

**Forum:** Political Committee

**Issue:** Addressing the effects of political polarization in authoritarian governments

**Student Officer:** Efe Kurtuluş Celep

**Position:** Deputy Chair

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## Introduction

In a globalized world, one of the biggest problems is political polarization. Authoritarian governments use political polarization as a tool to protect themselves from change. They resist the dynamic power shifts. Political polarization is not restricted to a particular region in the world. Almost every country has familiar issues. However, as the welfare level increases in the country with the help of a robust understanding of social state, the problem vanishes.

Political polarization on international levels sometimes leads to wars or international crises, as it leads to political destabilization in some regions, such as the Middle East and Latin America. Therefore, as the Political Committee, we have to take the necessary measures to prevent such cases. The committee will focus on preventing polarization on national and international levels.

As of today, the most significant example of political polarization is in Israel. Netanyahu's authoritarian government has been in power for a long time. Despite the countless efforts of the government to prevent any powerful leader other than Netanyahu and continue its propaganda on Zionism, the citizens of Israel are against the government and have organized massive protests. The destabilization in the region is a clear example of the international-level problems that political polarization in a country may cause.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Polarization:** Division into two sharply distinct opposites, especially: a state in which the opinions, beliefs, or interests of a group or society no longer range along a continuum but become concentrated at opposing extremes (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

**Depolarization:** To prevent or remove polarization of something (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

**Democratic Degradation (Backsliding):** Three distinct types of backsliding efforts: grievance-fueled illiberalism, opportunistic authoritarianism, and entrenched-interest revanchism (Understanding and Responding).

**Ideology:** a set of beliefs or principles, especially one on which a political system, party, or

organization is based (Cambridge Dictionary).

**Political Polarization:** Political polarization can refer to the divergence of political attitudes to ideological extremes.

**Authoritarianism:** In politics and government, the blind submission to authority and the repression of individual freedom of thought and action (Encyclopædia).

**Political Pressure:** Influencing people with the power that comes from the political role of the particular person or group (Encyclopædia).

**Partisanism:** A firm adherent to a party, faction, cause, or person (Encyclopædia).

**Social State:** A state which supports those who cannot provide for themselves (IMF Glossary).

**War:** A phenomenon of organized collective violence that affects either the relations between two or more societies or the power relations within a society. War is governed by the law of armed conflict, also called “international humanitarian law.” (The Practical Guide).

**Democracy:** A government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections (The Practical Guide).

## General Overview

### Effective Polarization and Its Causes

Active polarization means dividing the citizens into specific political categories. This phenomenon leads to partisanism in the country. Partisanism discourages one of the most important values of democracy which is dynamism. As time goes on and the affective polarization gets stronger, shifts between the polarized groups become more and more unlikely. The main reason behind the effective polarization is our evolution as Homo Sapiens. According to, “A vast literature in social psychology demonstrates that any such in-group/out-group distinction, even one based on the most trivial of shared characteristics, triggers both positive feelings for the in-group and negative evaluations of the out-group” (Iyengar, Shanto, et al). People also define their characteristics with their political ideology. This is another factor that drives people to polarize.

## Consequences of Political Polarization

There are many diverse consequences of political polarization. The significance of these consequences differs as the population and the culture of democracy differ. For instance, one of the consequences of political polarization is an unequal distribution of wealth among the population in a country. However, if the population is not large and there are democratic establishments that are in charge of providing equal access to resources, the significance of a particular consequence decreases. Furthermore, if there is a solid culture of democracy, consisting of robust establishments that are in charge of protecting the democratic environment and democratic awareness in the country, fatal consequences are avoided. Hence, it is unlikely to use political polarization as a tool to create an authoritarian government in those countries.

## Democracy Crisis

Another aspect of political polarization and authoritarian governments is the democracy crisis. They cause democracy degradation (backsliding). Even though there are multiple types of democracy degradation, in this section, the definition of the phrase is “any harm to the democracy in the country”. One of the common traits of authoritarian governments is changing constitutions and policies to raise their power. In the end, the democratic environment is harmed. The principles of democracy are violated. In some cases, enhancing this ideal democratic environment takes decades, since people lose their trust in democracy. Also, enhancing the same environment is not easy. There has to be a mass political movement and motivation to change it as authoritarian governments tend to use all of their power to prevent such a change.

