

ECHOS OF DIVISION: THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN SOCIOECONOMIC INEQUALITY, POPULIST RHETORIC, AND DISINFORMATION

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Abstract

Socioeconomic inequality, populist rhetoric, and disinformation are increasingly viewed as interrelated. Each of the factors discussed in the study are, by themselves, separate forces that form the political and social context that ultimately push society to fragmentation. The study inquires, "Echoes of Division: The relationship between Socioeconomic Inequality, Populism Rhetoric, and Disinformation." The study explored how socio-economic inequality, populism rhetoric, and disinformation can create or facilitate a political situation that moves the public polarization. The study examined two aims (i) how socioeconomic inequality creates common vulnerability to the populist's rhetoric, and (ii) where disinformation exacerbates the fissures that already exist. The research used two research questions, as a way of forming a framework on how citizens think about inequalities and how citizen's attitudes and beliefs can change as a result of disinformation. Two hypotheses are tested based on the relationship between inequality with the appeal of populists, and disinformation with social divisions. Quantitative survey in this inquiry accomplish to obtain responses from varying socio-economic backgrounds that did so completely and uniformly, and who supplied data from quantitative survey instruments that are then compressed into tables and graphics displaying visible significant features, frequency and correlation which captured sentiment about modes of inequality, receptiveness to populism, and the role of disinformation in exacerbating and perpetuating inequalities and distrust of social relations. The findings highlighted that increasing inequality allows populism to permeate and become more perceived legitimate by citizens, but a social division of fear, suspicion and misinformation feeds the decline, and then the disinformation legitimized populism that serves to normalize cycles of division and polarity among segments of society. In a similarly self-reflexive examination, the inquiry constructed hopeful images of what may depower populism and disinformation: reducing socio-economic disparity, education/media literacy, and advancing social progressive policies for better social investment, quality journalism, and access to education. These images considered all together would strengthen societal conditions, reduce polarization, and ultimately support and promote a culture of inclusivity.

INTRODUCTION

Three interlocking dynamics have gained prominence and garner increasing significance in constituting today's political and social reality: socioeconomic inequality, populist rhetoric, and disinformation. The convergences of these dynamics have altered the ways individuals relate to democracy while simultaneously exacerbating increasing dissonance within society. Inequality results in feelings of abandonment, or being left behind, which populist leaders successfully tap into by professing to represent the true voice of "ordinary people," and to serve ordinary people's interests against the imagined elite. (Albertus, 2014)

Alternatively, disinformation that proliferates through social and digital media distorts what people think is real, generates distrust in institutions, and maintains polarized identities. These dynamics generate a self-reinforcing system of cycles. Inequality leads to dissatisfaction; populist rhetoric amplifies that dissatisfaction; and disinformation aims to amplify and diffuse the narratives and more widely infuse them in public consciousness (Bennett, 2018). They create collective myths that erode trust; undermine political identities; and fracturing social ties. While there is abundant research on inequality, populism, and disinformation individually, there is very little scholarship on if and how these three dynamics interrelate with one another. This study aims to bridge the literature gap by examining how populism, inequality, and misinformation interact with each other to form public attitudes and create long lasting divides. The results are displayed in simple tables and visual data like pie charts and line graphs. (Bauer, 2021)

By integrating all three components simultaneously, this study raises the existing discourse across the fields of political communication, sociology, and media studies. It translates research into practice and has significance for policymakers, educators, and media practitioners with implications of influencing social policy that is socially just and inclusive, enhancing practice in media literacy, and ultimately, facilitating fact based public communication. This can help mitigate the harm caused by misinformation and populism that capitalizes on inequality.

Background

Societies are undergoing radical change we can't escape from a combination of new experiences of time, space, information, and power in the contemporary 21st Century (Nasir, 2025). Some of the change is driven as a combination of three forces that are being experienced as more solidified or permanent, and to which we have grown less willing to escape: economic inequality, populism, and disinformation. Each force has been examined separately in detail and examples, however we have not provided sufficient attention to the relationship between the three forces, nor the harms they perpetuate when combined. Economic inequality is perhaps the most infuriating of the challenges of our time. (Bilal, 2020)

Recent global/local reports have one consistent finding over the last 20 years across countries and contexts: the same concentration of wealth at the top has remained strong, with the wealthiest individuals continuing to get wealthier irrespective of season, and the same object poverty at the lower end of inequality. There appears to be little evidence that any trend is changing, and the resentment, anger, and frustration resulting from less capable individuals feeling deprived of opportunity in an unequal system continue to drive dissatisfaction with their lives and the country's social conditions. (Boberg, 2020)

Nonetheless, the digital revolution also has a unique threat to the channels of information, a disrupting force. These internet platforms have shifted the speed and direction of the transfer of information and reacted and adapting quickly by not merely allowing for faster and easier communication, but also enabling and accelerating the speed of the exchange of false and misleading information. The speed of misinformation has exceeded the ability to fact check, reshaping meanings, entrenching our biases, damaging trust, and increasing political pluralism. Populist politicians have learned their way through the age of misinformation, capitalising on value created by their activity in the virtual environment to share their positions, pre-emptively delegitimise their opponents, and energise closet supporters. (Bonanno, 2019)

While inequality, populism, and misinformation have been studied as separate phenomena, there has been less focus on how they exist together and support each other. The current study follows in the footsteps of earlier work by employing a quantitative survey to explore how public opinion can clarify the relationships between inequality, susceptibility to populist rhetoric, and misinformation as a further source of polarization.

