2013). Democracy requires that citizens work to advance justice. This requires forming political alliances with like-minded compatriots just the groupings wherein belief polarization can take hold Democracy requires of citizens that they deliberate together and exchange reasons. This generates pressure to expand democracy's reach to treat all social spaces as presumptively venues wherein democratic politics to be enacted. Social space thus becomes saturated by politics. This heightens exposure to belief polarization. Democracy depends on the capacity of citizens to sustain their investment in democracy in the face of what they regard as momentous normative lapses and errors. Citizens must remain faithful to democracy even when it yields results that they regard as deeply unjust. Citizens must be able to regard their compatriots as their civic friends they must view their opponents as reasonable, good-faith actors who remain committed to democracy. Polarization erodes the capacities required for democratic citizens to do this our capacities for democratic sympathy. As affective antipathy

towards the opposition mounts, we become increasingly unable to take the perspective of our political rivals. Thus, we come to regard the political opposition as unreasonable and unfit for democratic citizenship (Talisse,2019). Overdoing democracy thus undermines democracy.

Sustaining Democracy considers how matters appear to citizens engaged in democratic politics. Talisse suggests they face what he calls the democrat's dilemma. As a citizen, one is rightly moved by one's sense of justice one's actions and identity reflect one's convictions about what is just. Citizens thus find themselves at odds about what justice requires. Under such conditions, it can come to seem not only naïve but positively unjust to uphold democracy (Talisse,2015). Democracy requires accepting that justice may lose out and this can seem like capitulation to injustice. Polarization exacerbates this predicament because it threatens the capacities required to view our opponents as equals. The more polarized someone's beliefs become, the more our capacities to sustain democratic relations with our allies erode. Belief polarization rears its head within our political coalitions which become less accepting of reasonable disagreement (Jonch,2015). There is also evidence that other social and structural factors drive social sorting and political polarization. It's no coincidence that political polarization is particularly dramatic in the United States. Although elections themselves are key drivers of affective polarization, certain features of the American electoral system, such as its two-party system, and certain features of American society, such as its history of racial and class-based segregation, plausibly exacerbate polarization and social sorting. Given that there is no shortage of opportunities for individual associative choice in both political and nonpolitical contexts in other democratic societies beyond the United States and yet many of these societies are less polarized, choice expansion and social sorting seems at best only part of the story. So, even if belief polarization and social sorting partially drive the polarization dynamic. This theory adds insights to our study in that it recognizes that democracy is a key factor to polarization in that citizens of a country should engage both in political and nonpolitical context to ensure peace in the country.

Empirical Review

Abdikarir (2015), conducted a study to assess the impact of conflicts in the horn of Africa with a special focus on Kenya. The study used library and internet research. Published and unpublished data was used to put issues into context and to justify the research study. The findings of the study revealed that resolution and management of conflicts in the horn of Africa has posed a major challenge to regional organizations, states, regional and the international community. The conflicts in the Northern Region of Kenya are no exception. These conflicts are mainly concentrated in the boarders of Somalia and Sudan involving pastoralists. In recent times conflicts between host and refugee communities and within the community itself over the management of natural resources has span over time. There have been numerous attempts made by the government of Kenya to resolve these conflicts. Policies papers and documents have been written and revised, conventions have been held, but the major problem lies on the implementation of the various resolutions. Further the findings of the study revealed that recognition of conflict resolution and management in the Horn of Africa is lacking and the states in the region have not come out with detail policy document which can effectively tackle conflict in the region, beginning from the root causes of the various conflicts, how it evolved and parties concerned, attempted measures to resolve these conflicts.
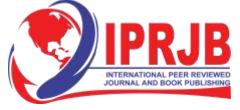
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Seif (2015), conducted a study to examine how various peace building strategies could be used to formulate a framework for post conflict reconstruction. The study adopted a case study design and used an open ended questionnaire method for data collection. The study used Proportionate stratified sampling and purposive sampling techniques. The findings of this study indicated that fragile post conflict societies require multiple interventions in their reconstruction process. The experiences of Haiti, Cambodia and Mozambique indeed underscore the fact that post-conflict reconstruction is a central feature on the international developmental agenda. Nonetheless, these interventions must address the key pillars of the post conflict reconstruction framework, namely: legitimacy, trust and authority of the state, political will for transparency and accountability, rule of law, social capital and social cohesion, economic reconstruction and service delivery and finally, security and cross border movement.

Nyakienya (2014), conducted the study to analyze the commiunal groups as the building blocks of a political order based on elite consensus and group autonomy and the relevant attributes of the convocational and incentivist models and highlights the need to broaden the scope of power-sharing to various spheres of governance such as territorial, economic, and political where groups may want to share power. Data was gathered by means of reviewing academic published books, journal articles and public documents on the subject for the relevant concepts and current opinions and policies. The study findings power-sharing in post conflict societies may work well in stable democracies when political elites are moderate and willing to compromise. However, this is unlikely in countries exiting civil conflict, where leaders are uncooperative and where majority group leaders are under pressure to not concede to minorities. Thus as a mode of managing conflict in Africa such as Kenya and Zimbabwe, it is a successful means of building up a government and end conflicts that may have cropped in as a result of a flawed electoral process. Power-sharing in post-conflict contexts are transitional arrangements, but could also become permanent features of governance architecture. However, power-sharing may be seen as rewarding bad political behavior and as mechanism in which the alternative scenario could be one of destructive violence. The danger is that power-sharing are negotiated democracy and could become the end in itself, rather than a means to an end.

