

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PARTISANSHIP

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ABSTRACT

This research dives into the psychological determinants of partisanship in political scenarios around the world. Partisanship determines of emotions, behaviors, motivation and reasons behind this identification process through past researches content analysis. This research ask questions like (i) What is the partisanship in psychology?(ii)Why partisanship has become the research interest of psychologist.(iii)What are the psychological determinants which elicit and reward these partisan behavior?(iv)How these psychological determinants are affecting present day democratic societies?(v)What impact does these psychological determinants of partisanship have on public? The answers this research has found are Psychological cognitions and emotions. Parent child transference as positive relationship indicator. Partisanship is expressive in behavior. The in-group biased judgments and negative out – group behavior. Lead to higher self-esteem when identified as a certain political party image. Impact of social networking websites through algorithm building and specified targeted news and exposure reinforce partisan behavior. Partisanship is same across all democratic cultures but recently all over the democratic system it is affecting negatively partisans parting ways from relationships and friendships of decades over their political choices.

Keywords: partisanship, Psychological, Emotional, Behavioral, Motivational

Introduction

1.1: Partisanship nature:

When researchers scientifically study psychology of politics. First cogitation happened that why, how and who get influenced by politics. Apart from society's elites and political actors.

What are the fragments of society apart from these two which made the political parties of any country so influential and powerful? To refute this simple question political psychologists through research introduced a simple term Partisan. Partisan is rather ideological term.

“It means political affiliation to certain political party in any democratic system”

Political parties are at the epicenter of the democratic process. In democratic scenarios these

political parties are the original linkage between public wishes needs and government decision making. Partisanship or party identification has remain most influential factor in democratic system. According to (Tajfel & Turnet 1979, Bankert 2019, Celsey 2023) partisan ship represent a social identity . In 2018 Shanto and Masha redefine its attributes as implicit and unprotected identity.

Partisanship have more obstructive views about outer groups rather than in groups. Partisanship has increased effects on political behavior. Partisanship is actually a boost to one self-esteem when the person who belong to certain political party act well or politically achieve better results than others. J. Clesty researches suggested that

Partisanship is grounded in childhood socializing from eight to onwards. Tajfel also quoted that as children are developing social identity Partisanship manifestation of favoritism to in-group mates and negative towards outer group's members. It could be similar to Freud's latency stage where in groups are gender base and dislike of opposite gender is common. Children like to socialize with similar gender. Children who developed partisan identity because they listened to partisan views about politics. Easton and Denis argue that partisan identity is developed in formative years of three to thirteen. And it has crucial impact on children as it engraved deep in parent child transmission (Ojeada, Hatemi 2015, oxly 2017, pedroza and percy 2020) according to these researchers that in early adulthood partisanship adds into their self-concept.

1.2: Conceptual understanding:

Partisanship conceptual framework based on theories of social, political and psychological identity. Firstly comes the primary models of partisanship in political psychology.

1.2.1: Instrumental model: which insists on public following or supporting a political party which best align with their political interest. One should assume full congruence between a political party and one self. A rationale base of partisanship.

1.2.2: expressive model: this model assume partisanship as more of a social identity like a fandom. In this model people don't have rationale base but more of a sense of belonging to certain social group or social class representation through a political group.

1.3: Theoretical concepts:

Partisanship has been seen as a social identity. Which is strongly fall into the political identity, favoritism, in - group and out-group hostility. Psychologist explore it through social identity theory, cognitive bias, affective polarization and negative bias. In the time of AI and online social networking where is no censorship partisanship has risen as the identity which has more negative influence on society rather than positive. These negativity could lead to

1.4: psychological correlates:

It includes the cognitive, emotional, moral, personality traits and behavioral outcomes among people who are partisans. Vitor Gerald & Isabella starling (2017) quoted in their research that debates among partisans of different political parties are so heated that it led to bringing down decades long relationships and friendships. People temper in now a days so fierce but partisans are one step ahead. It's not only the temper but they have certain personality type with distinctive features. Because in a partisan brain rational morals takes backseat.

