



Politics as the Malignant Pandemic Associated with Callousness: A Systematic and Meta-Analysis Review

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800725>

Received: 01 September 2026; Accepted: 07 September 2026; Published: 16 August 2026

ABSTRACT

Among the polarizing agents, politics is ranked the most destructive to Mother Earth. Modern partisan politics can be likened to a virus that takes over healthy cells to replicate and spread. In this context, it hijacks citizens' reason, empathy, and capacity for evidence-based thinking, turning them into carriers of misinformation, distrust, and policy paralysis. This study argues that politics is not just dysfunctional; it has become a malignant pandemic that mutates, evades immunity, and poses a serious threat to the survival of democratic societies. This study sought to sensitize the public to the fact that modern partisan politics is wrecking the world. The Preferred Methods and Methodology for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses guidelines were applied among 70+ publications (2019-2026) on politics linkages. A total of 24 articles were selected as the most cited and relevant articles for this systematic review. The findings highlight a path for a better future by recognizing how damaging politics is metamorphosing, working together to mitigate the inherent conflicts between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and encouraging the public to demand responsibility and openness from their leaders in order to share best practices. Politics is a good servant but a bad master. It is not a paradox that politics has destroyed some nations beyond recognition and that the same politics has developed a few admirable nations. Integrity is the quiet strength that carries you through life.

Keywords: Politics, Incivility, Proletariat, Bourgeois, Corruption, Ethnicity and Favoritism.

INTRODUCTION

Politics is often described as pervasively callous because it routinely exhibits the highest levels of selfishness [1]. The condition emphasizes power and electoral considerations, mostly at the expense of individual suffering and moral consistency. In competitive systems, leaders may delay or deny aid, scapegoat vulnerable groups, or prioritize short-term gains over long-term public goods. This can create a perception that decisions are made with indifference to human costs, especially when accountability is weak and incentives favour ruthlessness [2]. Bad governance is not only a basic conflict between a system that puts short-term gains and self-interest ahead of long-term sustainability and the welfare of future generations but an output of a failed nation [3].

Study findings [4] found that 81% of participants reported negative emotional responses to political events, leading to fatigue, dissatisfaction with life, and depression. The growing unease is influenced by the changing political climate and constant access to news. There is growing concern about hostile political discussions on social media, but the underlying dynamics remain unclear, especially regarding the relationship between online hostility and the broader sociopolitical context, with limited research outside Western countries [4].

The world faces instability driven by powerful and narcissistic people with questionable motives. In their findings [5] observed that many people harbor misperceptions regarding key facts about society and that political polarization is increasing, it is intuitively appealing to believe that better informed citizens would lead to a less polarized society, and hence that information provision can help decrease divisiveness. Politics is like "the same forest with different monkeys." The landscape of power and ambition remains unchanged, as new leaders promise transformation while often repeating the same habits: seeking influence, protecting allies, blaming predecessors, and prioritizing self-interest over the public good. The players may change, but the forest's tangled rules and drama typically stay the same [6].



Research [1] indicates that, trust in the international human rights system is fast eroding as the value of human life increasingly depends on politics rather than universal values. When political alliances surpass the protection of lives, the credibility of the international community suffers. This is a call for countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to demand accountability and take leadership in defending human rights consistently. Human rights must remain universal, not become a political tool [5]. Political deceit has long been tolerated since democracy's inception. When caught lying, politicians often offer alternative truths or justify falsehoods as necessary for national security. However, in the United States, lies have also led to the downfall of presidencies [7].

The degree of social cohesion, which signifies how inclusive a country's communities are, is essential for fostering the trust needed to execute reforms [8]. A region's bad governance and politics of deceit are not exclusive to it. It's a worldwide issue that calls for a diverse strategy. Corruption, nepotism, and weak institutions create significant roadblocks to progress on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They divert resources, erode public trust, and hinder investments in crucial areas like education, healthcare, and environmental protection [3].