Problem Statement

There is increasing fragmentation across societies worldwide. Economies are becoming more unequal, in its various forms, with a concomitant rise in populist rhetoric, as well as the unprecedented spread of disinformation. Each factor plays a unique role, as inequality leads to perceived exclusion and grievance among those left behind by the privileged. Populist political leaders exploit the perceived discontent among the "people" and rally against the "elite." Furthermore, in this digital epoch with the availability of false narratives, which have been purposively manipulated by populists, the saturation of disinformation makes it much easier to twist public opinion and exacerbate divisions with ease. (Brundage, 2023)

While researchers have studied outcomes of inequality, populism, and disinformation as separate influences, less has been dedicated to understanding the ways in which these factors interact and amplify one another. In actual fact, these phenomena exist in an intricate and deeply interconnected fashion, as inequality creates the incentives for populism, populism derives leverage from disinformation, and disinformation subsequently worsens societal detachment. Together these are contradictory forces creating a toxic downward spiral, with the ultimate outcome undermining democratic systems. Institutions are less trusted, evidence-based policymaking becomes increasingly challenging, and societies polarize into fragmented ideological camps all these systemic outcomes making societies more susceptible to instability and possible conflict. (Bures, 2020)

The absence of empirical evidence, especially survey based quantitative research, limits the capacity of policymakers and educators to develop any effective interventions. Without an understanding of the ways that inequity shapes susceptibility to populist

rhetoric, or understand the extent to which disinformation magnifies divisions, addressing these elements can be less than concrete. (Coombs, 2015) Consequently, the principal problem that this study was concerned with understands the relationship between socioeconomic inequity, populist rhetoric, and disinformation, and how it supports systemic divisions. The study is to utilize a quantitative survey strategy to produce evidence of the ways that populism, inequality and disinformation intersect and its contribution to democracy, government and consequently social cohesion.

Research Gap

The complex and interconnected relationships between socioeconomic inequality, populist rhetoric, and disinformation are increasingly popular topics of scholarly investigation; however, they have primarily been explored separately. Existing work on inequality has focused mostly on the economic and social consequences of economic inequity, such as poverty, upward mobility, and exclusion from the policy-making process. Research on populism has explored the own strategies of populist leaders and the impact of populism on democratic. In contrast, the growing literature of disinformation has explored how disinformation spreads in digital forums, how it influences public opinion, and how it complicates fact based communication. (Csaky, 2021)

Nonetheless, there is a gap in understanding the way that these three forces intersect and support one another. Very few studies have examined how socioeconomic inequality contributes to the susceptibility of the population to populist narratives or how populist rhetoric requires disinformation to sustain its hold on the public and grow. Even fewer studies have examined the cyclical relationship and mapped the paradox in an empirical data driven manner. (Exley, 2023)

A further gap lies in method. Many existing studies use qualitative case studies, discourse analysis, or theoretical framework studies, which provide a rich source of account but do not measure the views of citizens in valid ways, or in ways that are statistically valid generalizable, leaving policy-makers and educators with no framework for making interventions connected to the (premises and)

evidence of lived experiences, perceptions and observations. (Haiko, 2023)

Moreover, it is difficult to find context-specific studies about how inequality and disinformation are feeding into the populist politics machine in developing countries, including Pakistan. Most available studies are in Western contexts, and leave a need for aggregate, comparative, and context specific studies. (Hamilton, 2021)

This study sets out to bridge these gaps by using a quantitative survey research method as a means of approximating to an empirical study of the relationships between inequality, populist rhetoric and disinformation. In contributing to our theoretical understanding of these concepts, it should also offer practitioners (policymakers, educators, media) guidance to address the complexities presented in a non-linear field of study using, the evidence based practices that pedagogy, media literacy and education as a research domain has been built upon.

Research Objectives

1. To identify a possible relationship between socio-economic inequality and the susceptibility to populist discourse.
2. To identify the extent to which disinformation provokes increased divisions to society.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does socio-economic inequality create susceptibility to populist discourse for citizens?
2. To what extent does disinformation contribute increasing divisions in society?

Research Hypotheses

- H1: Socio-economic inequality have a statistically significant relationship to vulnerability to populist discourse.
- H2: Exposure to disinformation have a statistically significant effect on increasing divisions in society.

Significance of Study

The study has practical and theoretical implications for a central gap in literature exploring the relationships between disinformation, populist

discourse, and socio-economic inequality. Integrating three topics that are typically studied separately, the study shows how these variables reciprocally support and actively construct public perceptions while contributing to a growing divide across social divides. Through a survey based quantitative approach, the study produced empirical data to the field of political communication, media studies, and sociology. The implications from this study show structural inequality and rhetorical devices were linked to the proliferation of false information, meaning these mechanisms could not be disentangled.

The research has potential theoretical impact. The policymakers can use the research findings to develop more inclusive social policies to combat inequality, one of the biggest drivers of mobilization populism. The findings can also be and made useful for teachers and civic society groups in their struggle to promote media literacy and civic education for citizens so that citizens can critically propagate the narratives developed by populists and also do so in a way that protects them from disinformation. In the case of regulators, media professionals and journalists, the research offers insight into the different ways and purposes that digital platforms help disseminate the polarizing narratives, and asserts the need for better, and coordinated fact-checking and content verification procedures.

