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Populism Political Polarization and Democratic Resilience

लोकलुभावनवाद राजनीतिक ध्रुवीकरण और लोकतांत्रिक

लचीलापन

Dr Suman Yadav

Associate Professor, Deptt of Political Science, SBSE College, (University of Delhi), Sheikh Sarai, Triveni, New Delhi, India

Abstract-- The emergence of populist movements and the intensification of political polarization are progressively influencing the modern political environment in democracies. Often presented as a moral conflict between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’, populism deepens ideological rifts and undermines long-standing democratic institutions and norms. This write-up looks at the connection between political polarization and populism and noticed that how it affects democratic resilience. How a polarizing political environment can weaken institutional checks and balances, erode public trust, and put pressure on constitutional democracy while acknowledging the situations in which democracies exhibit flexibility and resistance to populist tendencies.

Through a conceptual and comparative analysis, this paper highlights the significance of media, political leadership, civil society, and democratic institutions in maintaining democratic resilience. The study contends that robust institutions, inclusive governance, and engaged citizen engagement are still essential for maintaining democratic stability and legitimacy even while populism and polarization provide serious obstacles.

Keywords-- Populism, partisan politics, identity politics, ideological polarization, democratic resilience, democracy, democratic institutions, majoritarianism, anti-elitism, and the people vs elite narrative.

Objectives-- To determine whether democracies can adapt, withstand, or be weakened by these modern political challenges, it is important to critically examine how the rise of populist movements contributes to political polarization and evaluate its effects on the resilience and operation of democratic institutions. And thoroughly examine the connection between political division and populism and assess how it affects democratic institutions, norms, and public confidence. To investigate how various democracies, react to polarization fuelled by populism and pinpoint the elements that bolster or undermine democratic resilience. Also determine tactics and institutional frameworks that especially in the case of India, as can it increase democratic resilience and lessen the divisive impacts of populism.

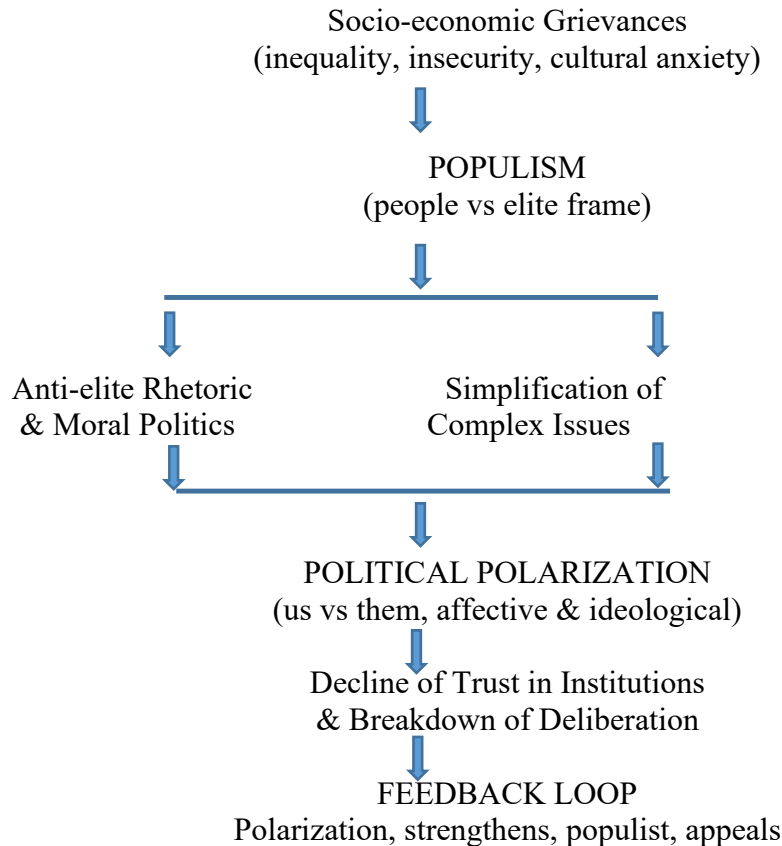
I. INTRODUCTION

Alongside growing political polarization, populist political movements have significantly increased in democracies across the globe in recent years. In modern politics, populism—which is defined by appeals to ‘the people’ against an elite that is seen as corrupt or uncaring—has grown to be a significant influence. Although populist leaders frequently assert that they are restoring democratic accountability and public sovereignty, their rhetoric and methods of governance often deepen ideological rifts and undermine the institutions and norms that support democratic regimes.