Morals are driven from primary emotions of love, joy, fear, anger and disgust. Heidt (2005) conducted a research, where he has robust findings that partisanship related to temperamental features. Motivational behaviors of approximation, avoidance and control are also related to amygdala in neuroscience. Researches have also noticed that self-deception is also is a major trait of partisans. Psychological correlates also impact the political polarization through partisanship. Self-deception or wrong belief about in- group is important for political belief.

According to B.E. Weeks partisanship awakens the primary emotions of anger and anxiety.

1.4.1: political polarization: it usually happened or defined when citizens of any democratic system pushed by extreme political stance. Which could be anything based on extreme factors like ideologies or social divide etc. these divisions are usually reinforced by news and social media algorithms. Political polarization may or may not be based on rational emotions and emotions are always motivated by primary or secondary incentives. Types of political polarization are divided in to two levels by Kalen Churcher 2025.

- Elite political polarization: they have a difference of ideologies in political leadership. Between the party who is in government and the other party in opposition.
- Popular political polarization: when the leaders and followers attack the morality of other party leaders and followers.

The other division we see in literature of partisanship and political polarization is

- Affective political polarization: when partisans have positivity for ingroup members and leaders and have extreme negativity for out group personal and even for each and every action.
- Ideological political polarization: when two parties and their followers couldn't find same grounds to agree upon. It could be based on any decision, policy or simply the way other party do their politics.

1.5: Problem: this study aims to investigate the psychological determinants of partisanship. This branch of psychology is particularly new and been in spotlight for lesser known time. It's not even century old. Though partisanship looks like a domain for sociologist but in this research, the focus is on the psychological determinants of partisanship. It shed spotlight on reasons behind partisanship. The motivation, emotions, incentives learning and reinforcements. This research shed light on the psychological determinants as what are the reasons behind the extreme divide and negativity behind today's democratic system around the world.

Through content analysis of past research papers, this research papers highlights the psychological determinants through past researches findings and patterns. This research paper tries to accumulate the primary and secondary determinants through noticing the research gaps found in past researches. This research tries to answer the what, why and how of partisanship concept.

1.6: Research Questions:

Through content analysis most common findings this research tries to answer are.

1. What is the partisanship in psychology through thematic analysis?
2. Why partisanship has become the research interest of psychologist in democratic settings.
3. What are the psychological determinants which elicit and reward these partisan behavior?
4. How these psychological determinants are affecting present day democratic societies?
5. What impact does these psychological determinants of partisanship have on public?

Literature Review

2.1: Partisanship has derived from group based activities (1944 by Paul Lazerfeld). Children developed their group based identities at very young age. Social identity of partisanship start developing at early age not at 18. It's not a personality shift that happened over night. It's part of social identity developed through years and shaped one personality. Researchers have noticed that like nepotism, partisanship like playing favorites.

Then in 1960s researchers at Michigan University developed a concept of voting behavior which is long and short term behavior toward party voting. Now clearly define partisanship. They named it "Funnel of Causality". Funnel of causality define voters behavior how and when of voting behavior in political science. But it could be viewed as psychological determinants of partisanship, which includes cognitive and behavioral reasons of partisanship.

2.2: Psychological identification: Huddy, Mason and Aaroe 2015 concluded that partisanship add as in person self-concept. Adding or deducting the traits likeable to same partisan group. This leads to in-group liking or liking of self. Which adds to identifying own self with in - group leaders, policies and likeminded people. Researchers have noticed the sharp rise of partisanship, because there is a great divide in parties to the group of people they attract. (Christopher.M. Fredrico 2017). Same writer suggested that it could be explained in two different patterns.

- Top-down
- Bottom - up

Top down is when people drift apart in their attitude towards other party partisans. The bottom up processing is that people with certain behaviors and traits are to seek certain political party influence.