Angoro (2013), conducted a study to analyze the maximalist and minimalist concepts that are set out as being at opposite ends of the spectrum; maximalists defining democracy as a regime that seeks to protect and promote human rights that are understood broadly to encompass individual, civil, social, economic and political rights whereas minimalist conceptions are basically procedural, formal and institutional. The research was conducted by the use of interview and observations. The findings show that the realization of the democratic promises that underpinned the struggle for pluralistic politics are yet to be achieved; it is on this premise that this study critically observes the root causes of undemocratic general elections and proposes that adopting the basic part of institutionalization, participation, transparency, and accountability are plausible way forward to sustainable democratic election processes. It is within these broad democracy discourses and progress made thus far that the debate about the various types of electoral systems and their implications and/or impact on multiparty democratic governance becomes central and timely

Dogbe (2013), conducted a study to analyze the key role of the civil society for the emergence of quality leadership in Africa in general and in Nigeria and DRC in particular. A descriptive and explorative research design had been used to guide critical analysis of existing secondary documents and primary data and situate the role of the civil society in Africa's desire for a quality leadership and governance era, with specific case studies covering Nigeria and DRC. The findings suggest that individuals and groups, as the backbone and actors in civil society, should design strategies that are inherently democratic and transparent as a prerequisite to effective action. A transparent and democratic civil society can play an important role as watchdogs to ensure governments are accountable and fulfill their commitments. By insisting on transparent development strategies, the civil society can actively engage in policy making and implementation. As advocates of policy change and analysis, they can play an even greater role in ensuring accountability and transparency, openness and responsiveness, while building social capital, enabling citizens to identify and effectively articulate their values, civic norms, and democratic practices. The civil society is an important agency in the mobilization of constituencies, such as the vulnerable and marginalized in the society and encouraging them to fully participate in politics and public affairs.

Research Gaps
Conceptual Gaps

A conceptual gap is the missing gap of knowledge which is related to the role a variable play in an already existing body of knowledge and it is a sub-set of research gap. Abdikarir (2015), who conducted a study to assess the impact of conflicts in the horn of Africa with a special focus on Kenya. Dogbe (2013), who conducted a study to analyze the key role of the civil society for the emergence of quality leadership in Africa in general and in Nigeria and DRC in particular This two studies presented a conceptual gap since our study will look at factors contributing to the extreme polarization of the society in South Africa.

Methodological Gap

Methodological gap is the missing gap of knowledge on a more appropriate underlying method(s) which can be used in research instead of the previously one. Seif (2015), who conducted a study to examine how various peace building strategies could be used to formulate a framework for post conflict reconstruction. The study adopted a case study design and used an open ended questionnaire method for data collection. The study used Proportionate stratified sampling and Purposive Sampling Techniques. Angoro (2013), who conducted a study to analyze the maximalist and minimalist concepts that are set out as being at opposite ends of the spectrum; maximalists defining democracy as a regime that seeks to protect and promote human rights that are understood broadly to encompass individual, civil, social, economic and political rights whereas minimalist conceptions are basically procedural, formal and institutional. The research was conducted by the use of interview and observations. The study used structured and semi structured questionnaires as data collection instrument. The data collected was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. This two studies presented a methodological gap since our study will utilize a desktop research methodology.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop literature review method (desk study). This involved an in-depth review of studies related to factors contributing to extreme polarization of the society. three sorting stages were implemented on the subject under study in order to determine the viability of the subject for research. This is the first stage that comprised the initial identification of all articles that were based on factors contributing to extreme polarization of the society. The search was done generally by searching the articles in the article title, abstract, keywords. A second search involved fully available publications on the subject on factors contributing to extreme polarization of the society. The third step involved the selection of fully accessible publications. Reduction of the literature to only fully accessible publications yielded specificity and allowed the researcher to focus on the articles that related to factors contributing to extreme polarization of the society which was split into top key words. After an in- depth search into the top key words (factors, extreme polarization, society), the researcher arrived at 5 articles that were suitable for analysis. The results are from analysis of research papers done by:

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SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Conclusions

The study found out that that polarization is increasing worldwide. Increasing affective polarization can have grave ramifications, especially during times of political turmoil. There is a broad similarity between the current state of the Trump administration and the Watergate years, and yet, heightened polarization has altered the political context in important ways. The Watergate scandal was brought to light by investigative news reports that, over time, became widely accepted as credible and eventually resulted in significant erosion of approval of President Nixon among both Democrats and Republicans alike In contrast, the current pervasive drip of scandal touching on the Trump administration has done little to weaken President Trump's popularity among Republicans, who accuse the press and investigative bodies of partisan bias Partisanship appears to now compromise the norms and standards we apply to our elected representatives, and even leads partisans to call into question the legitimacy of election results, both of which threaten the very foundations of representative democracy.

Having moved away from society and closer to the state, and linked more to governing than anything else, parties, in the present age, are still in need of loyal people in the institutions of the state who can design and implement their policies. As such, patronage remains an important

dimension of party life in contemporary democracies. In this article, Africa has had the smallest increase during this period, although it has long had high levels of polarization.

Recommendations

Since the social comparison theory, the Robert Tallisie theory by Robert Tallisie theory were useful on giving insights on extreme polarization and the society the researcher recommends that the theories can be used in the future for future studies in the political sector.

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