Multiple studies reveal a high prevalence of dishonesty in politics. One experiment found that 78% of politicians misreported outcomes for personal gain. Globally, many politicians' statements are false; for instance, analyses showed that less than a quarter of statements by African politicians in debates were inaccurate, yet over half of some parties' claims were false at times. Public skepticism is evident, with a 2021 YouGov poll indicating that 74% of Americans believe "most politicians are liars." The definition of a "lie" can vary based on factors like interpretation and partisanship, adding to the complexity of political narratives [6].

As political divisions deepen and crises persist, politics has become a major source of stress for many in the U.S. A national survey found that nearly 80% of adults identified politics as a significant anxiety source. Additionally, about 41% of adults are considering relocating to another country, while 39% are thinking about moving to a different state due to heightened political tension [4]. Negative leader effects are increasingly evident in today's politically polarized climate, characterized by incivility and negative campaigning. This negativity bias, influenced by partisanship and political dissatisfaction, suggests that leaders often drive voters toward opposing candidates instead of gaining their support [9].

Politics has a significant negative impact on well-being, as shown in a 2017 study that matched nationally representative data. It found that the public health effects of politics are comparable to or worse than those of alcohol [7]. Researchers estimated that 94 million Americans experienced severe stress from politics, 44 million lost sleep, 30 million faced physical health issues, and 11 million had suicidal thoughts impacts similar to or worse than those linked to alcohol. Politicians' uncivil behaviors are increasingly violating social and moral norms [10]. Research indicates that such behavior is on the rise, highlighting the need to consider the broader political and ideological context when examining the impact of moral beliefs. Notably, political aggression directed at one's own party is less tolerated; supporters are sensitive to in-party conflict and make harsh evaluations of ingroup critics during such times. While much political conflict occurs online, incivility is also evident in interviews, campaign rallies, and TV debates.

In their study findings [2] indicate that, political campaigns are mostly in humble backgrounds; rarely will you see campaign posters or political rallies in the sub-urban areas. The experiences voters have with winning or losing elections greatly impact their perspectives, especially their satisfaction with democratic processes. Voters who support populist parties show a heightened responsiveness to these influences.

In a world where true leadership is a rare gem, it often feels like selfishness has taken the spotlight. We seem to have more individuals chasing personal gain than visionaries willing to uplift society [1]. Politicians camouflage and engage in highly ritualized behaviors during campaign rallies, debates, and media appearances, resembling cult-like practices in their symbolism and repetition. Scholars refer to these as "political rituals" that legitimize authority, build collective identity, and manage public attention. Research suggests that rituals like loyalty tests and attack ads can promote conformity, dehumanize opponents, and distract from important policy discussions, raising concerns about the health of democracy [5].

Recycling politicians in Africa by repeatedly returning the same individuals to power has led to weakened



democratic institutions, entrenched corruption, and stalled development. When leaders rotate without accountability, governance shifts from merit to loyalty and patronage, turning ministries into rewards rather than responsibilities. This discourages innovation, as long-serving politicians protect the status quo and maintain patronage networks. Over time, citizens lose confidence in democracy as elections yield little change, resulting in apathy, discontent, and sometimes violence. Studies link prolonged tenures and political recycling to poor governance, institutional stagnation, economic decline, and underinvestment in human development even in resource-rich environments [11]. It's akin to attempting to access future opportunities with the tools designed in the past. The philosopher Mark Twain stated that "Politicians and diapers must be changed often and for the same reason."

Ethnic identity is a significant factor in the politics of many countries, more than 26 across the world and certainly in Africa, where political elites often manipulate it for their own ends. The 2017 election cycle in Kenya was particularly divisive, marked by a Supreme Court annulment and an opposition boycott, reminiscent of the turmoil in the 2007 elections. Voter mobilization and perceptions of election fairness largely reflected ethnic identity. The Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) emphasizes the need for innovative approaches to address longstanding issues of exclusion beyond ethnicity since Kenya's independence [12].

