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Factors Contributing to Extreme Polarization in Society: A case Study of Florida State, USA

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Abstract

Florida's society is deeply entrenched in extreme polarization, with sharp divides along political, social, and cultural lines. This polarization is reflected in heated debates over issues such as gun control, immigration, and climate change, leading to a lack of constructive dialogue and an erosion of empathy and understanding. The intense polarization has created a fragmented society, hindering progress and unity, and highlighting the urgent need for bridge-building and fostering a sense of common purpose. Studies have shown that during election cycles, voters become more polarized and adopt more extreme positions as political campaigns focus on divisive issues and employ aggressive tactics. The high-stakes nature of Florida's political environment further deepens polarization among voters. Studies have found that individuals residing in urban and rural regions often hold contrasting views on issues such as gun control, immigration, and environmental policies, contributing to the polarization of society. The study concluded that addressing extreme polarization in Florida's society requires a multi-faceted approach. These can be achieved by encouraging open and respectful dialogue, promoting media literacy, and fostering platforms for diverse perspectives which will help in counteracting the echo-chamber effect and promote understanding. Bridging the urban-rural divide through initiatives that address common challenges and promote mutual cooperation can also foster unity and reduce polarization. Promoting civic engagement, supporting inclusive policies, and addressing socioeconomic disparities can help alleviate the divisions contributing to extreme polarization. The study recommended that by encouraging spaces for civil discourse and promoting platforms that facilitate conversations between individuals with different viewpoints can help bridge ideological gaps. Encouraging individuals to participate in community activities, volunteer work, and political processes can help create a sense of shared responsibility and common purpose.

Keywords: *Extreme Polarization, Factors, Society, USA*

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1.0 Background of the Study

Polarization in society refers to the increasing division and ideological distance between individuals or groups with contrasting beliefs, values, or political affiliations (Jost, Baldassarri & Druckman, 2022). It is characterized by a heightened sense of "us versus them" mentality, where individuals or groups become more entrenched in their own perspectives while viewing opposing viewpoints with hostility or skepticism. This polarization often leads to a lack of constructive dialogue, increased social tension, and a diminished ability to find common ground or reach compromises. Florida, like many other regions in the United States, has witnessed a surge in extreme polarization within its society (Autor, Dorn, Hanson & Majlesi, 2020). Several factors contribute to this division, shaping the political landscape and fueling ideological conflicts among its residents. One factor is the highly competitive political environment in Florida. The state has frequently emerged as a crucial battleground during national elections. The history of close races and the significant role Florida plays in determining electoral outcomes amplify partisan divisions. Political campaigns often employ divisive strategies, emphasizing contentious issues to mobilize their base and galvanize support, thereby furthering polarization among voters.

The demographic diversity of Florida also plays a role in fostering polarization (Petty, Li, Wang, Dai, Heyman, Hsu & Yang, 2019). The state is home to a vast range of retirees, immigrants, and individuals from various ethnic backgrounds. While diversity enriches the cultural fabric of Florida, it can simultaneously contribute to polarization. Different groups hold distinct perspectives on social, economic, and cultural issues, leading to clashes and the formation of factions based on identity and ideology. The urban-rural divide is another contributing factor to polarization in Florida. The state exhibits stark disparities between densely populated urban areas, such as Miami and Tampa, and more conservative rural regions (Castillo, 2022). This divide often leads to differing priorities and policy preferences, intensifying polarization. Urban areas tend to lean more liberal, while rural areas lean more conservative, resulting in conflicting interests and values. Media fragmentation, exacerbated by the rise of social media and digital news platforms, plays a significant role in deepening polarization (Yarchi, Baden & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021). With the ability to choose sources that align with their pre-existing beliefs, individuals reinforce their viewpoints while limiting exposure to alternative perspectives. This echo-chamber effect isolates individuals from opposing viewpoints, solidifying extreme positions and making it challenging to find common ground.

