

Does Political Ideology Affect Social Bonds Among College Students In India Today?



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ABSTRACT: Political ideology has played a significant role in shaping humans and their interactions with other humans since the emergence of modern political systems around the world, however, it may not have been as ubiquitous as it is in today's day and age. These days, political ideology may affect people's everyday choices, even what kind of people they want in their social circle. In college spaces where people engage in political discourse actively; it may impact the already existing bond among peers or lead to a dissociative behaviour. It may also have no impact at all. In this research we try to study the extent to which someone's political ideology governs their choice of selecting or dissociating from certain social circles based on similarities or differences of political opinion. The existing literature is mostly centered on people being divided into political cleavages for elections or how family and friends play a role in shaping one's ideology. In this research we try to study how political ideology is always at work and how it can impact the way the youth bond with their peers.

KEYWORDS: Political Ideology, Social Bonds, Peer Groups, Intergroup Relations, Indian Youth

I. INTRODUCTION

The youth of India has become increasingly active and impactful in politics over the years [1]. With a median age of 28.4 years in 2020, India is a young country. Youth makes up around 34% of the country's population. Forty-five million young people, having become eligible to vote as they turned 18, have been added to India's electoral roll since 2014, according to 2018 data from the Election Commission. This has expanded the voter list by 5% since 2014. Thus, the youth play a key role as voters in election process.

Youth is also actively engaged in college politics. The world's largest student organization is 'Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad' which is affiliated to right wing political organization, followed by 'National student Union of India' which is the student wing of Indian congress. Both these parties have more than 3 million members each. There exist various other student parties too. This shows the active engagement of students in politics.

However, even students who aren't a part of any student political party have strong political ideologies and express it through social media sites. These social media sites have occupied a central role in the dissemination and gathering of knowledge for the youth, and have become facilitators of large number of political discussions [2]. With increasingly homogenous mainstream news channels, social media provides the freedom for people to openly discuss and engage with alternative viewpoints. However, sometimes disagreement with certain opinions leads to conflict and dissociative behaviour online like blocking or unfollowing the other person. Conversely, someone is also most likely tended to follow people with likewise political ideology and even have their own opinions informed by them [3]. These online patterns can also be seen offline.

Recently, radical polarisation of ideologies has taken place in India due to right wing government being in power and most educational institutions being intellectual and liberal hubs [4]. This has led opposing views on government policies, giving rise to active discourses and protests in college campuses. Many people have felt that it's okay to break friendship over politics, while others feel politics is not worth losing a friendship over [5]. In our research we want to get a deeper understanding of the extent to which differing ideologies may or may not affect social bonds.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Cleavages, Issues, and Electoral Change- Russel J. Dalton

Dalton shows that bases of electoral choice have changed dramatically in the past generation. There are social and political changes that have brought in this change and transformed democratic electorate. Firstly, class and religion have weakened as predictor of

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electoral choice. Secondly, there is ideological conflict in Western democracies. New agendas like women's movement, environmentalism, quality of life issues have created new bases of conflict. In addition, attention to these new issues has been paralleled by a general growth in issue-based voting, even for old issues. Dalton discusses role of ideology and weight of different issue change nature of electoral competition in contemporary democracy [6].

Karl Mannheim- Ideology and Utopia

Mannheim argues that true nature of society can be seen by its ideologies, and in an attempt to reach utopia, the dogmas of ideology affect the intellectual integrity of theories of philosophy and history [7]. \

III. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Aristotle insisted in 4 BC that man is by nature a political animal because human beings, unlike any other, are best suited for pursuing a life in politics. This implies that the human psyche and mental capacity, more than any other is crafted for the purposes of political expression. A typical illustration of this is the fact that human beings have the innate capacity for the essential function of reasoned speech. Moreover, Aristotle asserted that human beings are born with a desire to congregate together and effect changes in their lives and those of others, a desire that can only find expression in the practice of politics [8]. Thus, we can conclude that our social bonds are formed due to politics. His theory has affected our project.