2.3: Characteristics of partisanship: When researchers view partisanship few features and reasons pop out of many were how the democratic system of the country is given space to. Is it two political party system like U.S or it has multiple political parties system? (j.celeste lay2023). Some researchers think that partisanship is fundamental

to democratic system to survive. (Natalie wenzelle letsa, 2024). Its characteristics include s

- Inclination towards misinformation
- No accountability towards in-group
- Harsh judgment towards out-group
- Motivational and emotional rigidity

2.4: Development of partisanship: like any other identification process partisanship is influenced and reinforced by peers, society, environment and education. According to many past researchers the partisan preference is dependent on how people view political disaccord among elites. Max Webber (1948) discussed the notion of “Effective affinities”. A linkage of patterns, types and ideas of people who are attracted to certain propositions. All in all it could be concluded that masses are tend to polarize when elites from parties polarized and unable to see the difference masses gets polarized too. (Federico, 2020).

2.5: Rationale: In current research world of psychology of politics partisanship is the domain which is less researched through quantitative and qualitative research. Though it’s the topic of research for sociologist from a century but hardly touched d by its psychological counterparts for its affects. As new rising domain in psychological research it is essential to study it affects and effects in fast changing world of scenarios. Where political scenarios changes rapidly but people partisan view rarely change. to research the gap in this field that what psychological correlates influence this medium in current world, researchers tries to analyze the emotional and psychological side of partisanship in this study. Previous studies were through sociologist or quantitative method but partisanship usually don’t have its fair share of qualitative analysis. Though this research is not region or geographically specific but researcher tries to find psychological reasons and affects for being partisan. This research is not only a content analysis but thematic or psychoanalytic in a sense too.

Researchers target the already defined reasons on the psychological bases in multiple studies to integrate into more specific psychological meaning

behind it. This research indicates that how partisanship develop in democratic systems but support a rigid despotism as result in the democratic system. This study highlights the partisanship as system running under a system. Darker side of democratic system in present decade scenario.

2.6: Objectives: to explore the partisanship concept in detail through lens of psychologist this study aims to arrives on objectives, which are determined to find

1. What are the core concept of partisanship in present day democratic scenario and to know the gap between the already present researches of partisans?
2. Does this social role play any positive growth among people or is it just the identification for power. To explore laymen understanding and to determine that which is the most common pattern of identification of partisanship. Is it ideological or person centered?
3. How political parties develop theoretical partisanship and how person centered partisanship works. Though characteristics might be same but dynamics of partisanship must have to be different.

Methodology

3.1: Sample: Purposive sampling was used, which was selected for targeted topic of the psychology of partisanship. For instance, purposive sampling provides a more targeted and specific sample, which helps to answer research questions related to that particular population or phenomenon. However, this approach may also introduce bias by limiting the diversity of the sample.

3.2: Measures: Content analysis is a research method used to identify patterns in recorded communication. To conduct content analysis, you systematically collect data from a set of texts, which can be written, oral, or visual. in this research measures were the research papers, which are objective, valid and reliable for this content analysis of psychology of partisanship. . data was collected from online libraries of research gate, Cambridge online and scholar work.

3.3: Research design:

a topic of The Psychology of Partisanship



Select a method of research Qualitative content analysis



Then select the research papers from reliable &



valid online libraries



Content analysis of those researches & articles



Finding out same patterns to form results

Results

4.1 : What is the partisanship in psychology?

2.

Why partisanship has become the research interest of psychologist

- Psychological cognitions and emotions. Parent child transference as positive relationship indicator. Partisanship is expressive in behavior

4.2: What are the psychological determinants which elicit and reward these partisan behavior?

- The in-group biased judgments and negative out - group behavior. Lead to higher self-esteem when identified as a certain political party image.

- Impact of social networking websites through algorithm building and specified targeted news and exposure reinforce partisan behavior.

4.3: How these psychological determinants are affecting present day democratic societies? What impact does these psychological determinants of partisanship have on public?