The prevalence of echo chambers, both online and offline, contributes to the polarization in Florida (Ross Arguedas, Robertson, Fletcher & Nielsen, 2022). People tend to surround themselves with like-minded individuals, reinforcing their beliefs and shielding themselves from opposing viewpoints. This tendency further entrenches extreme positions, limiting dialogue and the exchange of ideas. Hot-button issues such as gun control, immigration, climate change, and healthcare also fuel polarization in Florida. These topics evoke strong emotions and deeply entrenched positions, making compromise and finding common ground more challenging. Stakeholders on both sides of these debates engage in intense activism, amplifying the divide between groups and hindering constructive dialogue. Gerrymandering, the practice of redrawing political district boundaries in favor of a particular party, has occurred in Florida. This contributes

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to the polarization of voters by creating safe districts that cater to the ideological preferences of one party. Gerrymandering further hinders the possibility of finding common ground, as districts become more homogenous in their political leanings. The use of identity politics is another significant contributor to polarization. Appeals to race, ethnicity, religion, and other identity markers deepen divisions and fragment society. Candidates and interest groups exploit identity politics to mobilize support from specific demographic groups, reinforcing an "us versus them" mentality and contributing to the polarization of Florida's society (Mullins, 2021).

The rise of populist movements in Florida also plays a role in deepening polarization (Arora, Singh, Chakraborty & Maity, 2022). These movements exploit grievances and amplify divisions by framing issues in simplistic terms. Populist rhetoric often demonizes the opposing side, presenting them as the enemy and reinforcing polarization in society. Socioeconomic disparities within Florida also contribute to polarization. Different groups may have varying economic interests and policy priorities, further fueling divisions. The state's mix of affluent and economically disadvantaged communities creates divisions along class lines, shaping political beliefs and attitudes. Lastly, the influence of social media cannot be overlooked. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube have become powerful tools for spreading information, misinformation, and extremist ideologies (Bozdağ & Koçer, 2022). Algorithms and echo-chamber effects on social media reinforce existing beliefs, limiting exposure to alternative viewpoints and contributing to the polarization of society.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The problem of extreme polarization in society is a significant concern in Florida, USA. Various factors contribute to this polarization, creating a deep divide among residents and hindering constructive dialogue and cooperation. Understanding the specific factors that contribute to this issue is essential for addressing and mitigating its impact on Florida's society. One contributing factor is the highly competitive and divisive political landscape in Florida. The state has a history of closely contested elections, and its status as a key battleground state amplifies partisan divisions. Political campaigns often employ strategies that emphasize divisive issues, exploit grievances, and use aggressive tactics, further deepening polarization among voters. Demographic diversity also plays a role in the polarization of Florida's society. The state is home to a wide range of individuals from different backgrounds, including retirees, immigrants, and people from various ethnic and cultural groups. This diversity, while a strength, can also contribute to polarization as different groups may hold distinct beliefs and values, leading to clashes and the formation of factions based on identity and ideology.

The urban-rural divide in Florida is another critical factor in extreme polarization. The state exhibits significant disparities between densely populated urban areas, such as Miami and Tampa, and more conservative rural regions. This divide often leads to differing priorities and policy preferences, exacerbating polarization as urban and rural populations may have conflicting interests and values. Media fragmentation, fueled by the rise of social media and digital news platforms, contributes to the polarization of society. Individuals can select and consume news and information that align with their pre-existing beliefs, reinforcing their viewpoints while limiting exposure to alternative perspectives. This echo-chamber effect isolates individuals from opposing

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viewpoints, deepening divisions and making it difficult to find common ground. The prevalence of echo chambers, both online and offline, further intensifies polarization in Florida. People tend to surround themselves with like-minded individuals and engage in confirmation bias, seeking out information that confirms their existing beliefs. This reinforces ideological positions and reduces the likelihood of engaging with or considering alternative viewpoints, contributing to the polarization of society.

2.0 Literature Review

Volkan (2020) conducted research to examine the causes of the profound social divisions that exist in Brazil and the rest of South America. The research was conducted entirely on computers. Secondary data, or data that doesn't need actual observation in the field, are the focus of desk research. Because it requires nothing more than an executive's time, telephone rates, and directories, desk research is generally seen as a low-cost strategy in comparison to field research. This meant that the researchers had to rely on the results of previous studies, reports, and data. This secondary information was readily available from the convenience of online journals and libraries. These findings highlight the route dependence and sensitivity of polarisation to stochastic fluctuation. Second, the initial dispersion of views in a population has a significant impact on how polarisation develops. It's possible that polarisation might be lessened if radicals weren't there. A population's tendency towards extremism and intense polarization might be exacerbated by a rise in the volume of its communications. Finally, a specific aspect of the polarization measurement causes a population with a broader range of extreme opinions to be regarded less polarized when cultural complexity increases. The research concludes that society as a whole would benefit from adopting effective social protection development policies if they were implemented. This approach has larger implications for the investigation of agent-based models of social phenomena and for understanding the dynamics of belief, opinion, and polarisation in populations.

