



Research Report

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Committee: General Assembly 3

Student Officer: Sarah Vonk

Issue of: protecting the educational systems of the effects of polarization



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Forum: General Assembly 3

Name: Sarah Vonk

Position: Chair

Introduction

Polarization is the division into two different and contrasting groups of opinions and beliefs. In a political fashion, this means different parties.

Most important is that the parties' opinions are vastly different and are on opposite ends of the spectrum. This could lead to conflation; conflation is when two separate issues are treated as one. This can and does lead to errors and misunderstandings as the line between the two issues can become blurred. When conflation occurs, a parties' ideology on one certain issue can bleed into their ideology on another, entirely different topic.

Polarization is not just that people disagree or have different opinions as that is normal in a democracy. However, it happens when people refuse to live or work together with someone with another political view.

Something that allows this phenomenon is tribalism. Tribalism is when groups gather and stick together. In this case, the groups are sorted by their political views. This can cause segregation in communities as well as in educational systems. Because of this, people might choose educational facilities differently, deciding not to send a student to a certain facility and by doing so causing further divides in the community.

In many cases, antagonism can be helpful. However, when there are no troubling times in a nation, there is no need to be divided.

Education itself can have quite a positive impact on polarization as educated people tend to be less affected by polarization and more capable of recognizing reliable sources. Though this is true, educational systems themselves still suffer from polarization. Education might be one of the most vulnerable things in regard to polarization; young students are more susceptible to indoctrination; students can be from many backgrounds and full polarization results in a separated society.

Because the process means a division, it can create problems in educational systems. This can be in the sense that the students' opinions clash but also that teachers are not sure what information to teach and having to be careful not to offend any of their students.



Definition of Key Terms

Polarization

'The divergence of political attitudes to ideological extremes. Almost all discussions of polarization in political science consider polarization in the context of political parties and democratic systems of government. In most two-party systems, political polarization embodies the tension of its binary political ideologies and partisan identities'

Antagonism

'active hostility or opposition'

Tribalism

'The word 'tribe' can be defined as an extended kin, group or clan with either a common ancestor or a shared interest. Humans have the instinct to stick together and form friendship networks with people with similar interests, occupations, habits or just overall beliefs. Tribalism stems from this but means the phenomenon of people coming together in communities. If this happens as a result of polarization, the 'tribes' will be sorted by their political beliefs.'

Segregation

'The institutional separation of an ethnic, racial, religious or other minority groups from the dominant majority.'

Credibility

'The quality of being trusted and believed in.'

General Overview

Origin of polarization

In political science, polarization occurs when one separation overrides other breaks and commonalities to the point it has boiled down into one separation causing it to become ingrained. Polarization does not have to be based on whole beliefs but can be based on single disagreement regarding for example religion, nationalism, or a person's identity. Once this single divide has happened it can harden into two political parties and spread their opinion onto many different topics creating the party's policy, as the different parties stem from one disagreement, the groups tend to distrust each other and so the issue spreads from political into social. As a result, the electorate and the parties might start to see someone as their opinion on a political party and the opposition and thus, polarization is born.

Once a community has been polarized, many times debates about issues that can be factually proven, rise up. Once this happens, facts, arguments and moralities lose their value as people decide or make up their answers. Journalists, specialists and politicians can become a part of the problem by participating in partisan storytelling or can lose their part of society.

As a result of the polarization, politicians and other government officials lose their credibility as the support for democracy and laws slumps. It slowly becomes harder



for people to act educated as it gets harder to find the truth or by following morals when it does not agree with a party's beliefs.

Effects of polarization on education

Apart from the effects on democracy, polarization also affects educational systems in multiple ways.

Loss of credibility

As a result of polarization, disagreements might occur about factually proven or provable issues. Take for example the 'anti-vax' community. These people are convinced that the vaccines are not beneficial, despite fact-based research existing and hundreds of years of scientific examination and progress. The groups with these beliefs tend to live together as a result of tribalism. As these groups discuss the issue and try to convince more people, scientists and political figures will provide counterarguments. Since these communities tend to be stubborn, arguments will be repeated and, as a result, might lose their value. This is also what can happen in educational facilities. As arguments and previously respected and trusted information lose their value, it will get difficult for teachers to teach as they might not get through to the students or might not know what to educate the students on.