The issues of procedural non-adherence, nepotism, godfatherism, ethnicity, disregard for the rule of law, and electoral manipulation raise doubts about the ability of political parties to ensure free and fair elections in Nigeria. Since independence, internal conflicts among political parties have undermined electoral validity. The dynamics within these parties can significantly influence the election mood, impacting outcomes and governance quality [13].

Political governance is one of the core pillars for vision 2030. Indeed, the concept has become politicized rather than being effectively implemented. The public's trust in institutions is weakened by politics and poor governance. People who don't trust their government are less inclined to take part in development projects, which impedes advancement [1]. Unsustainable practices and environmental harm can result from lax environmental standards and a lack of enforcement brought on by corruption. This puts in jeopardy SDGs like clean water and sanitation that depend on a healthy world [3]. The SDGs cannot be achieved if and when they are politicized. Politics is a malignant pandemic with the same symptoms and signs. The main ones being selfishness and callousness. It's no surprise that politicians must possess at least two of the polarizing agents. The majority if not all politicians peg their campaigns on polarizing subjects. Successful politicians often have a knack for pitting the masses against each other. They excel at deceiving the hoi polloi and tend to be a source of fragmentation in society, mostly through the polarizing agents.

Political incivility negatively impacts political trust but does not significantly influence political participation. While the effect on trust is small, there are indications of publication bias in this research. Scholars and citizens should be concerned about incivility's effects on democracy, but more research is needed to fully understand the phenomenon. Key areas for future investigation include the medium of communication, cultural factors, the specific nature of incivility, its intensity, and its effects on different types of political participation [14].

METHODOLOGY

This systematic review of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method was conducted (Figure 1). Article searches were conducted using a comprehensive strategy on the Scopus research journal databases. The keywords used were "politics" AND "political influence." A calculated 1.129 articles from SCOPUS were mined in August, 2026. The inclusion criteria were documents and articles written in English and published within the last decade. The exclusion criteria in this study were documents that were not written in English and those published more than 10 years ago. A total of 24 articles were selected as the most cited and relevant articles for this systematic review. The researcher used the screening feature on the SCOPUS website to identify the articles with the highest number of citations and relevance. The annotation method was also performed to ensure that the selected articles followed the research topic. The researcher also used the annotation method because some of the identification results showed research that was not relevant to politics, for example, only in the field of polarizing agents without any relation to politics.