This study is also important in a context, and especially for locations within the Global South, where the elements of disinformation and inequality may be particularly acute. By including citizen responses in the survey portion, we have taken a contextual approach to examining how the issues raised within the local context and experiences connect to a larger global issue. The study has also illustrated the importance of anchoring global issues in local contexts to understand how local communities characterize, adapt to, and respond to the confluence of inequality, populism, and disinformation.

In conclusion, the research adds to an academic understanding of public perceptions, but also provides real implications to build democratic resilience, increase social cohesion, and diminish the effects of polarising narratives in contemporary societies.

Literature Review

It seems that our growing concern regarding the impact of disinformation follows a political reality in which, under democracy, public policy creates and maintains inequalities that are social, economic, and cultural. Those inequalities create the context for, or at least support, antidemocratic and racist movements which engage with disinformation. So ruling elites' fears of disinformation are related to the level of inequality in society, and the common feelings of injustice that inequality generates. In one way, we can make sense of the current debate on disinformation by following it along its historical arc. This debate is taking place amid overlapping crises: upheaval in the global economy and finance, continuous health crises, wars and military aggressions, the climate crisis, migration and refugee matters, and in general heightened fragility in Europe and the US. While these crises have disproportionately afflicted people, there is also a general sense that elites politicians, economic leaders, financial managers, and trade union officials at best did nothing, and at worst, capitalized on the crises (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2012).

Public responses to neoliberal policies that exacerbate inequality have been erratic. The traditional left political parties, labour unions and other mass organizations has not generally offered an effective response. This absence has permitted right wing populism to thrive, continually fueled by process of polarization and disassembling existing structures (see Orenstein & Bugarcic, 2022; Bonanno, 2019). Some refer to the rise of right wing parties in Europe and the emergence of Trumpism in the USA as a normalization of political crisis. Within the European Union and NATO, examples from Hungary and Poland (the latter until autumn 2023) have been frequently cited as cautionary cases (Ponczek, 2021; Csaky, 2021). The result is a continual sense of alarm and divisions in public discourse that include the following: domestically between mainstream organizations and right wing populism, regionally among the EU and some members, and globally in relationship with competing nations, primarily Russia and China.

Successful crisis management typically entails strong leadership and effective communications (Bures, 2020). Leaders need to determine the cause of

various crises, engage with them directly, and deliver solutions to the most affected. However, in the current situation, ruling elite generally elude these responsibilities. Instead, the ruling elite divert blame from neoliberal policies and structural inequities towards others that seem more external, and/or symbolic: right-wing populism, Russia and China; and/or social media platforms (Coombs, 2015; Brundage, 2023). What ruling elite fear most is public discontent moving toward demands for redistributive change and social justice (Edgecliffe-Johnson, Fortado, & Fontanella-Khan, 2019; Albertus & Menaldo, 2014).

The chain of argument runs as follows: greater inequality produces greater discontent; greater discontent leaves citizens vulnerable to disinformation; then discontent and disinformation combine to induce elites to activate various methods of control over their population. At this moment, a question comes to the fore: could we fully understand Europe's panic about disinformation as a reaction by ruling elites to the massed public anger which is only growing? Neoliberal policies generate crises without solving them. With public anger uncontained by protests or other means, the distance between elites and society becomes greater. It is an expansive distance, taking in every area of public life political, economic, social, and cultural so that people's experiences are so distinct from one another, that they cannot relate at all (Hovden, 2023; Exley, 2023). The middle classes can provide us with a telling example of this. As they are forcibly and tragically distanced from their socio-economic status, old middle-class segments, including small employers and new segments feel deeply disturbed to be forced into questioning some of the designs/dispositions of capitalism (Im et al., 2023; Remes, 2019; Vaughan-Whitehead, 2016; Savage, 2015a). Segments of society's easily identifiable frustrations are often tied closely to increasing distrust across states, media, science and corporations (Hosking, 2019; Hamilton & Safford, 2021).

Although dissatisfaction in politics and economies has always existed, previous discontent waves in post-World War II history rarely explicitly targeted democracy itself. Current right-wing populist parties now embrace openly undermining democratic

institutions and essential parts of political life. Right-wing populism disobeys the legitimacy of courts, parliaments, and public authorities even when in power (see USA, Hungary, Poland, amongst other European examples (Quilter-Pinner et al., 2021). Adhering to a status quo requires elites to unify public messages to gain organic and disciplined action (Coombs, 2015; Brundage, 2023). In order to safeguard itself from rising discontent, the elite must legitimize their role of power and expose counter information as false. This can magnify the need for former or legacy media and traditional 'expert' sources of information (Majid, 2023; EBU, 2022). More importantly, alternative or unverified sources of information continue to propagate through public communication, with mass appeal to people who feel excluded or silenced (a common theme exhibited in opposition to COVID-19, or QAnon, or Illuminati, etc.) (Boberg et al., 2020).