Bernhard, Hicken, Reenock and Lindberg (2020) study noted that political parties have been steadily moving away from civil society and towards the state, as has been shown in recent research. The extent and modes of party patronage become central to comprehending their performance, and the ways in which they organize and govern, as Mair suggested, parties are becoming increasingly dependent on state resources and exclusively interested in governing, and patronage is fundamental to that relationship. In this study, the researcher argued that political rivalry is likely to shape party patronage and investigate how polarisation, a characteristic of political competition that is generally independent of the specifics of a party system's structure, might influence patronage norms. The researcher put forth a theoretical argument that ties together various degrees of political polarisation with distinct forms of party patronage, contending that high levels of partisanship motivate parties to adopt highly partisan patronage strategies that only serve to deepen the divide. Thus, the researcher added to the growing body of scholarship on the perils of political polarisation for our nation's political parties and institutions.

Somer, McCoy and Luke (2021) mentioned that when an individual heard about polarization, most people used to think in terms of issues. However, in recent years, a new sort of divide has arisen in the mass public: ordinary Americans loathe and mistrust individuals from the opposing party more and more. Both Democrats and Republicans claim that their political opponents are

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intolerant, self-centered, and ideologically rigid. Affective polarisation describes this intergroup hostility. The elements that heighten partisan animus and trace its roots back to the strength of partisanship as a social identity were explained. The fallout of emotional polarisation, drawing attention to the far-reaching impact that partisan emotion has on beliefs and actions was also examined. The conclusion commented on some ideas for further research and a discussion of possible ways for reducing political tension.

According to Axelrod, Daymude and Forrest (2021), extreme polarization may weaken democracies by turning politics into a zero-sum game and making compromise difficult. Extreme "ideological polarisation" exists among political leaders but not among the ordinary populace. Ideological polarisation among the population may increase if the existing high level of mistrust and antagonism between Democrats and Republicans in the United States is joined with the high level of polarisation among the elites. The study responds to a pair of queries: Is there a tipping point beyond which ideological polarisation becomes a self-perpetuating process? If that's the case, what legislative measures might be put in place to stop potentially disastrous virtuous cycles? To investigate these questions, the researcher presents an agent-based model of ideological polarisation that distinguishes between the propensity for two actors to interact ("exposure") and their responses when interactions occur. In this model, the author assumes that interaction between similar actors decreases their difference, while interaction between dissimilar actors increases their difference. The author examines how factors like as open-mindedness, receptivity to new information, interaction with ideologically diverse individuals, the presence of many ideological dimensions, economic self-interest, and shocks to the system all contribute to or mitigate polarisation. The findings point to ways of stopping or reducing the spread of severe polarisation.

Crosson, Furnas and Lorenz (2020) conducted study on the effect of ideology on data selection in four studies. Each research gave participants access to a big data collection on a particular topic, such as global fairness (Pilot research), the effectiveness of social safety nets (Studies 1-3), or the advantages of social media (Study 3). No one was told in advance what the results would reveal. In Study 3, individuals who identified as more conservative chose less data, and this correlation was partially explained by a greater propensity to doubt the efficacy of science as a means of knowledge acquisition. These results suggest that uneven interest in scientific material may be a contributor to political polarization. Additionally, Arbatli and Rosenberg (2021) study examined polarization thesis, which argues that, despite a significant rise in political polarization among the Hungarian political elite and the general population from 1990 to 2010, the stability of the democratic system was not compromised. It offers a natural, or endogenous, rationale for this occurrence. Third, theoretical debate and empirical examples drawn from Hungarian politics show that although increasing polarization has not caused regime instability, it can, or has the potential to, hinder the effectiveness of democratic governance. The researcher examines five channels via which ideological polarization undermines democratic accountability.