Disagreements between students

A major part of polarization is the tribalism or even segregation. This might mean that apart from e.g. religiously separated schools, you might get schools that have been categorized by the students' or their parents' beliefs. This might be safer for some students as in certain situations it might be in harm's way if students with all beliefs are put together. If kids are taught that polarization is normal from a young age, they will continue it in their life from as young as seven years old. This might result in bullying and even further polarization. As the educational system gets divided into different groups, parents of students will meet parents of other children that have the same views and thus expanding their social connections.

Split schools

Politicians with a certain policy might try to win the electorate over by demonizing the opposition and funding schools. If polarization continues to occur, this might mean the politician will end up opting for making his school available for students with the same beliefs

The goal should always be non-biased education. The moment politics get involved in education; education becomes less reliable and, in some cases, harmful. If a

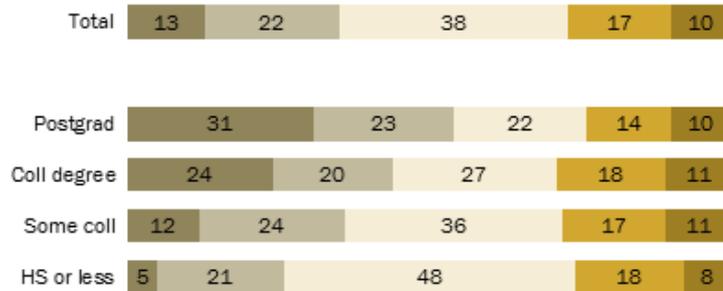


teacher teaches a certain belief and not factual information, students might not feel safe and can, in the long term, cause chronic stress.

Adults with postgraduate experience most likely to have consistently liberal political values

% with political values that are...

■ Consistently Lib ■ Mostly Lib ■ Mixed ■ Mostly Cons ■ Consistently Cons



Source: Survey conducted Aug. 27-Oct. 4, 2015 (N=6,004). Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions.

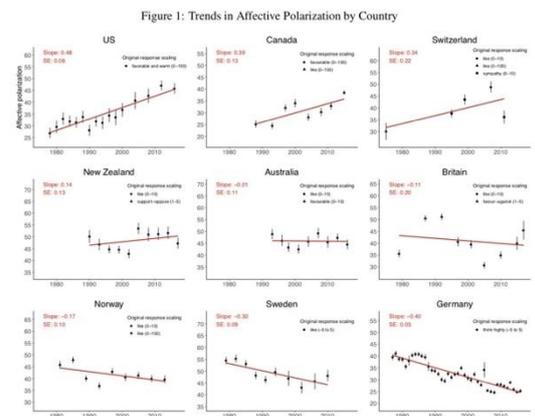
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The history of polarization

As far as we know polarization has existed since ancient times, even without print, information was passed orally. People have the instinct to form groups with other people with the same views. Even in ancient Rome, polarization existed as well, eventually contributing to the fall of the Roman Empire. During the middle ages, polarization occurred as different social classes only wanted their own well-being. Different social classes in western Europe had their own representatives in politics. Once the gap between the different statuses became less noticeable, polarization slowly got less over time.

During the cold war, many nations got divided and polarized. For nearly half a decade after the end of WWII, the world was split up. During the cold war, Germany was literally split up but not just in a political fashion, this had its' effect on the nation for many years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Once communism in Central-Eastern Europe had fallen, the difference between both sides was not as big and reintegration of either side became easier.

Since the 1990's, polarization has been on the rise again due to social media and the internet. A 2011 study by the University of Chicago found that ideological segregation online is to a much higher degree than in offline media.