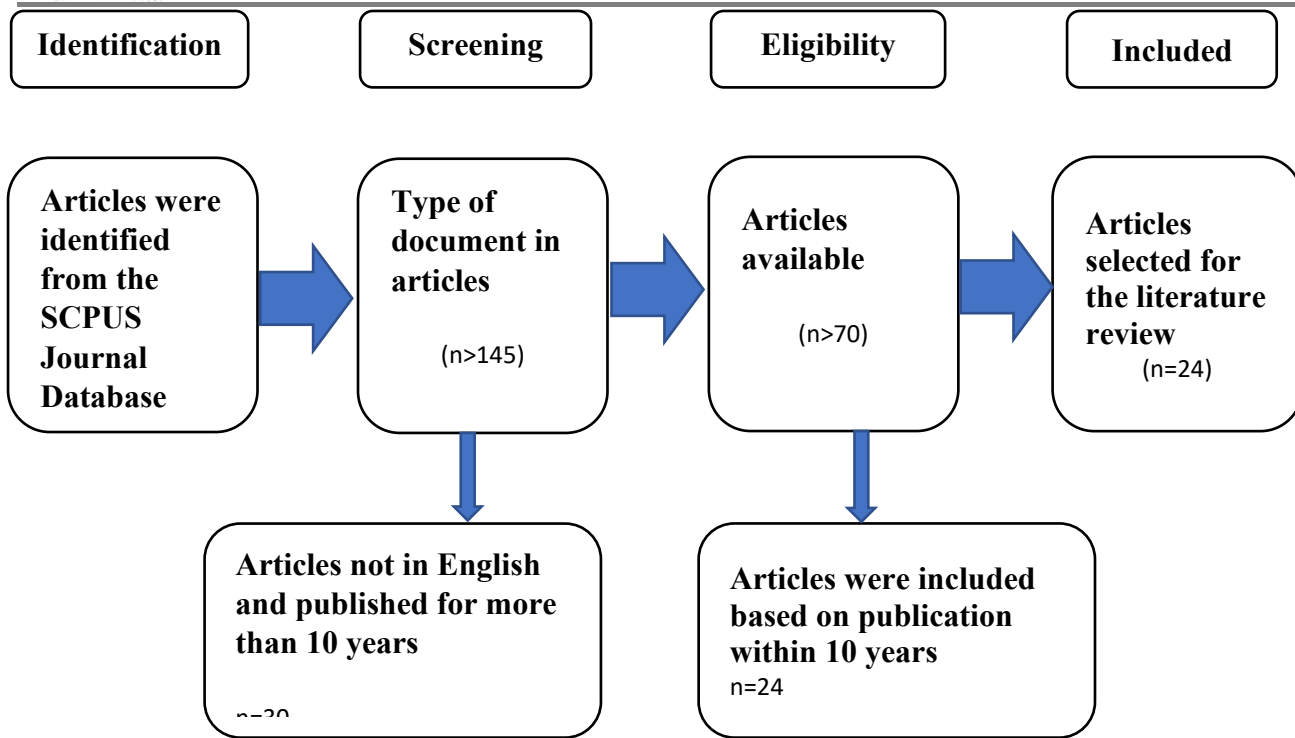


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart of the article selection process

DISCUSSION

Many studies have examined how political incivility impacts citizens, generally finding that it diminishes political trust. The effects on political participation are less consistent [14]. While America has always been a land of passionate political expression, they find themselves facing unprecedented polarization. It's remarkable how deeply their convictions impact lives, from job decisions to friendships. However, this moment in history also presents an opportunity for dialogue and understanding. Though they've experienced shocking events, they can come together to rebuild connections and foster compassionate conversations, ultimately strengthening democracy and community spirit. Let's embrace this challenge and work toward a more united and hopeful future [4]. This polarization leads to mental turmoil for many. The more passionately they engage, the greater the internal angst. Politics now extends beyond D.C.; it has worn their affiliations proudly and may even uproot their lives due to the changing political climate.

According to [3], political instability is widely viewed by economists as a significant issue that can severely impact economic performance. This instability often causes policymakers to focus too much on immediate concerns, resulting in short-sighted macroeconomic strategies. It can also lead to frequent changes in policy, creating uncertainty and volatility that further undermines overall economic performance. Given the harmful effects of political instability on economic outcomes, it's surprising just how pervasive it remains across different countries and time periods.

Political figures often present themselves as rivals in public forums, yet they frequently engage amicably behind the scenes, ostensibly enjoying the manipulation of public perception. While they may appear to oppose each other, their actual goal often aligns: to exert control over the populace. Furthermore, it has been revealed that some of these politicians maintain business partnerships, undermining the authenticity of their competitive claims. Elections are crucial for citizens to exert political control and for governments to gain legitimacy in democracies. However, their effects are not universally positive; they often create a gap in attitudes between winners and losers, leading to polarization with long-term consequences. Parliaments should reflect the diversity of a country's institutions, and leaders should respect their constitution and constituents [2].

Philosophers, political scientists, and sociologists have debated the issues of truthfulness and falsehood in politics for centuries [15]. The widespread phenomenon of political and policy instability in various countries



over time, along with its negative effects on economic performance, has garnered the attention of many economists. Their findings suggest that governments in politically fragmented countries facing high levels of political instability must address the root causes of these issues and work to mitigate their effects on the design and implementation of economic policies. Only by doing so can these countries develop sustainable economic policies that may lead to higher economic growth.

In a study [9] conducted last year with over 12,000 respondents, 26 % indicated that they had ended a friendship due to political disagreements. The findings also revealed that 9 % of romantic relationships also ended because of differing political views. However, the impact of political differences isn't limited to friendships and romantic partnerships; professional lives have also been significantly affected.