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

### South Africa:

South Africa is one of the countries that have suffered from political polarization throughout their histories. National Party (NP) is the first political party in the country. When it was established, it was a white-only party. Also, the party was responsible for apartheid rule, institutionalized racial segregation. This case was an example of democratic degradation. As a counterparty, African National Congress (ANC) was established. After negotiations in the 1990s, political polarization was relaxed. However, now a populist leader, Zuma, came to the stage. His party is uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the former paramilitary wing of the African National Congress. According to the polls, he is going to win the next elections. New conflicts are going to arise in the country. Today, white people are afraid of raising conflicts. This is an example of the necessity of justice in the country. Everyone, no matter their background, needs a democratic system with all its aspects.

### **United States of America:**

In USA's history, the Democratic and Republican parties have been the only parties that have the potential to win the elections. Today, the same trend continues. Therefore, there are two extreme sides to the country. This partisan attitude does not only affect politics; it affects almost every topic in the country. As an example, the citizens of the USA had different opinions about the COVID-19 pandemic. Former President Donald Trump had contrary views to the scientists and doctors in the country. Besides, the Democratic Party mentioned that the state has to take immediate action; however, the Republican Party did not agree. In the end, people started to argue on scientific facts.

Other than the COVID-19 pandemic, the most significant example of political polarization and democratic degradation is the Capitol riot. As a result of misinformation and untrust to the election process, Donald Trump's supporters marched over the Capitol. After the riot, Donald Trump has been charged among other involved individuals. In 2024, Donald Trump started his campaign again for the presidential election in the USA.

Even though political competence is an element of a democratic environment, the manipulation of facts is highly risky for citizens. There can be fatal consequences for the democratic environment and the member state as a whole.

### **Spain:**

The Spanish Civil War is one of the most brutal examples of political polarization. The war lasted three years, between 1936-1939. Two extreme sides, Franco's nationalistic side and republican side, fought for control of the country. Franco got support from the Nazis and Italy whereas the republican side got support from the Soviet Union and Mexico. The results were devastating for both sides. Millions of people were affected tremendously.

After almost 90 years, the political polarization still continues in Spain. The most significant conflict is in Catalonia. A political conflict between the Government of Spain and the Generalitat de Catalunya caused a constitutional crisis that took place in Spain from 2017 to 2018 over the issue of Catalan independence. The Generalitat de Catalunya requested a referendum for the independence of the region while the government of Spain pressured the Generalitat de Catalunya by threatening its economic and political power. Tensions between the two extremes were piqued after the police arrested fourteen senior Catalan officials. As of today, the conflict is still unresolved.

### **Italy:**

Italy has had a political polarization problem for a long time. Two extreme sides are fascists and socialists. The tension between the sides arose when Benito Mussolini, the person who founded the ideology of fascism himself, was elected. Today neo-fascist movements accelerated in Europe, pioneered by Italy. The conflict still continues today.

Giorgia Meloni, prime minister of Italy, is a populist leader from the far right wing. She was an activist with the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), a neo-fascist movement, when she was young. She does not distance herself from the dark history of Benito Mussolini and uses history as a tool to unite her supporters. Other than her political choices, she changed the economy and refugee policies according to her ideals, which are very different from the past. Her movements do not only affect Italy but almost every country in Europe directly.

## Turkey:

Turkey had two extreme sides: leftists and rightists. The struggle between those two groups was used as a tool to control the country throughout the years. The struggle was at its peak in the 1960s. Numerous young people participated in mass protests and fought for their political ideals, sometimes occurring as armed conflicts. Due to those struggles, the army took control and established institutions in order to defuse the tension. After the 1960 coup d'état, the military government distanced young people from politics.

As of today, despite their nationalistic neo-liberal policies, Erdogan's government evokes the past struggles and shows itself as an intermediate. Even though today the struggles between leftists and rightists have vanished, new conflicts have arisen. The main polarization factors in the country are sect and identity. For example, the current conflicts are Kurds vs Turks and Alawite vs Sunni. Day by day, polarization continues to deepen. The Sivas Massacre in 1983 and the Roboski Massacre in 2011 are examples of fatal consequences of polarization in the country. Furthermore, the number of extremist parties and parties that use identity as propaganda increases and dominates the democratic environment of Turkey.