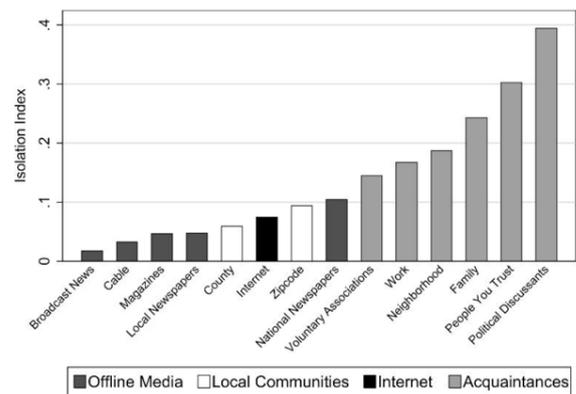




Current situation

Partially due to the current pandemic, there has once again been a rise in polarization. This occurs because the pandemic enforces pre-existing divides and further strains democratic institutions.

- The pandemic allows for politicians to further demonize their opponents but also foreign enemies or any other systems to blame. For example, in the United States, ex-president Donald Trump has “built his coronavirus narrative around his favored partisan targets” thus Thomas Carothers, he did this to systems like the media but also entire nations. His government, by being divisive, has widened a divide in the electorate regarding how they view the crisis and the government’s response to it.
- Another way politicians tend to enhance polarization is by excluding the opposition from the issue or the solution. This is done in a way that their party solely gets credit for the solution. In some nations, leaders are seeking credit for the way they handled the COVID-19 crisis and their response to the pandemic.
- Finally, leaders can allow for polarization by taking the power of the opposition away. These so-called polarizing feuds have taken over in some countries. In some cases, even the electorate was involved and criminal investigations against the opposition were opened. During the pandemic, politicians might more easily get away with this as it might not seem like the government’s priority.



How should it be combatted?

Polarization itself is not an issue that can easily be combatted. However, by separating the issues there are multiple quicker ways to protect educational systems. Polarization is a very urgent and pressing issue, but it requires deep democratic changes to be solved and so takes more time. In the meanwhile, education could still be affected so ensuring some safety measures would help protect both student and teacher.



Major Parties Involved

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, scientific and cultural organization)

UNESCO has been active since 1925 in protecting education and creating new educational systems.

United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

It adopted the 2008 Seminar on Article 19 and 20. In order to protect the human rights and necessities of the countries or cities to live freely, without being afraid of polarization and the right to independent education. The UNHRC also supported the UN's regulations for the necessities of individuals and communities.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

The UN body especially created for promoting higher standards of living was one of the first UN bodies to recognize and call attention to the issue. In their world social report of 2020, they once again called the attention to the issues as it isn't recognized as an important issue often enough.

Timeline of Key Events

10-11 May 2017	The EU meets in Stockholm to discuss education's role in preventing and managing polarization.
September 25 th -October 1 st 2018	the F3 rd session of the General Assembly discusses systemic bias
September 4 th 2020	the general assembly holds the forty-second session of the committee of information discussing misinformation
October 30 th 2020	TICGR holds an international conference to analyze the causes, impacts and distribution of polarization

Previous attempts to resolve the issue

European Union

The European Union has been working since 2017 on its so-called polarization agreement. RAN EDU is an EU body that specializes in support of teachers, school leaders and other members of school staff. They ended up coming out with the Polarization Management Manual.



Countries

Many different countries have been combatting polarization as a whole. However, not many nations have discussed the effects polarization can have on education and even less discussed resolving the issue.

Possible Solutions

Polarization as a systemic flaw is difficult to quickly solve so putting protective measures in place should be a priority. Teaching students about the effects of polarization will help them recognize it and protect themselves from it. Teaching students will also help them prepare for the democracy they will likely live in. In order to be able to teach students about polarization, you have to teach them different ideologies and the competing values within ideological positions. A result and indicator of polarization can be inequality in income, teaching students to recognize it, could prevent further polarization.

Educational systems should always be non-biased. This can be accomplished by keeping them independent. Once individual political parties get involved in educational systems outside of the government. Schools might start to polarize so a good way to prevent this would be to keep politics and educational systems separate.

Appendices

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