Deep ideological, socioeconomic, and partisan divides are examples of political polarization, which has become a defining characteristic of contemporary democratic politics. Such polarization has the potential to weaken democratic discourse, erode public confidence in institutions, and reduce political actors' willingness to make concessions. Polarization presents serious threats to constitutional governance and democratic stability when paired with the exclusionary discourses and majoritarian inclinations of populism. Many democracies have shown varied degrees of resilience in the face of these difficulties.

The ability of political institutions to endure, adjust to, and bounce back from internal and external challenges without compromising fundamental democratic values like accountability, pluralism, and the rule of law is known as democratic resilience. This article examines the intricate connection between political polarization and populism and evaluates how these dynamics affect democratic institutions' ability to endure. In order to determine whether democracies are essentially eroding or changing in response to these modern political dynamics, the study looks at theoretical frameworks and comparative experiences.

Relationship between Populism and Political Polarization:



The diagram illustrates how populism frames politics as a moral struggle between the ‘pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elite.’ This framework intensifies polarization by hardening identities and reducing the space for compromise. One important analytical finding is that populism is a bio product of polarized societies as well as a source of political polarization. Instead of being linear, this relationship is cyclical and bidirectional. Political polarization, in turn, deepens distrust and grievances, making populist narratives more potent. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle where populism and polarization mutually amplify each other.

**II. POLITICAL POLARIZATION & POPULISM
 AFFECTS THE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS,
 NORM AND PUBLIC CONFIDENCE**

Populism portrays politics as a moral struggle between ‘pure masses’ and ‘corrupt elites’ and is both a democratic promise and a democratic risk. It places a strong emphasis on direct representation, popular sovereignty, and majoritarianism—often under charismatic leadership.

People who feel left out of elite-driven politics can be mobilized by populism. It can reveal technical isolation, elite capture, and corruption. Populist movements frequently boost political engagement and voter turnout. Populism delegitimizes disagreement by seeing ‘the public’ as a single & homogeneous entity.

Right from the socialist populism in the post-independence era to modern nationalist populism, suspicion of intermediary institutions including civil society organizations, opposition parties, and occasionally the court has taken many ideological forms. The stark division of society into opposing political factions, when there is little room for discussion or compromise, is known as political polarization. One of the many areas where division has intensified in India is the rise of majoritarian nationalism against pluralistic and secular political outlooks. Conflict over nationalism, secularism, and constitutional morality. Caste systems, linguistic and regional identities, and religious divide, especially between Muslims and Hindus, increasing animosity and mistrust among supporters of various political parties.



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By facilitating false information, echo chambers, and highly charged political discussion, digital media and social networking sites have exacerbated this division.

This dynamic has produced a political climate in India where compromise is seen as weakness and disagreement is occasionally depicted as mistrust. Polarization and populism are related in a number of ways, and populist language deepens polarization by reducing complicated political arguments to moral dichotomies. By portraying themselves as defenders of the people and opposing antagonistic elites and minorities, polarization aids populist politicians in gaining support. The emotional appeals, rather than substantive discussions, are becoming more and more important in electoral competitiveness.

III. POLARIZATION AND POPULISM'S EFFECTS ON INDIA'S DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

By putting pressure on independent institutions, consolidating authority in the executive branch, and eroding bureaucratic neutrality, populist politics can erode institutional autonomy. But judicial review and India's constitutional framework have also been crucial protections. India's democratic strength is demonstrated by the country's frequent, competitive elections and high voter turnout. However, issues with unfair resource distribution, identity-based mobilization, and deteriorating political discourse quality continue to be problems.

Despite political and legislative obstacles, civil society organizations continue to be crucial hubs of democratic resistance and advocacy as media polarization and selective coverage have impacted educated public discourse. Polarization has grown due to social cohesion, which weakens community trust and increases the fragility of democratic administration. Institutionalized social differences have the potential to erode democratic legitimacy over time. Indian democracy unquestionably demonstrates remarkable resilience in the face of these difficulties, including a robust constitutional tradition and Supreme Court jurisprudence, federal diversity that permits regional political options, electoral accountability and voter awareness, grassroots political participation, and social movements.