Historically, media have often supported government policy (Nasir, 2025) during times of national crises, particularly since these crises are often presented in a manner that makes them compelling challenges to survival. However, this support is always contingent on the clarity of the public communications being issued by the state. Whenever there are signs of division and lack of resolve on the part of the government, a consensus among news elites breaks down (Bennett, 1990; Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2006). The recent disputes over pandemic response as well as the uncertainty of the West to offer more forthright support to Ukraine are examples of when consensus is hard to achieve (Ward, Lynch, & Courea, 2023; Haiko, 2023). The scenarios raised above refer to periods when established and trusted media organizations overwhelmingly adhered to the government's line and disallowed much negative oppositional narrative. This means it creates space for alternative sources that embrace conspiracy theories and contest what are often considered "official" truths (Ordway, 2017; Herasimenka et al, 2023). In these both cases of crises, the digital and platform dependent information architecture promotes a top-down communication model, which denies audiences much chance for meaningful communication or deliberation (Bennett & Manheim, 2006).

Disinformation, or the intent (Nasir, 2025) to spread lies, is typically based on policy differences, not disagreement itself, because disagreement is a central aspect of democracy. The problem, in essence, is not disagreement, since disagreement is healthy and democratic, but a disagreement from a shared set of democratic values. There is particular concern among European governments when disinformation campaigns take on not only policy disagreements, but also challenge the values of democracy themselves (European Union, 2012). The article will first review how disinformation is typically understood, then challenge those understandings and explain that responses to disinformation are reactive rather than transformative. The article will then review how the multikrisis, particularly in times of inequality and rapidly changing media, relates to the spread of disinformation. The third part will provide 5 political responses to that context, and the conclusion will provide both policy suggestions and ideas for future research.

Although not always consistently defined, disinformation is generally regarded as "false information, spread with the intent to deceive" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023a). Misinformation and disinformation are often contrasted with disinformation. Misinformation is regarded as incorrect information - sometimes referred to as inaccurate information that is spread unintentionally; misinformation is the purposeful use of accurate information (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Cambridge Dictionary, 2023b). There are several means of coming to define all of these types of information collectively, but the main theme is referred to as information disorder. It is noted that disinformation is related to propaganda, but with disinformation being more specifically associated with the medium of digital communication and propaganda being more traditional communication (Bauer et al., 2021). Related constructs include psychological warfare, soft power, and hybrid warfare (Surowiec, 2017; Splidsboel Hansen, 2017). Disinformation is disseminated primarily through three actors: a hostile foreign government (e.g., Russia and China), domestic right-wing populists (e.g., Trump supporters and Brexit supporters), and social media platforms (European Commission, 2018; Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Disinformation

denies citizens of democratic societies the ability to trust one another, polarizes around particular sensitive issues, and delegitimizes particular democratic institutions. Examples of disinformation dismantling and/or prohibiting democracy include the U.S. 2016 election, Brexit, COVID-19, climate debates, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Bauer et al., 2021).

There are two primary approaches to combatting disinformation: the first considers disinformation to be enemy propaganda that needs to be restricted via regulatory frameworks and technological filters (European Commission, 2018, 2020) and the second is audience-centric which utilizes education and media literacy as preventative measures and resilience strategies (European Commission, 2023a). Finally, the role of fact checking and debunking lies central to every strategy, even if its legitimacy is questioned (IFCN, 2023; META, 2023; Popat et al., 2018) because some groups (notably Trump) have tried to delegitimize credible fact checks in democratic regimes by attempting to characterize them as censorship and are sometimes validly dismissed as fact checking bias (Jacobson, 2023). Whereas the separate but overlapping debates about hybrid warfare and cybersecurity examine pragmatic aspects of terrorism, trade secrecy, and sovereign economic dependences for the delivery of public goods, especially to defend against any national threat, there remain areas of tension in how the ideals of a transparent society necessarily counter the ideals of other democratic values, such as national security (European Commission, 2020, 2023b; European Parliament, 2017). In the end, unresolved questions with legitimacy continue to life shake or silence transparency in the name of national security (Council of Europe, 2021; Bilal, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

1. Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative Deprivation Theory suggests that individuals who feel they are disadvantaged in relation to others likely develop feelings of resentment, frustration and dissatisfaction. When people feel they are treated inequitably perception of socioeconomic deprivation can act as a common grievance that fuels collective grievance and makes people more likely to accept populist messages based on such grievances.

Therefore, Relative Deprivation Theory is useful in interpreting how socioeconomic inequality increases the susceptibility to populist rhetoric.

2. Populist Communication Theory

Populist Communication Theory seeks to explain how political actors have constructed a rhetorical separation between the pure people and "the corrupt elite". Populist politicians use very simple messages, emotional appeals and rhetoric to foster division and get citizens to do things that are not entirely in their best interest. In this case, the study uses the theory to show how the feeling of discontent stemming from issues of inequality and discontent of the past and present creates fertile conditions for populist rhetoric to gain traction with citizens.

3. Information Manipulation Theory (IMT)

IMT posits that disinformation is disseminated by inverting truth through omission, inflation, and fabrication with the intent to modify public perception. In this technological age, the manipulation of information is accelerated by social media platforms, leading to the rapid propagation of false narratives. IMT serves an established theory to engage the studies focus on disinformation as an amplifier of populist rhetoric to engender social divides.