## Israel:

Zionist parties are in charge of Israeli politics. Nonetheless, Netanyahu's votes were declining prior to the crisis with the Palestinians. Protests were held in opposition to Netanyahu's reforms. Netanyahu established an authoritarian regime in the nation and utilized the conflict as a means of silencing critics of his administration. This is an obvious instance of how divisive elements are used to strengthen the government's position of power. Left-wing parties oppose Zionism, but since Netanyahu frames the battle as a patriotic war, they are unable to oppose the administration. The democratic environment in Israel is in crisis due to Netanyahu's military actions. Today, he defines himself as the leader of the country and the army, which opposes the principle of separation of powers. He continues his polarizing propaganda. The government's action did not just harm the democratic environment in the country but also caused one of the humanitarian plights, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## Timeline of Events

<b>8 January 1912</b>	African National Congress (ANC) was founded in South Africa.
<b>1 July 1914</b>	The National Party (NP) was established in South Africa.
<b>6 April 1924</b>	Benito Mussolini won the Italian general elections.
<b>17 July 1936</b>	The Spanish Civil War started.
<b>1 April 1939</b>	The Spanish Civil War ended.
<b>27 May 1960</b>	First coup d'état in the Republic of Turkey took place.
<b>3 February 1990</b>	African National Congress (ANC) got legalized in South Africa.
<b>3 November 2002</b>	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won the general election in Turkey.
<b>10 August 2014</b>	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won the presidential election in Turkey.
<b>6 September 2017</b>	Catalan independence referendum was condemned by the Spanish government and subsequently suspended by the Constitutional Court.
<b>25 September 2022</b>	Giorgia Meloni won the general election in Italy.

## UN Involvement

The UN is aware of the current issue and tackles it from different perspectives since the same issue has distinctive backgrounds in different regions. Despite the conferences and political committee's efforts, there is no solid solution to the problem. The efforts are limited to creating annual reports and mentioning the problem in the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

## **Relevant UN Documents**

[Amid Growing Polarization, Intolerance Worldwide, Secretary-General Highlights Education as Powerful Tool to Tackle Hate Speech, at Multi-Stakeholder Forum](#) - Press Release from the Secretary (SG/SM/20942, 30 September 2021)

This press release is an important document since it is a summary of the efforts of the UN on the issue. Furthermore, it tackles the issue from different perspectives and tries to address the significance of education for the issue.

[Conflict Resolution in the Era of Political Polarization](#) - Report from United Nations Institute for Research and Training (UNITAR) (18 November 2020)

The resolution points out the origin of the problem. Even though it is not directly related to political polarization, it offers a new approach to the polarization problem. It can be a good guideline for the resolutions.

[Political polarization in DR Congo may spark 'large-scale violence,' UN envoy warns Security Council](#) - Press Release from UN (11 October 2016)

This release shows the fact how a political crisis can be fatal. Also, it is an example of the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) involvement in the issue.

[Regional Human Development Report 2021](#)

This report reveals facts on how political polarization can cause fatal consequences in terms of equality and diversity.

## **Treaties and Events**

### **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**

Even though there are not many treaties and events on the topic since it is regarded as an internal issue most of the time, this international covenant is a great treaty that you can refer to in your resolutions. Furthermore, it is a good ground because 173 states are the state parties of this covenant.

## **Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

There is no solid action taken in order to solve the issue. The UN is mostly in charge of identifying the issue with reports and observations. The UN declares the fatal consequences to the General Assembly and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to raise awareness. However, in most cases the issue is treated as internal affairs. This is why there isn't any action to tackle this issue. The most

significant contribution of the UN is establishing research projects on the issue and discussing the outcomes in conferences. But in recent years, the UN started to see the importance of the issue and its possible international outcomes, such as conflicts in Latin America and the Middle East.

## **Possible Solutions**

Even though the polarization problem is common for almost every state, there are different aspects. Therefore, every kind of conflict due to polarization has to be tackled in unique ways. Regional conferences on the issue can be offered by relevant UN agencies. Furthermore, regional reports should be more specific to the topic, and relevancy among consequences and polarization should be clearly explained.

Possible international outcomes of political polarization and authoritarian governments should be signified to member states in the relevant region and the member state that causes the stress should be informed by an advisory board. An advisory board should be created with the support of every member state and be an agency of the UN Political Committee. The board should inform the committee in every step that they take. Also, annual reports should be created and presented to the public.

## **Notes from the Chair**

In order to craft a resolution suitable for all member states, delegates should be more focused on basing their resolutions on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Their aspect should be political and human rights; otherwise, the resolution will not be as effective as it should be. Furthermore, the international aspect of the problem should be addressed in the resolution. The key part that every delegate should be careful about is not violating the internal policies of member states.

Other than that, while discussing the issue, delegates should take different aspects into account. Every possible resolution will not be suitable for every member state and its background. The necessary part is creating a common framework that every state will be able to contribute.



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