Mead's Theory of Social Behaviourism also is important as sociologist George Herbert Mead believed that people develop self-images through interactions with other people. He argued that the self, which is the part of a person's personality consisting of self-awareness and self-image, is a product of social experience. Self-image may also include ideology. We will study the interaction between two individuals as it speaks a lot about society and self-image [9].

IV. OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

In this study we want to find out how much a person forms bonds, or disassociates themselves from existing bonds, based on their Political ideology. We also want to discover the particular issues which trigger such reactions and the extent of these reactions. Additionally, we want to explore their relationship with the people with whom their ideology contradicts with.

V. METHODOLOGY

Questionnaires were used to conduct this research. It was conducted as an online survey in the month of March-April with a sample size of 37 students. The questionnaire had both open-ended and close-ended questions like MCQ's which gave us the space for both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

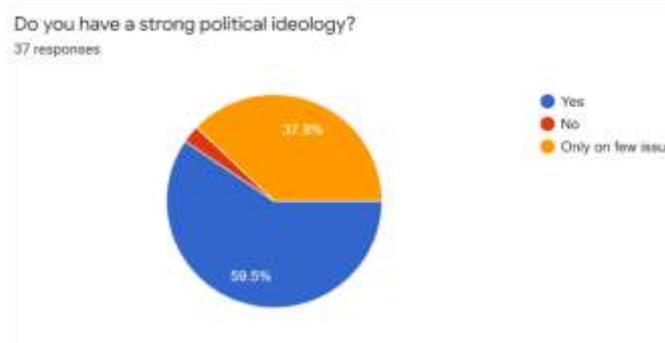
VI. QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you have a strong political ideology?
2. Will you want your friends to be politically active?
3. To what extent do you engage in political discourse with your friends?
4. Would you only prefer friends who are of similar ideology? Why?
5. If your friend pursues different political ideology, will it affect your friendship? If yes, how?
6. Has your bonding changed with some of your peers because of their ideology?
7. Do you have bonding with fellow students who have difference of opinions? If yes, how would you describe it?
8. Are you willing to give space to ideologies different to what you pursue in students space?
9. What are the issues in your ideology for which you feel strongly about and cannot tolerate any other view?
10. Do you think only your political should be pursued by masses?
11. Are you in favour of forcing your political ideology if given a chance or would you like people to adopt it voluntarily?
12. Will you change your political ideology if your friends tell you to do so?
13. Would you like to share any experience or view that is relevant to the topic?

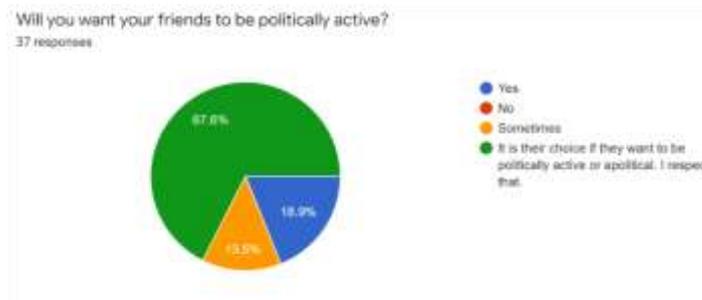
VII. RESULTS

The first question was aimed to find out if respondents have strong political ideology. More than half of them responded with 'yes'. Whereas with the exception of one respondent denying to have strong political ideology, rest everyone responded that they do have strong political ideology if not overall, but definitely on few issues.

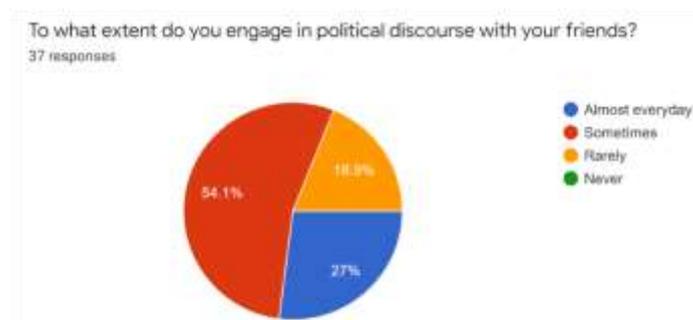
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On being asked if they would want their friends to be politically active, majority answered that 'it is their friend's choice if they want to be politically active or apolitical and they respect that'. But what is interesting to note is that the rest of the respondents replied with 'Yes' or 'Sometimes'. No one replied with a 'No'. It shows that no one wants their friend to be completely and absolutely indifferent to the political scenario and would at least want them to admit it is their choice to be apolitical so that they can respect their choice.