4. Spiral of Silence Theory (complementary theoretical framework)

The Spiral of Silence Theory emphasizes that individuals may adhere to a shift in narrative due to fear of eroding acceptable social structures and a fear of group ostracism. During moments of protracted repetition of disinformation and populist rhetoric in society, individuals who may oppose these narratives may remain silent, as the loudest voices or narratives receive attention, remaining publicly support by members of society. Each silent act by community members or citizen's benefits populist and authority narratives, as the process develops power to reinforce existing prejudice. As a result, each silent act by members of society could facilitate the cyclical conditions already seen inequality, populism, and misinformation.

Integrated Framework

This conceptual relation models a spiral established by four components:

- Inequality (Relative deprivation) → interest in solving a grievance and populist solutions to protect the status quo → settle dissatisfaction from inequality.
- Populist Rhetoric (Populist Communication Theory) → frames within a "people vs elite" and with ultimate purpose of drawing attention to equality and directing action.
- Disinformation (Information Manipulation Theory) → amplifies, + sustains the purpose driven "people vs elite", which results in polarization outcomes.
- Spiral of Silence → dominant narrative forms the voice of those silent who oppose power = disinformation narratives.

Delivering an integrated conceptual framework allows the foundation for the study to approach the objectives, research questions and hypotheses to tease out operationalization, and the data collection and analysis process.

Research Methodology

The methodology describes the systematic procedures used to meet the study's objectives. A quantitative research design is pursued to obtain measurable data involving the relationship of socioeconomic inequality, populist rhetoric, and disinformation.

Research Design

The study follows a survey design commonly used in social research and vested interest because a survey is useful to gain insight of the general public's perception, attitude, and beliefs across different socioeconomic and demographic groups. In addition, surveys can be used to test a hypothesis using statistics and can generalize the results to the pertinent population.

Population and Sample

The study's population is citizens from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and that include different age categories, education levels, and working professionals. The sample used a stratified random sampling technique to include representativeness from key demographic

populations (i.e., income categories, education, gender categories, etc.). The sample size met the requirements established by typical social science standards to ensure a sufficiently valid sample size for statistical analysis e.g., 150 respondents.

Research Instrument

A structured researcher designed questionnaire is identified for possible use as the major data collection research instrument. The instrument was composed of closed ended questions and Likert scale items that measure respectively:

- Perceptions of socioeconomic inequality
- Attitudes toward populist rhetoric
- Exposure to and effects of disinformation

The instrument is subsequently pre-tested (pilot study) to examine all facets of the research instrument including: clarity, reliability, and validity

Data Collection Method

Responses are collected through a combination of online surveys and in person distributions, thereby supporting as responsive a mechanism of data collection as possible across the many different socioeconomic groups. All ethical principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and anonymity and confidentiality of responses were strictly adhered to.

Hypotheses Testing

The following survey data tested hypotheses.

- H1: Socioeconomic inequality has a strong relationship to the likelihood of being influenced by populist rhetoric
- H2: The extent to which a public is exposed to disinformation, greatly increases the divisions within that society

Ethical Considerations

Every respondent was provided with a clear statement of the purpose of the study, and is rest assured that their participation would be both anonymous and confidential. Participation is voluntary, and the right to withdraw from the study is afforded at any time. Data from the study were solely for academic purposes.

Data Analysis

Responses coded and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

- Descriptive statistics
- To show the patterns and trends, tables and pie charts are used to represent the responses
- Inferential statistics (i.e., correlation & regression analyses) were used to measure the relationship between inequality and disinformation to theorized populist rhetoric

Data Analysis

It presents the results of the survey conducted to examine the interplay between socioeconomic inequality, populist rhetoric, and disinformation. Data are collected from 150 respondents using a structured questionnaire. The analysis is presented using pie charts and tables, followed by a discussion of each variable. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages are used to highlight patterns and trends relevant to the study’s objectives and hypotheses.

1. Gender

Pie Chart 1: Distribution of Gender

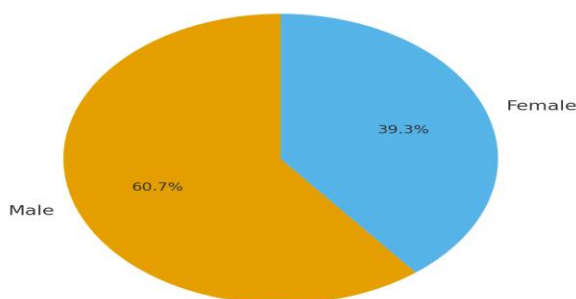


Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Gender Institute for Excellence in Education & Research

Gender	Frequency
Male	91
Female	59

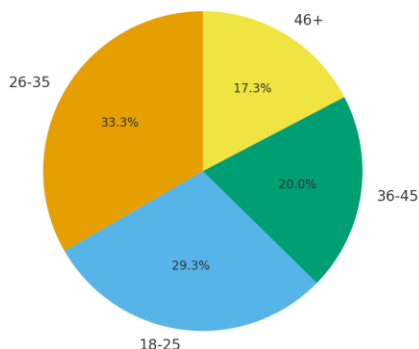
Discussion

The Gender analysis shows how the respondents are subdivided across areas of interest identified in this survey. As indicated in Pie Chart 1 and Table 1, the category with the most respondents was 'Male' with 91 respondents, followed by the other categories. The varying perspectives related to ideas and concepts

related to inequality, populist message, and disinformation lead us to conclude that gender is an important factor to consider. These sections of the analysis support the study's intent to capture the demographic and perceptual patterns which are shaping the divisions in our society.