India's democratic resilience is seriously threatened by populism and political polarization because they strain institutions, widen societal divides, and reduce room for discussion. Furthermore, India's democracy is still in place thanks to elections, judicial intervention, and public debate.

Strengthening constitutional standards, defending institutional autonomy, advancing inclusive political narratives, and fostering communication across ideological divisions are all essential to India's democratic resilience in the future. Although populism does not always mean the end of democracy, it has the potential to progressively erode the democratic underpinnings of India's pluralistic political system in the absence of robust protections.

To comprehend modern Indian politics, populism, political polarization, and democratic flexibility have become essential ideas. India, the largest democracy in the world, is particularly susceptible to division and populist mobilization due to its deep social variety and high voter turnout, but it also has robust constitutional safeguards that support democratic resilience.

IV. DEMOCRACY, POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND DEMOCRATIC TOLERANCE IN INDIA

India, the world's largest democracy, offers a rich case study because of its size, diversity, constitutional framework and vibrant but contested democratic institutions. Here the relationship between demagoguery and political polarization in India is examined and their implications for democratic resilience, understood as the ability of democratic institutions, norms and society to withstand shocks while maintaining democratic governance, are evaluated.

The easiest way to conceptualize populism is as a narrowly defined ideology that splits society into two opposed groups; The corrupt elite Vs the pure masses. Populist leaders frequently oppose pluralism, independent media, and institutional checks and balances while claiming exclusive moral representation of the populace. In India, charismatic leadership and direct communication between the leader and the populace are examples of populism. From socialist populism in the post-independence era to modern nationalist populism, suspicion of intermediary institutions including civil society organizations, opposition parties, and occasionally the court has taken many ideological forms.

The stark division of society into opposing political factions, when there is little room for discussion or compromise, is known as political polarization. The emergence of majoritarian nationalism vs pluralistic and secular political outlooks is one of the many dimensions on which polarization has become more intense in India. disagreement over constitutional morality, nationalism, and secularism. Religious division, particularly between Muslims and Hindus, caste systems, and linguistic and regional identities. increasing animosity and mistrust among supporters of various political parties.



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V. IMPACT OF POPULISM AND POLARIZATION ON INDIA'S DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

By putting pressure on independent institutions, consolidating authority in the executive branch, and eroding bureaucratic neutrality, populist politics can erode institutional autonomy. But judicial review and India's constitutional framework have also been crucial protections. India's democratic strength is demonstrated by the country's frequent, competitive elections and high voter turnout. However, issues including unequal access to resources, identity-based mobilization, and deteriorating political discourse quality continue to raise concerns.

Despite political and legislative obstacles, civil society organizations continue to be crucial hubs of democratic resistance and advocacy as media polarization and selective coverage have impacted educated public discourse. Polarization has grown due to social cohesion, which weakens community trust and increases the fragility of democratic administration. Institutionalized social differences have the potential to erode democratic legitimacy over time. Indian democracy unquestionably demonstrates remarkable resilience in the face of these difficulties, including a robust constitutional tradition and Supreme Court jurisprudence, federal diversity that permits regional political options, electoral accountability and voter awareness, grassroots political participation, and social movements.

India's democratic resilience is seriously threatened by populism and political polarization because they strain institutions, widen societal divides, and reduce room for discussion.

Furthermore, India's democracy is still in place thanks to elections, judicial intervention, and public debate. Strengthening constitutional standards, defending institutional autonomy, advancing inclusive political narratives, and fostering communication across ideological divisions are all essential to India's democratic resilience in the future. Although populism does not always mean the end of democracy, it has the potential to progressively erode the democratic underpinnings of India's pluralistic political system in the absence of robust protections.