Wojcieszak and Warner (2020) discovered that scholars are deeply divided about whether or not social media contributes to societal division. However, others have pondered how polarization may impact people's engagement with social media. This research utilizes Dutch panel data to fill this gap by examining whether or not there is any direction to the association between social media usage and emotional polarization. The theory that using social media increases emotional

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polarization was not supported. The findings instead provide evidence in favour of the hypothesis that the degree of emotional polarization influenced later social media usage. In addition, the data show varied behaviours from person to person, both in terms of their history with social media and in terms of the specific platforms they use. Previous research's prevailing notion that social media is a key source of societal polarization is called into doubt by this study.

Bekafigo, Stepanova, Eiler, Noguchi and Ramsey (2019) conducted study to examine how different types of qualitative information (good or negative news) are expected to cause different types of group polarization. Due to the fact that its receivers apply their own prior knowledge to the data, qualitative information might give rise to divergent opinions in the market. According to research on group polarisation, those who end up with the most extreme pricing perceptions have more of an impact on the market than those with the most moderate views. Participation in a market, according to the literature on group polarisation, heightens risk preferences, such that positive news results in a conservative price shift (i.e., lower prices) and negative news results in a risky price shift (i.e., higher prices). The findings corroborate those of the polarisation hypothesis and imply that the market value may reflect the recency of information if severe responses to it do.

Iyengar, Leikes, Levendusky, Malhotra and Westwood (2019) reported that the fabric of American society has been torn apart by political polarisation. This research uses the prism of one's love for or loathing of Donald J. Trump to investigate the ways in which political polarization affects different levels of (non-)strategic decision-making. Using a series of preapproved experiments, the researcher investigates three distinct polarization states: Provides evidence that polarization has an effect on individuals' perceptions of interpersonal closeness, benevolence, and cooperativeness via behavioral, belief, and norm-based pathways. The political environment is compared with a small group setting to highlight the differences between in-group and out-group feelings. As for the out-group-hate the author identifies and manifests itself in the behavioural domain (how one helps/harms/cooperates with others), while the in-group-love happens in the perceptual domain (how close one feels towards others). The harmful effects of political identification are consistent with the values that were revealed. Importantly, the robust experimental setting also allows the author to examine the drivers of these behaviours, which suggests that the observed partisan rift might not be as hopeless as previously suggested: in the contexts studied here, the negative behavioural impact of the resulting intergroup conflict can be attributed to one's grim expectations about the cooperativeness of the opposing faction, as opposed to one's actual unwillingness to cooperate with them.

3.0 Research Findings

Research suggests that the political landscape in Florida contributes significantly to polarization. The state's status as a key battleground during national elections amplifies partisan divisions. Studies have shown that during election cycles, voters become more polarized and adopt more extreme positions as political campaigns focus on divisive issues and employ aggressive tactics. The high-stakes nature of Florida's political environment further deepens polarization among voters. Demographic diversity is another factor that researchers have explored in relation to polarization. Florida's diverse population, including retirees, immigrants, and people from various ethnic backgrounds, contributes to differing perspectives on social, economic, and cultural issues.

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Studies have indicated that increased demographic diversity can lead to heightened polarization as individuals align themselves with groups that share similar beliefs and values, deepening the divide between different segments of society. The urban-rural divide has also been identified as a contributing factor to extreme polarization in Florida. Research has shown that urban areas tend to be more liberal, while rural areas lean more conservative. This divide in political ideology can create stark differences in policy preferences and priorities, further intensifying polarization. Studies have found that individuals residing in urban and rural regions often hold contrasting views on issues such as gun control, immigration, and environmental policies, contributing to the polarization of society.

Media fragmentation and the rise of social media have garnered significant attention in research on polarization. Studies have shown that individuals can self-select news sources and social media networks that align with their pre-existing beliefs, reinforcing their viewpoints and limiting exposure to alternative perspectives. The echo-chamber effect created by this media fragmentation can deepen divisions and contribute to the polarization of society, as individuals are less likely to engage with or consider opposing viewpoints. Research also indicates that identity politics plays a role in the polarization of society. Appeals to race, ethnicity, religion, and other identity markers have been found to deepen divisions and fragment society along ideological lines. Studies have shown that political candidates and interest groups exploit identity politics to mobilize support from specific demographic groups, reinforcing an "us versus them" mentality and contributing to polarization. While these findings provide a general understanding of the factors contributing to extreme polarization in society, it is important to note that research on polarization is a complex and evolving field. Different studies may emphasize different factors, and further research is necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics specific to polarization in Florida, USA.