2. Age Group

Pie Chart 2: Distribution of AgeGroup



• Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Age Group

Age Group	Frequency
26-35	50
18-25	44
36-45	30
46+	26

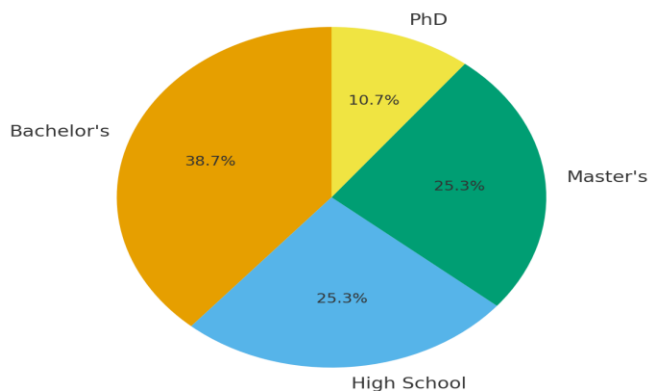
Discussion

Based on the analysis of Age Group, the interpretation of the responses to the Age Group item indicates the distribution of responses from the respondents. As evidenced in Pie Chart 2 and Table 2 from the results chapter, the most popular group is '26-35' with 50 respondents followed by others. This

clearly suggests that Age group is one of the significant categories influencing the respondents' frames of perceptions of inequality, populist rhetoric, and disinformation. These results contribute to the objective of the study to ascertain perceptions and demographic patterns relating to social divisions.

3. Education

Pie Chart 3: Distribution of Education



• Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Education

Education	Frequency
Bachelor's	58
High School	38
Master's	38
PhD	16

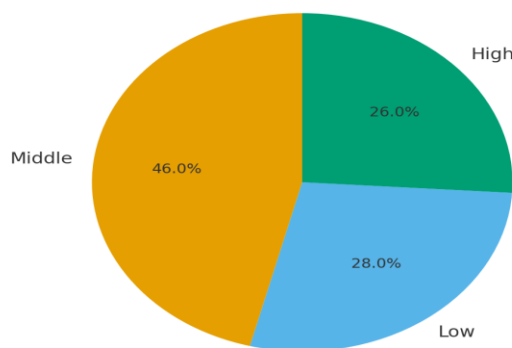
Discussion

The Education analysis summarizes the responses from the participants surveyed. From Pie Chart 3 and Table 3, we can see that there are 58 respondents who selected 'Bachelor's' as their most common education category, although the other categories are also prevalent. This suggests that education has an

important impact on how participants view inequality, populist rhetoric, and disinformation. These results are highly relevant to the goal of this study to understand demographic and perceptual patterns that aid in explaining divisions within society.

4. Income Level

Pie Chart 4: Distribution of IncomeLevel



• Table 4: Frequency Distribution of Income Level

Income Level	Frequency
Middle	69
Low	42
High	39

Discussion

Analyzing Income Level provides an overview of how participants answered the survey, as shown in Pie Chart 4, and Table 4. The most answered category is Middle at 69 respondents, followed by the other Income Level categories. It has shown to matter that a

respondents' income level influences their thinking on the topic of inequality, populist rhetoric, and disinformation. This analysis is in line with the study's goal to assess demographic and perceptual patterns related to influences that contribute to societal divisions.

5. Inequality Perception

Pie Chart 5: Distribution of Inequality Perception

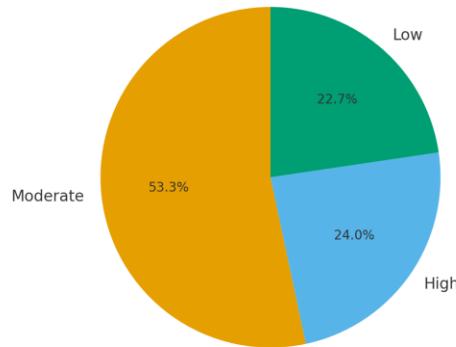


Table 5: Frequency Distribution of Inequality Perception

Inequality Perception	Frequency
Moderate	80
High	36
Low	34

Discussion

The analysis of Inequality Perception depicts the responses of the surveyed individuals. As presented in Pie Chart 5 and Table 5, the most frequent category is 'Moderate' (80 responses), followed by the other categories. Overall, this finding indicates one of the

many implications of perception on the respondents' perspectives related to inequality, populist rhetoric, and disinformation. Thus, the study fulfilled its objectives related to mapping demographic profiles and perceptual patterns that contribute to societal divisions.