- Partisanship is same across all democratic cultures but recently all over the democratic system it is affecting negatively people parting ways from relationships and friendships of decades over their political choices.

FIGURE 1: RESULTS

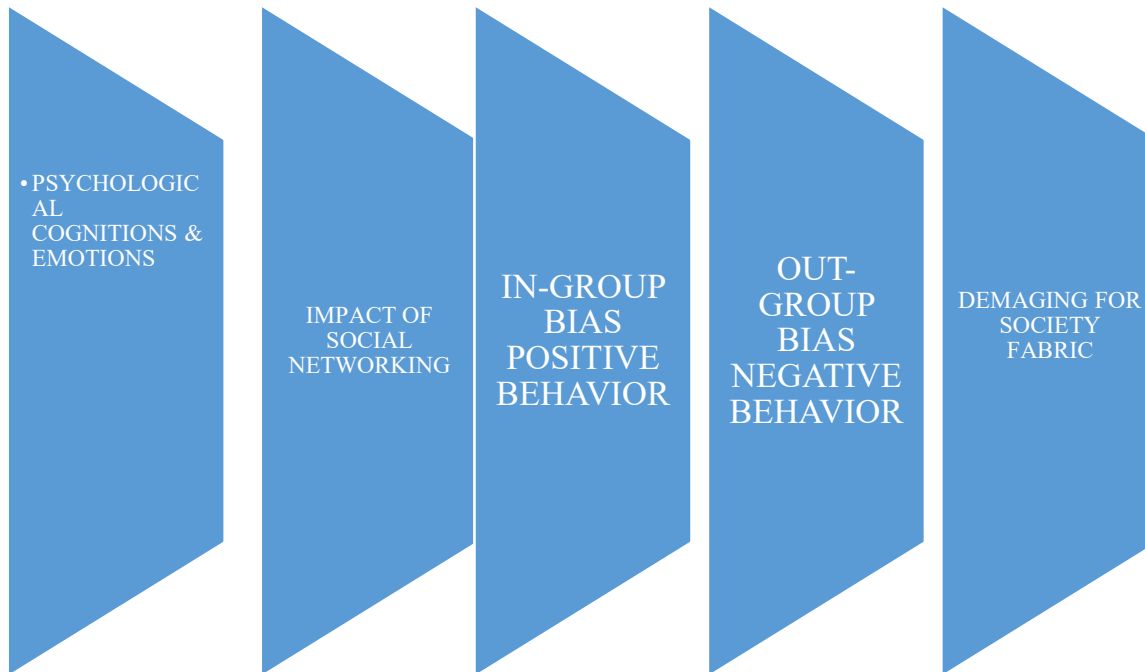


FIGURE 2 :

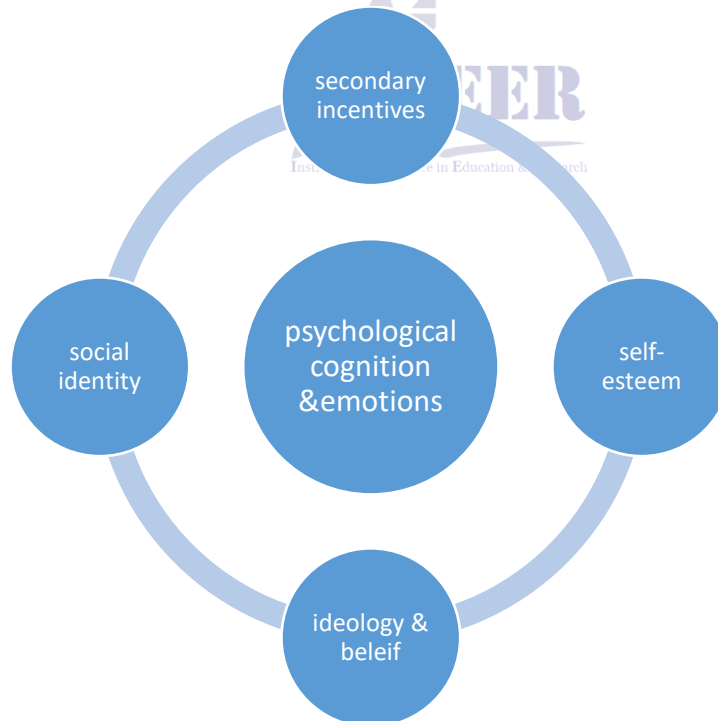


FIGURE 3:

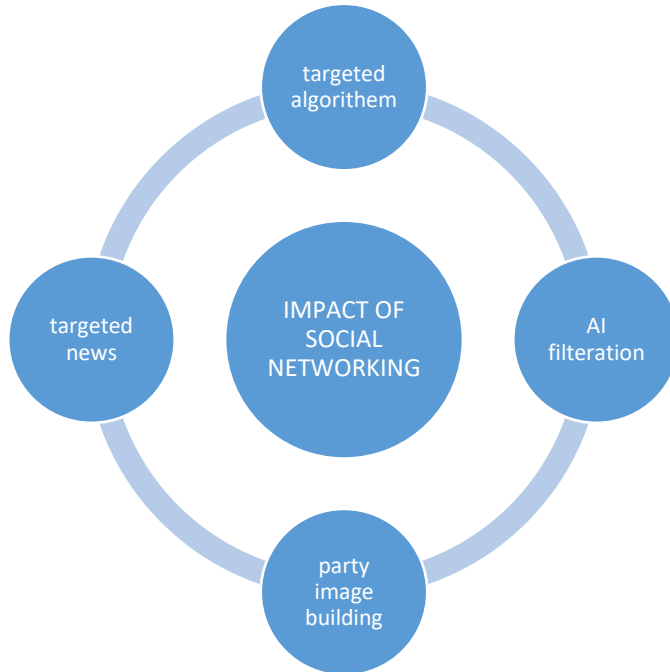


FIGURE 4:

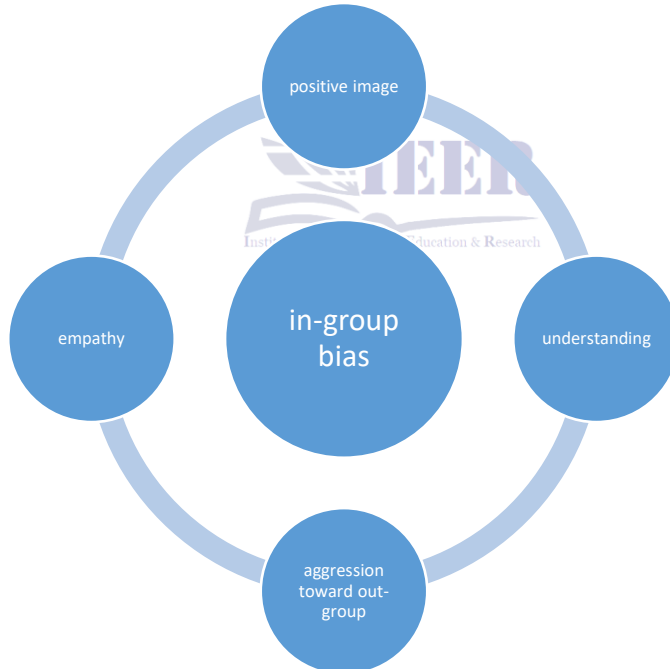


FIGURE 5:

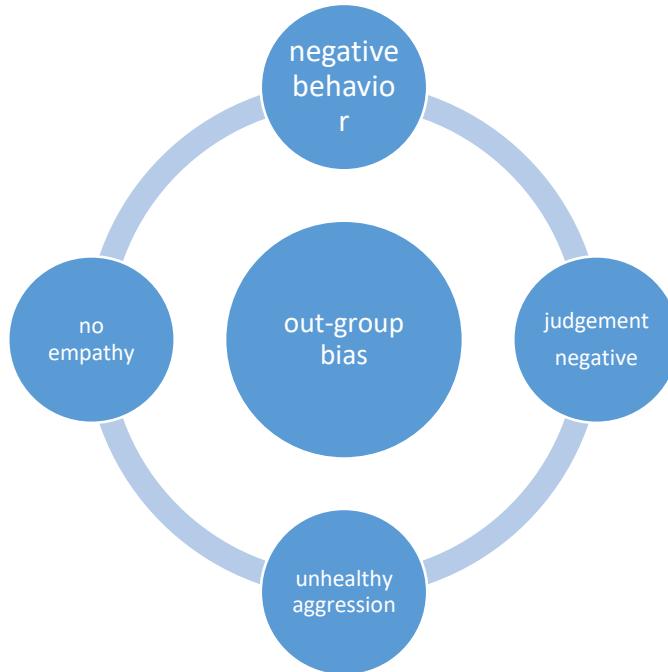


FIGURE 6:



Discussion

In this research data is from many researches as it is archival research content analysis. Researcher found out robust findings of the specific questions mention earlier in the abstract and result section. Which are

- 5.1 : What is the partisanship in psychology?
2. Why partisanship has become the research interest of psychologist
 - Psychological cognitions and emotions. Parent child transference as positive relationship indicator. Partisanship is expressive in behavior. But when psychologist quoted that partisanship has its roots deep in psychology as it based on

emotions, motivation and incentives. One ponder over what these could be. In present time we observe that partisanship meaning has turn in to aggression against other parties. Some researchers also indicated the robust findings of certain personality features which helps to build and sustain partisan identity. Studies found out that partisan personality has link with Big five personality three features of Extraversion , agreeableness and openness.it includes Conscientiousness as it supports the concept of order, tradition, and adherence to social norms(Haas VG2017) .

For example few examples of recent times could be a significant behavior of Partisan behavior. In U.S Trump followers tried to take over capitol on 6 January 2021. When his followers or partisans attacked the capitol building before counting of votes. It was self-coup not dictate by Trump. When he lost 2020 presidential elections.

In Pakistan when on 9 May 2023 Imran Khan, leader of Pakistan Tehreek -E-Insaaf got arrested by government. Stir anger among his partisans, ended as biggest riots in all over Pakistan ever.

As the rise in protest against certain political parties or policies around the world recently but it couldn't be label as partisan anger because in Nepal , Malaysia, Bangladesh and now in Iran these riots or protests are not in favor of certain political party but against the already existing system.

Praise from the likeable group feels like enough reinforcement for the in-group mates. Problematic behavior arises when reinforcement happen and other partisans take it as a cue to repeat that behavior, so if other partisans doesn't have that certain personality behavior but after incentive of being noticed by their authorities for these behavior other members tend to behave in the ways which are appreciated by partisans authority. Which could be a healthy pattern but usually it end up in extreme behaviors and partisans being used by political party.

5.2: What are the psychological determinants which elicit and reward these partisan behavior?

- The in-group biased judgments and negative out - group behavior. Lead to higher self-

esteem when identified as a certain political party image.

Ankita & Francisca 2025 quoted that partisanship is very psychological in nature and longstanding too. They wrote that actually ideological self-identity and partisan self-identity overlap in studies. And enlighten the researchers that behind every partisan mind set, its ideological or expressive rely the belief that when partisan's party came in power will entertain their agenda or give them favor. And the reward of this partisan behavior is the reinforced behavior. In every democratic system there are political parties which identified to have certain characteristic to their fractions of society. Which is their pride and motto by which they attract people to become there partisans. Many parties belong to people in poverty, others may identifies people who are educated, moderate yet rich. Others may be true calling for religious base partisans. This happened on the really unconscious level, many times partisans reasons to support any political ideology is on psychoanalytic unconscious reasons. Many partisanships are inherited from parents view point like any other children would inherit belief system through Freudian developmental stages.