A significant number of Americans perceive politics as negatively impacting their health, with one in three reporting feelings of loneliness. During this loneliness epidemic, many cannot afford to lose close relationships. Between 50 and 85 million adults blame politics for fatigue, lost sleep, anger, and compulsive behaviors. Similar findings from an APA study reveal that about 32% of people feel strained family relationships due to politics, and 30% report limited family interactions because of differing values. Additionally, a quarter have considered moving because of politics, while 40% more than 100 million identify it as a major source of stress. Alarming, around five percent of adults report suicidal thoughts due to politics, totaling about 12 million people [4].

Social cohesion, which indicates the inclusiveness of a country's communities, is vital for establishing the trust required to implement reforms. Citizens need to be confident that the short-term sacrifices associated with reform will ultimately be surpassed by long-term benefits. However, in nations marked by divisions of class and ethnicity, and lacking robust institutions, even the most committed and well-informed leaders will encounter considerable challenges in advancing policy reform [2]. From a sociological perspective, individuals may engage in deceit for various reasons: hysterical lying, where they aim to attract attention to themselves; malicious lying, where they deceive for personal gain; pathological lying, where they lie compulsively or struggle to distinguish truth from falsehood; and self-deceptive lying, where they persuade themselves that their false statements are accurate [9].

Numerous studies [5] have shown that continuous exposure to relentless news cycles and constant social media updates can significantly elevate stress levels. To address this impact, it may be effective to establish specific times during the day to catch up on the news, reducing the tendency for impulsive checking. Additionally, limiting social media interactions or selectively curating the accounts followed can ensure that one's feed contains positive and relevant content. Reducing exposure to overwhelming information may help mitigate information overload and promote a sense of calm, potentially lowering anxiety levels.

The path to accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is characterized by both challenges and opportunities. One significant obstacle is poor governance, which encompasses issues such as lawlessness, nepotism, and corruption. Ineffective governance can divert resources, undermine institutions, and impede progress in essential areas like poverty reduction, environmental protection, and social justice. In environments affected by corruption, funds designated for development initiatives may be misappropriated. This misallocation can hinder advancement in critical sectors necessary for achieving the SDGs, including infrastructure, healthcare, and education [3].

Kenya is an African nation where ethnic politics play a crucial role. The largest ethnic groups, commonly referred to as the "Big Five," include the Kikuyu (17.7%), Luhya (14.2%), Kalenjin (13.3%), Luo (10.8%), and Kamba (10.4%). Other significant ethnic communities include the Somali (6.4%), Kisii (5.9%), Mijikenda (5.2%) and Meru (4.4%). This diverse ethnic composition has direct implications for Kenyan politics, especially in terms of the formation of political parties and coalitions, as well as voting behavior [11].

Ethnicity, regionalism, and religion are often weaponized in African politics, leading to exclusionary governance, recurrent conflicts, and weakened democratic institutions. When political parties focus on ethnic or regional identities over policy, elections become zero-sum contests, marginalizing out-groups and eroding trust in the state [1]. These dynamics foster patronage and cronyism, rewarding co-ethnics or co-religionists while treating others as second-class citizens, which exacerbates inequality and national divisions. Such tensions have escalated into communal violence and civil wars, especially where grievances over land or political



representation intersect with ethnoreligious identities. While religion can provide moral guidance, it is often exploited by elites to mobilize support and deepen divisions, hindering the development of inclusive and issue-based politics. The overall result is poorer governance, reduced citizen satisfaction with democracy, lower investment, and stunted development [11].

[12] noted that in Kenya, the emergence of political candidates largely excludes the masses, resulting in the recycling of political actors who mainly serve the interests of powerful groups, or "godfathers," thus preserving the status quo between elites and the public. Law enforcement struggles to detain or prosecute those involved in electoral violence, as police lack the authority to punish offenders effectively. Consequently, violators are often arrested post-election but released the next day [13]. Politicians have a history of misusing the police.