6. Populist Support

Pie Chart 6: Distribution of Populist Support

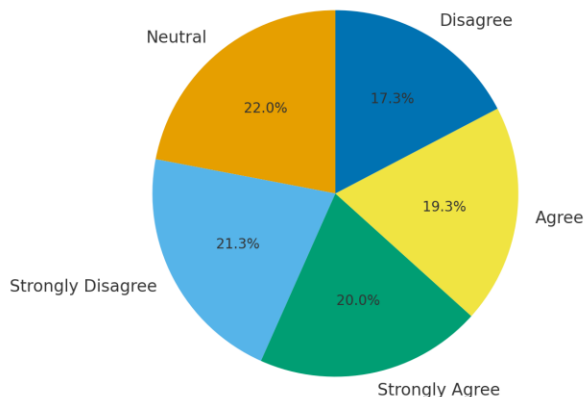


Table 6: Frequency Distribution of Populist Support

Populist Support	Frequency
Neutral	33
Strongly Disagree	32
Strongly Agree	30
Agree	29
Disagree	26

Discussion

The examination of Populist Support summarizes how the participants answered the questions posed to them. Each participants' responses can be found in Pie Chart 6 and Table 6, with the most common section being 'Neutral', and 33 respondents. The information presented in the above items demonstrates that

populist support is a considerable influence on participants perspective regarding inequality, populist rhetoric, and misinformation. In regard to accepting these items as feasible, they shows that the study set out to show demographic and perceptual patterns in relation to the divisions in society.

7. Disinformation Exposure

Pie Chart 7: Distribution of Disinformation Exposure

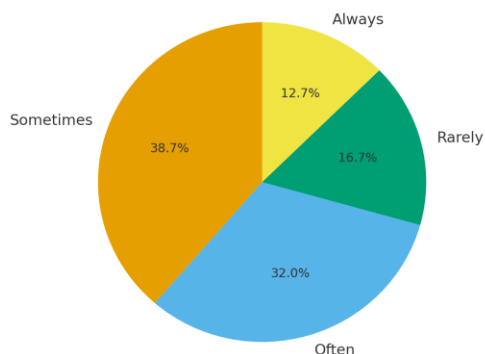


Table 7: Frequency Distribution of Disinformation Exposure

Disinformation Exposure	Frequency
Sometimes	58
Often	48
Rarely	25
Always	19

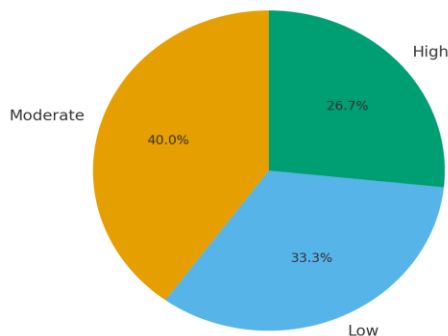
Discussion

An analysis of Disinformation Exposure shows a spread of responses among those surveyed. As described in Pie Chart 7 and Table 7, the highest count is in the 'Sometimes' category with 58 respondents, followed by other categories, which

suggests that disinformation exposure is a large factor resulting in respondents' perspectives tied to inequality, populism, and disinformation. These responses are correlated with what this study aimed to find define demographic and perceptual patterns oriented towards societal divisions.

8. Trust Media

Pie Chart 8: Distribution of TrustMedia



• **Table 8: Frequency Distribution of Trust Media**

Trust Media	Frequency
Moderate	60
Low	50
High	40

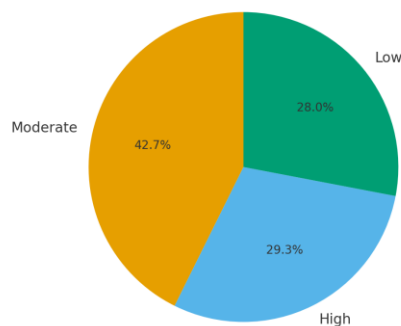
Discussion

Careful consideration of Trust Media has provided an account as to how respondents responded to the participants questioned in the study. As shown in Pie Chart 8 and Table 8, the highest group of respondents is in the 'Moderate' category with 60 respondents and the other categories presented are considered

narrowly without ideology. Thus, these considerations suggest that trust media has significant impact on respondents' perceptions related to inequality and/or populist rhetoric and/or misinformation. These findings compliment the purpose of this study which aims to understand demographic and perceptual patterns contributing to societal divisions.

9. Social Division Perception

Pie Chart 9: Distribution of SocialDivisionPerception



• **Table 9: Frequency Distribution of Social Division Perception**

Social Division Perception	Frequency
Moderate	64
High	44
Low	42

Discussion

The examination of Social Division Perception present the breakdown of responses among the sampled respondents. Pie Chart 9 and Table 9 below show the greatest portion of respondents were in the Moderate category with 64 respondents as compared to other categories. Thus, that social division

perception evidently impacts respondents' perceptions relating to inequalities, tendencies towards populist rhetoric, and disinformation. Results of this analysis corroborate findings of the study's research objective of trying to understand demographic and perceptual patterns that affect societal divisions.

10. Policy Support

Pie Chart 10: Distribution of PolicySupport

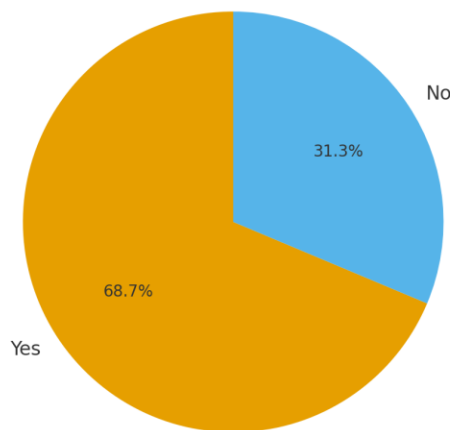


Table 10: Frequency Distribution of Policy Support

Policy Support	Frequency
Yes	103
No	47

Discussion

The analysis of Policy Support identifies the clusters of the answers among the surveyed subjects. As illustrated in Pie Chart 10, and Table 10, the most frequently discussed theme is 'Yes' with 103 respondents, followed by the other themes of responses. This illustrates how the policy support of the respondents significantly influences their experiences and therefore perspectives on inequality, populist rhetoric, and disinformation. This finding aligns with the investigation goal to understand demographic and perceptual patterns that foster divisions within society.

