The Issue of Increasing Sociopolitical Polarisation

In the many large democracies, there is the issue of increasing sociopolitical polarisation, particularly fuelled by online algorithms. Many people now feel aligned to specific social and political issues, as opposed to a specific party. Recent increases in economic and social hardship, globally, has led to an increase in sociopolitical tensions as well. More and more, people use online publications and social media as a source of news and information, which are fuelled by algorithms that have been shown to show increasingly extremist views.

Social polarisation is the segregation within a society that emerges when factors result in the differentiation of social groups from high-income to low-income. It is a growing problem, particularly in large cities and developed economies, however, it is a problem in any place with a social hierarchy. Countries with a cycle of poverty and class conflict are seeing rapidly growing social polarisation as the class divide widens. In urban areas, where people with a variety of economic backgrounds are in close proximity, the class divide can often be seen more easily and therefore cities are more likely to see riots and general social disintegration.

Modern political parties' tactics are now to personally attack members of the opposition, promoting the view that the president represents only their supporters, rather than the country as a whole. Political movements are now shaped by social inequalities and issues that leave little room for a 'middle ground'. Political allegiance is also now becoming tied to personal identity, intensifying the issue.

Recently Facebook has launched an anti-fake-news campaign in an effort to combat the extremism that is rife on the site, but many platforms still have much work to do. 4chan holds many far-right conspiracy theories that have grown in popularity in the recent years, such as the Qanon group who believed that President Trump was waging a secret war against elite Satan-worshipping paedophiles in government, business and the media. They, and others inspired by social media, played a part in the storming of the White House in January 2021.

The Christchurch Mosque shootings in New Zealand 2019, were perpetrated by a terrorist who spread his manifesto online and live-streamed the attack, which led to many social media sites trying to police their content to remove violent or extremist videos, a temporary measure.

Reducing sociopolitical polarisation is a challenging task, as much of the effort must be put into addressing the issues behind the sociopolitical divide, as well as promoting effective and positive discourse. Racial, gender and wealth inequalities all add to the sociopolitical divide, and for some countries there is also a religious divide that is sometimes exacerbated by the state. Countries can implement differing online content rules and firewalls, that are often bypassed by citizens, however, much is up to the companies themselves.

Points to consider

- What are the main points of social divide in your country, e.g. wealth, gender religion etc?
- How can you promote access to a diversity of information and prevent online radicalisation?
- Does your country's current political party believe in serving the country as a whole or its voters?

Useful Links

- [Why is political polarisation increasing in democratic countries? (openaccessgovernment.org)](#)
- [Political polarisation and participation - POST (parliament.uk)](#)
- [We are Resisting Disinfodemic: Global Media and Information Literacy Week 2020 (unesco.org)](#)