That behavior when reinforced lead to in-group positive behavior. When one notice more positive behaviors or put things under light of positivity. Whether the act itself positive or not. It's like when partisans of Hitler deemed him as most disciplined human being ever, but his crimes against humanity doesn't justify by his good or well managed life style. In the end researchers have noticed that partisanship is actually elite behavior, which masses identify with. We could say that partisans are more prone to pragmatic basis for in-group people rather than out-group. Through pragmatic partisanship they expect that masses get influenced by personal characteristics or ethnicity or same culture. Researchers found out that people with high self-esteem tend to engage in partisan activity more than other adults.

Out -group negative judgment often appreciated by the in-group. Through belief system that the political party they identify for example believing that whatever other political party is doing is not rationale. Making certain names for other

partisans in a bigotry way is often get appreciated, which is not a civil way of acting. Out group hatred to the level that your rivals become inhumane to you, bashing ,threatening and calling names just to satisfy certain motives is very common practice among partisans.

- Impact of social networking websites through algorithm building and specified targeted news and exposure reinforce partisan behavior.

Social networking sites (SNS) actually reinforces existing belief exposing misinformation and extreme views. With algorithms prioritizing polarizing content for engagements. Partisans with likeminded people strengthening views and increasing polarization, becoming more suspect able to misleading content. Algorithms of social networking sites (SNS). Algorithm shows user content are likely to agree with creating and isolating and increased ideological separation.

In 2016 researchers quoted in a book named “The Presidency & Social Media” that there is an increased in partisan news in social networking sites of partisans, which has political consequences. They also indicate research results that if given the choice to partisans to read news online they chose to engage in pro attitudinal information. Information that is pro to their belief system. Creating utopian idea of their political party. When in reality it doesn’t happened a partisan act in a way which is frictional to society.

5.3: How these psychological determinants are affecting present day democratic societies?

What impact does these psychological determinants of partisanship have on public?

- Partisanship is same across all democratic cultures but recently all over the democratic system it is affecting negatively people parting ways from relationships and friendships of decades over their political choices. Defining new characteristic to rivalry, which is not mafia base or religious basis. It is budding from going against political ideologies. Few decades back it used to be on micro level but now with the help of internet and social networking sites news or opinions out of context spread like wild fire in the jungle. And people who belong to times before internet and from the time of rash censorship, believe these

news or fake news to be authentic. Make and act on those small rash events and act out as they are true in nature. As a result many protest happened which has caused riots among peaceful countries. And given the reason to prevail hidden agenda of countries who want to derail the system of democracy.

In this time when mobile phones are working as television and due to internet each and every news is available all the time or just a click away . all news are uncensored which usually give the perception of freedom of speech and media but at the same time it work as loose cannon reaching to those who doesn’t possess political awareness or past knowledge which is much needed for a partisan. So it’s like support from people who believe themselves to be supporting a political party as a partisan. Usually ended as the support provided which is not needed neither asked for .

People have fear and loathing across out - group people. Which lead to more stress. Researchers have found that negative side of partisanship lead to more poor and unhealthy physical and mental health days compare to who are not extremely polarized in their views. Partisanship has intensified to the length that people may object to their children marriage to out-group person. The other side effect of gradually hiking partisanship is dehumanization and violent behavior towards out-group. Researchers have found robust results that partisans tend to look out-group partisans more morally vindictive and think that they have done morally wrong acts to extreme. Partisans have shown more prone towards violence for out-group partisans too. Moreover, cult like following among certain political groups which target their partisans religious belief through their political gestures or certain personality charismatic charms. Cults are famous for their partisan’s blind following through their agenda. But these followers could be acting out on certain ideological bases too. But if one could observe objectively religion is an ideological base. But what happen in democratic countries where religion is not priority? Over those countries we have examples of Hitler’s Nazi ideology, recently we have Trump MAGA (make America great again). They are not religious extreme groups but rather

based on societal reforms through one person vantage point. Their partisans or followers allows extreme dedication toward their leaders and not allow any slight criticism. Researcher could suggest that it is kind of extreme in-group behavior but damaging to societal fabric which allow societies to grow in each other in harmony.