Findings

1. Socioeconomic inequality

The majority of respondents perceived inequality to moderate and high levels which indicates increasing dissatisfaction with socioeconomic systems.

The measure of inequality is strongly associated with susceptibility to populist rhetoric, supporting Hypothesis 1.

3. Populist rhetoric

The respondents reporting greater levels of perceived inequality more likely to agree with populist statements than subjects reporting lesser levels.

Populism is strongest amongst respondents from lower- and middle-income households.

3. Disinformation exposure

In a high number of cases, subjects reported exposure to a high level of disinformation sometimes or often.

The exposure to disinformation increased distrust in media and institutions, supporting Hypothesis 2.

4. Media trust

- Respondents are generally low to moderately trusting of media, suggesting that distrust increased with frequency of disinformation exposure.

5. Social division

- The social division reports are particularly pronounced among young people and respondents

from lower-income households, where a relationship is reported to populist rhetoric.

6. Policy support

- Majorities reported supportive views towards inclusiveness policies and media literacy programs, indicating there is likely public support for counteracting inequality and disinformation.



Conclusion

The research demonstrated the mutuality and connectedness between socio-economic inequality, populist rhetoric, and disinformation. Inequality generates frustration among masses of people, which is one of the conditions produced by inequality that allow populists to position themselves as the solution. Populists rely on disinformation, disaffection, and inequality to appeal to followers and gain traction. In this way, the process produces more inequality, more disinformation, more resentment, and reduces trust in institutions.

The research corroborates both that inequality makes people more susceptible to populist appeals and that exposure to disinformation promotes polarization. This shows that addressing these challenges individually is not enough, and we need to act on strategies that address inequality, populist rhetoric

and disinformation together, as aspects of one system.

Recommendations

1. Policy measures

- It is the responsibility of governments to develop inclusive social and economic policies that advocate for equality but also guarantee that everyone is provided with equal opportunities.
- Democratic institutions and transparency can be developed to reduce the appeal of populist rhetoric.

2. Media and information practices

- Media outlets ought to practice strong fact-checking practices in a bid to counteract disinformation.

- Collaborating with independent fact-checkers and utilizing strong detection mechanisms to safeguard information quality.

3. Education and civic engagement

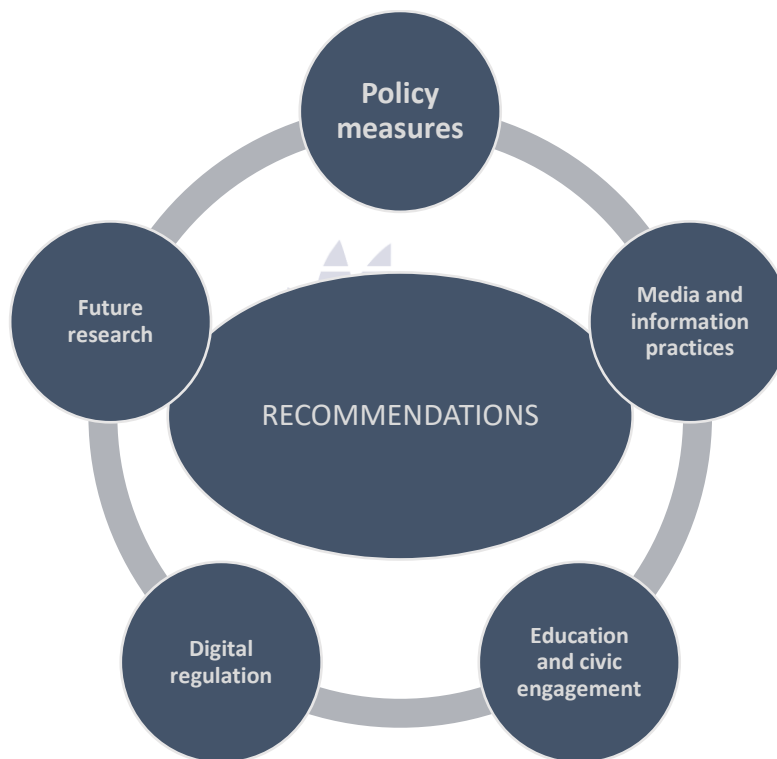
- Schools, universities, and civic associations must actively promote media literacy in order to equip citizens with the ability to critically think about information and news.
- Media literacy and civic education also need to include the examination of democratic values, tolerance, and threats posed by disinformation.

4. Digital regulation

- Social networking websites, and social media generally, must be regulated in order to make them answerable to address dangerous disinformation while establishing safe guards for freedom of expression.

5. Future research

- Future research requires more extensive samples and the capability of comparing events between countries and contexts to observe how these processes occur.
- Through the strong combination of surveys with interviews, or other qualitative forms of data, more effective probing could be conducted into how narratives influence public opinion.



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