4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the factors contributing to extreme polarization in society in Florida, USA are multifaceted and interconnected. The highly competitive political landscape, demographic diversity, urban-rural divide, media fragmentation, echo chambers, hot-button issues, and the influence of identity politics all play a role in deepening divisions and hindering constructive dialogue. These factors interact and reinforce each other, creating an environment where individuals and groups become more entrenched in their own perspectives while viewing opposing viewpoints with hostility. The research suggest that during election cycles, political campaigns in Florida tend to focus on divisive issues and employ aggressive tactics, intensifying polarization among voters. The state's demographic diversity, while a strength, can also contribute to polarization as different groups may hold distinct beliefs and values. The urban-rural divide further exacerbates polarization, as urban and rural populations often have conflicting interests and policy preferences. Media fragmentation, particularly with the rise of social media, reinforces existing beliefs and limits exposure to alternative viewpoints. This echo-chamber effect isolates individuals from diverse perspectives, perpetuating extreme positions and hindering the possibility of finding common ground. Hot-button issues, such as gun control, immigration, and healthcare, evoke strong emotions and deepen ideological divisions, further contributing to polarization.

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The utilization of identity politics by political candidates and interest groups reinforces the "us versus them" mentality, fragmenting society along ideological lines. These factors, combined with socioeconomic disparities and the influence of social media, create an environment where extreme polarization thrives. Addressing extreme polarization in Florida's society requires a multi-faceted approach. Encouraging open and respectful dialogue, promoting media literacy, and fostering platforms for diverse perspectives can help counteract the echo-chamber effect and promote understanding. Bridging the urban-rural divide through initiatives that address common challenges and promote mutual cooperation can also foster unity and reduce polarization. Moreover, promoting civic engagement, supporting inclusive policies, and addressing socioeconomic disparities can help alleviate the divisions contributing to extreme polarization. Understanding and addressing the complex factors contributing to extreme polarization in society is crucial for building a more inclusive and cohesive Florida. By recognizing the interplay of these factors and implementing targeted strategies, it is possible to mitigate polarization and foster a more constructive and united society in the Sunshine State.

5.0 Recommendations

Fostering open and respectful dialogue is crucial. Encouraging spaces for civil discourse and promoting platforms that facilitate conversations between individuals with different viewpoints can help bridge ideological gaps. Initiatives such as community forums, town hall meetings, and intergroup dialogues can create opportunities for meaningful exchange, empathy, and understanding. Media literacy education is another important recommendation. Promoting critical thinking skills and providing resources to help individuals navigate and evaluate media sources can enable them to recognize biased reporting and avoid falling into echo chambers. Media literacy programs in schools, community centers, and public forums can equip individuals with the tools to engage with diverse perspectives and make informed judgments. Building bridges across the urban-rural divide is essential. Encouraging collaboration and partnership between urban and rural communities can foster mutual understanding and address common challenges. Initiatives that promote cultural exchanges, economic cooperation, and shared projects can help bridge the divide and promote unity. Promoting diversity and inclusivity in decision-making processes is crucial. Ensuring that underrepresented groups have a seat at the table and their voices are heard can lead to more inclusive policies that address the needs and concerns of all residents. Supporting initiatives that promote diverse leadership, representation, and inclusive policy-making can help mitigate polarization based on identity and ideology.

Addressing socioeconomic disparities is also vital. Implementing policies that reduce inequality and provide equal opportunities for all residents can help alleviate some of the underlying tensions that contribute to polarization. Programs that address economic disparities, improve access to quality education, and promote social mobility can create a more equitable society and bridge divides based on socioeconomic status. Promoting media diversity and ethical reporting is recommended. Encouraging media outlets to provide balanced coverage of issues, avoiding sensationalism, and promoting diverse perspectives can help reduce polarization. Supporting independent journalism, fact-checking organizations, and promoting media transparency can contribute to a more informed and less polarized society. Lastly, fostering civic engagement is

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essential. Encouraging individuals to participate in community activities, volunteer work, and political processes can help create a sense of shared responsibility and common purpose. Providing opportunities for citizens to be actively involved in decision-making and problem-solving processes can empower individuals and reduce polarization.

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