Yet how this explain in thematic analysis of partisans. Cult behavior could be explain by Carl Jung's collective unconscious. As it is inherited structure to all human race from when the human race existed on this earth.

Conclusion:

The psychology behind partisanship and variables which underlies or being covered by the term psychology has been discussed in this archival research through content analysis of rather a new domain of psychology of politics.

This paper has highlighted psychological domain behind every partisan behavior in this world. So, is behind partisanship. It is found that the behavior of partisanship has bases of emotions, motivation and incentives. Moreover incentives has been identified as secondary in nature rather than primary. Which has worked as strengthening of this political behavior or should say social identity. Researches have double checked and confirmed that this behavior is connected to negative emotions, reinforcements and incentives among political elites and masses. It is based on the basic base of self-esteem, sense of identification and social polarization in present day extremely polarized partisan society. This research has highlights the negativity around the term partisanship. The more we research the more we find out about the negative bias this identity has brought to today's society fabric. These research findings call for an action plan for political elites and political parties to educate their partisans to more positive attitude towards out-groups. For healthy environment to make masses realize their participation in political system.

Though it is true that partisanship has an emotional connection but sometimes its extreme presence destruct the image of political party itself. In today times where extremism is manifesting its way through every behavior. Political elites should be careful towards their behavioral and verbal

conduct because in the present day society they have far more presence on screen then few decades back. Which has increased their influence on masses too. In this field of psychology there is still more research to be done as ever in every field. But to improve the partisanship bases on positive behavior is more important.

Recommendations:

For future endeavors it could be recommended that this partisan behavior should be researched in more specific and empirically. Along with psychological variables, because partisan behavior worked differently in different democratic systems. By working differently it doesn't mean that its primary reasons are different but it meant that why partisan behavior is so extremely negative in few democratic systems and not in others. Though primary basis doesn't differ but behavior does. There should be more empirical and qualitative ways to study psychological reasons behind this behavior.

This research press the need that in present day society where political leaders and elites are more present than ever in front of people. Through social networking sites, political elites should be

- More careful in their own verbal and behavioral conduct, their behavior should elicit more assertive and less base on hatred. Because partisans reward system is wired to the appreciation from top tier leadership or people who are in authority of political party through proper channel. Whenever leadership appreciate or ask for certain acts or behavior, even when they don't ask for it. Partisans needed to act in the way leaders expect them to.

- They should take more responsibilities for the sake of their partisans. So partisans have not to support irresponsible behavior of their leaders. Because partisans are supposed to be supporting their political parties and leaders through good and bad, usually make them end up in tough situation which they usually don't bargain for when they step in to partisan role.

- Political elites should intentionally guiding their partisans towards more positive behaviors. Conducting seminars and workshops so they could learn ethics of politics.

- Political wings who just not organize but synchronized the partisans who are destructive should be banned not for certain time of period but to stop them from joining other parties too. Because if destruction is their neural path then whichever political party they would join ,they will be destruction force and negative influence to other partisans .

- Educate partisans through managed trainings

In future there is need to identify that is their certain personality pattern or traits that entertain or more welcoming to be a partisan or is it vice versa that partisan identity promote that rigid and biased personality patterns. Political parties should be more organized in keeping their partisans disciplined, though it's not possible to keep this mass behavior in check. But political parties can arrange communication skills. Which would make them approachable and easy to communicate with. In this time of social networking sites, AI and camera in every other hand everybody is directly connecting to masses. But political parties should have made harsh boundaries for their media wings, so partisans would have positive, calm and collective persons to look upon.

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