The rationale behind ethnic mobilization in Kenyan politics evolves over time and context, with ethnic identity being a crucial factor. Political parties are often seen as ethnic enclaves, and elections reflect the numerical strength of these groups [12]. This politicization of ethnic identity is considered a major problem in Kenya and has led to numerous political challenges since independence. Additionally, ethnic identity influences the choice of lawyers politicians hire for election petitions. The perception that elected leaders act as brokers for their own interests, often prioritizing personal gain over constituents, is common in Kenya [11].

It is evident that our nation has become so politically divided that this division negatively affects our mental health. Nevertheless, even with the considerable progress made in establishing issue-focused politics, Kenya still has not reached its full potential. A series of obstacles has marked the journey toward democratization and the development of a strong political system. To enhance its democratic reputation, Kenya must foster and cultivate a culture centered on issue-based politics. Political parties ought to concentrate on the issues that impact society rather than prioritizing money and ethnicity with the goal of addressing societal challenges [15].

The assignment of individuals lacking the necessary qualifications to positions of authority can result in nepotism, which subsequently leads to social injustice. This phenomenon not only perpetuates societal inequities and marginalizes qualified individuals, but it also obstructs the progress toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in areas such as gender equality and poverty reduction [3].

Corruption is arguably synonymous with ineffective governance. Political activities ought to align directly with societal interests, which are translated into government policies by elected official [16]. It is imperative that political parties internalize and institutionalize internal democracy, rather than relying on consensus candidacy, in order to facilitate the emergence of credible candidates. It can be asserted that democratic decisions and policies that genuinely reflect the will of the populace cannot originate from individuals who have not been democratically elected or appointed. Such individuals typically owe their allegiance to the politicians who secured their positions through means other than democratic processes, rather than to the general public.

Political intolerance in Ghana is fueled by ethnic sentiments, personal animosity, and frustrations stemming from unmet political aspirations. This intolerance has become prevalent in our modern era [17]. Media plays a significant role in this landscape, affecting perceptions and behaviors. Political tolerance, essential for democracy and parliamentary functioning, requires accepting diverse viewpoints and the rights of those with differing opinions [18]. However, many fail to recognize political intolerance as a pressing social issue affecting individuals and the nation. Misinformation and abusive language spread through the media, exacerbating political divisions [19].

Political parties are essential to a democratic system, and their effectiveness is directly linked to the system's success. To improve governance, political leaders should be recruited through an inclusive, open process in a mature political culture characterized by free and fair elections. Political parties must operate as institutions for political recruitment, emphasizing political education, internal democracy, and accountability under an independent electoral body. These measures can establish a stable and enduring democracy that benefits everyone [20]

As [21], reported, despite the fact that party politics, both historically and currently, has been plagued by factions, oligarchic behaviour, violence, and crises, it has become a necessary aspect of a free society. Indeed, political parties are regarded as precursors to democracy, and for a society to truly embrace democracy in line



with Western ideals, it must actively engage in party politics. This approach, as practiced in the Western world, is foreign to African traditions. However, since society is not meant to remain unchanged, political parties act as prerequisites for democracy. Party politics cannot thrive in isolation; for it to be successful, we must all contribute our efforts toward its progress and the endurance of the nation [17].

Ghanaian governments have invested significantly in socioeconomic development programs, but many have failed due to poor implementation. It is recommended that these programs be managed by qualified experts instead of through political patronage. An independent body, including both incumbent and opposition members of parliament, should oversee project management to ensure bipartisan participation. Additionally, local communities should be allowed to initiate their own programs, with government representatives taking an advisory role to foster local ownership and participation [22].

Across the globe and particularly in Africa, one significant issue impacting local government authorities is political interference in decision-making. A long-standing concern in public administration has been the separation of politics and administration, particularly regarding political meddling in the public service and among bureaucrats. The effectiveness of the Local Government Authority (LGA) in Tanzania suffers due to the disruption caused by the overlap of roles between politicians and administrators. This issue arises from inadequacies in the legal frameworks that establish clear policies and distinct responsibilities for LGAs and politicians. Despite the Tanzanian Constitution explicitly outlining the different functions of government and public administration, and recognizing the crucial role of the public sector in ensuring governance freedom, public officials often exercise discretion that allows politicians to encroach upon the functions of public administrators [23]. It is no wonder the public trust a swarm of flies than an official government stamp when buying meat. These are basically the consequences of embracing and devolving corruption.