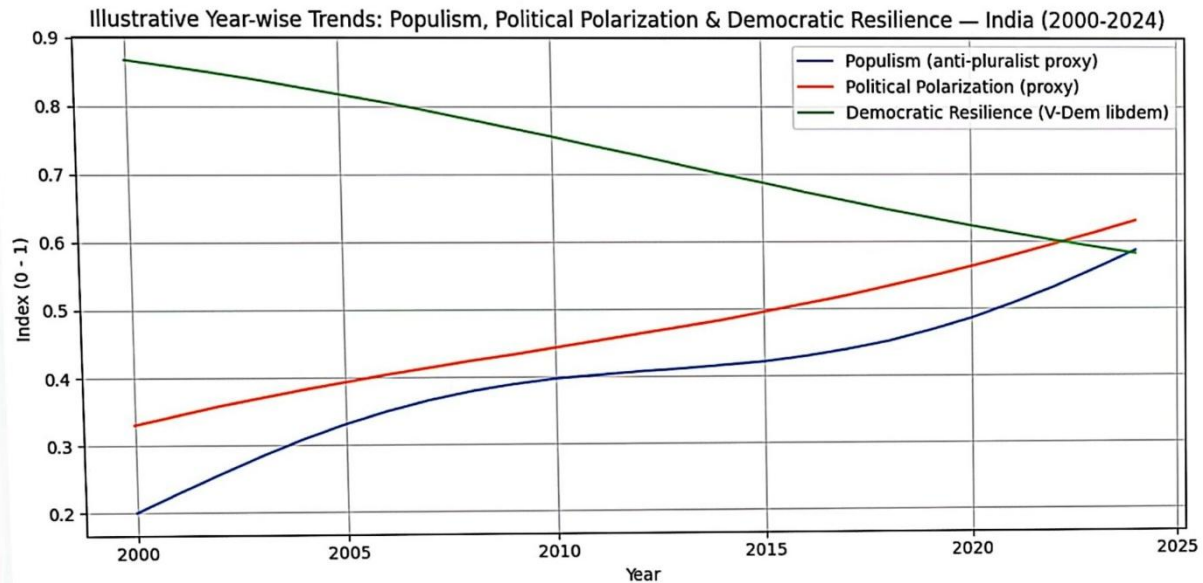
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VI. INDIA'S POLITICAL DIVISION

The term 'political polarization' describes the widening divide between political factions, which narrows the range of mutual trust and agreement. Polarization in India is focused on identity, ideology, and emotion. For instance, stark disagreements over nationalism, secularism, and constitutional principles. These topics are discussed in more absolutist ways in political discussions. Election campaigns frequently center on issues that have deepened the Hindu-Muslim divide, such as citizenship, religious symbols, and communal violence. Opponents are branded as 'anti-national' or 'anti-democratic' by supporters of opposing parties, who see one another with growing distrust and animosity. By disseminating false information, bolstering echo chambers, and promoting emotionally charged political discourse, social media has exacerbated polarization.

Democracy and polarization strengthen each other in Indian politics. Populist rhetoric simplifies politics into moral binaries, which deepens ideological and identity-based polarization. Polarization allows populist leaders to consolidate support by portraying critics as enemies of the public. Election campaigns often prioritize emotional and identity-based appeals over policy debates, further undermining deliberative democracy. As a result, dissent and protest are sometimes delegitimized, and compromise portrayed as a betrayal of the popular will.

An illustration of populism political polarization and Democratic resilience in India:



Year wise graph of India from 2000 to 2024 where three series are showing exact numbers in interactive table. It demonstrates what a year-by-year view might look like and how the three concepts trend relative to each other.

- Populism (anti-pluralist proxy) is plotted using an anti-pluralism style series as a proxy for populist tendencies (increasing in the example).
- Political polarization (proxy) An illustrative polarization score that increases over time.
- Democratic Flexibility (V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index Proxy) An illustrative liberal democracy index that is slightly lower in e.g.

VII. CONCLUSION

Populism, political polarization and democratic resilience are deeply interconnected phenomena that are shaping contemporary politics. While populism often emerges as a response to genuine social and economic grievances, its tendency to frame politics in rigid ‘people Vs elite’ terms can intensify polarization and undermine democratic norms. In turn, excessive polarization hinders discussion, erodes trust in institutions, and diminishes the ability for compromise that democratic systems require to work well. The interaction of political polarization, populism, and democratic resilience in India illustrates both the advantages and disadvantages of the biggest democracy in the world.

By appealing to public aspirations, identity, and welfare concerns, populism has been crucial in organizing voters and frequently giving voice to groups that had previously felt shut out of political power.

Needless to say, populist politics run the risk of escalating social and political division along religious, caste, regional, and ideological lines when they depend more and more on majoritarian narratives and stark ‘*US Vs THEM*’.

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