In numerous developed countries, politicians are paid dearly. Diminishing the attractiveness of politics and offering competitive salaries can effectively inspire more individuals to pursue meaningful leadership roles. By reforming political financing and promoting transparency, we can encourage politicians to focus on using resources to benefit society rather than detract from it. Together, we have the opportunity to cultivate an environment that appeals to dedicated individuals who genuinely wish to make a positive impact [20].

Political decay, which refers to the decline of political systems, institutions, and governance, represents a significant threat to the stability and effectiveness of governments globally [24]. This decay happens when institutions become ineffective, corrupt, and fail to address the needs of citizens. Such a process weakens democratic values, diminishes public trust, and obstructs governments' ability to create and enforce sound policies. The repercussions of political decay are extensive, impacting various areas from economic growth to social unity [23]. The influence of political decay on governance and policy is deep and widespread. It diminishes the efficiency of government institutions, reduces public confidence, and undermines the democratic foundations of society. Tackling political decay necessitates thorough reforms that encourage transparency, accountability, and flexibility within political frameworks. By addressing the underlying causes of decay, like corruption, institutional inflexibility, and economic disparity, governments can rebuild public trust, enhance policy results, and secure sustainable governance for the future. The journey ahead requires not just structural adjustments but also a revitalized commitment to principles of good governance and the rule of law [24].

The ongoing struggle between social classes reflects an inherent conflict that has deep historical roots, yet this dynamic is gradually changing. Over time, the systematic exploitation faced by the working class, or proletariat, is slowly being recognized and challenged. As laborers become more conscious of their collective challenges and realize their substantial numbers, the complacency and arrogance of the ruling class, or bourgeoisie, appear to intensify. This growing awareness among the proletariat suggests that the vision of a classless society, where resources are allocated equitably, is not merely a distant dream but an increasingly inevitable outcome.

CONCLUSION

Modern partisan politics can be likened to a virus that takes over healthy cells to replicate and spread. In this context, it hijacks citizens' reason, empathy, and capacity for evidence-based thinking, turning them into carriers of misinformation, distrust, and policy paralysis. This study argues that politics is not just dysfunctional; it has become a malignant pandemic that mutates, evades immunity, and poses a serious threat to the survival of



democratic societies. Elected leaders should be a sample of the people in all their traits. Constituents should see themselves in their leaders. Claims that majority of politicians are hypocrites are not unfounded, and since they are worse than murderers justifies the current state of societies. Politics is a good servant but bad master. It is not a paradox that politics has destroyed some nations beyond recognition and how the same politics has developed admirable nations. Poor governance, in all its manifestations, casts a long shadow over our hopes for a sustainable future. It is not, however, an impassable barrier. We can set a path for a better future by realizing how damaging politics is metamorphosing. We must work together to complete this journey. The public has to demand responsibility and openness from their leaders. Responsible sourcing and ethical standards need to be given top priority by institutions. Legislation empowering civil society and promoting good governance must be crafted by policymakers. In order to share best practices and provide support, international cooperation is essential. People should recognize that there is a difference between being informed and doomscrolling. Treat news as news, not as a form of entertainment. With all that is happening in the world, now more than ever, we need to connect locally with family, friends, and community. The recommendation is that research should investigate the extent to which political issues are pervasive, examining whether they are an inherent aspect of humanity and the historical context that has led to the current situation. Furthermore, it is essential to conduct studies that highlight the positive aspects of political systems, as well as to identify any countries that may possess successful political frameworks free of deleterious and nefarious characteristics.

Disclaimer (Artificial Intelligence): During the preparation of this work, the author used Grammarly to spell check words and sentences. After using this tool/service, the author reviews and edits the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the published article.

Competing Interests: The author has declared that there are no competing interests.

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