The next question focused on finding out how much they engage in political discourse with their friends. 54% responded with 'sometimes', 27% responded with 'almost every day' while the rest chose 'rarely'. It is again interesting to note that no one chose 'never'. This means that even that one person who doesn't have any strong political ideology would at some point of time engage in political discourse with his/her peers. Next question wanted to explore if college students would prefer their friends to be of similar political ideology. There was split in the answer. Most of the people responded with No but there was also a considerable number who responded with yes. People who responded with 'No' had their own reasons. Some believed that Ideology is a choice and everyone can have their own. On top of that they don't think that political ideology is a parameter to choose friends.



They also believe that different ideology would broaden their own perspective and help them think of things that they may have not considered earlier. They want to know what everyone thinks of political situation and then form an overall picture. Few mentioned that only getting access to one side of the coin always is not only useless but also dangerous. The "other" opinion always leads to balance and is required at all levels. Limiting you to people of a similar line of thought may lead to situations of extremity, and it's this radicalisation in every field of ideology that needs to be tackled with. They believe there is need for different views which may compete, fuse and hence come up with a better belief or notion which may be suitable for majority

They also acknowledged that everyone bases their political ideologies on their personal realities. It would be unfair to limit themselves to people who have the same ideologies as them because everyone has different realities and experiences. Ideologies are governed by one's socialisation and upbringing and other social or personal choice. They focused that one should be friends with someone based on how the person is irrespective of their political ideology. One person even said that having friends only of similar political ideology is like living in validation bubble and echo chamber. One can only understand their own ideology when they are faced with opposition.

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There were few who were okay with having friends of different ideology but they put up conditions. They want their friend's opposition ideology to be based on logical arguments and not be outrageous. For ex- They wouldn't prefer their friend's ideology to be against any marginalised group and if so, will maintain distance from them as the personal is political for them. They also don't want anyone to assert their own ideology on them. They will prefer friends of different ideology as long as the other person also accepts and respects their choice of ideology.

People who said yes said so because according to them it shows what kind of attitude the person has towards other people as they believed that political ideology and one's morals go hand in hand. One of the responses was, 'I can't disassociate an individual's political ideology from how they treat me as a person, particularly if the person's ideology rests on oppressing minorities. I understand and acknowledge my privilege and lack of the same. I wouldn't like to engage with people who negate others' struggles and/or who fail to recognise their potential to help the oppressed.'

According to them, they have the opinions that they do because they feel they are right and balanced. It is only natural for them to befriend people who view the world in a similar way.

The next question wanted to go in depth of if and how a friendship might be affected if one of the friends pursues different ideology. Considerable number of people said that there will be differences and heated debates but not to the point that friendship will be affected completely, a person remains the same even if they change their ideology. But the majority answer was layered with a condition. Friendship won't be affected as long as they don't find their friend's ideology problematic or extremely radical. They don't want their friend to be outright hateful or bigoted; they don't want to argue on something so fundamental that they start questioning their friend's morality. They want their friend to choose right stance on a serious situation if their political ideology is different. They believe that if even one of the friends makes political ideology their priority that can lead to friendship turning toxic. They feel that if their friend follows opposite political ideology and follows it rigorously then it will make them uncomfortable and difficult to form deeper bond of friendship. Sometime people tend to impose their own ideology on their friend and get aggressive about their political ideology which can hurt the friend with opposite political ideology on a personal level.

If any of these conditions are disrespected by the friend with opposite view then it may change the way they perceive their friend, lead to maintaining some amount of distance from them or cutting them off completely. Someone said that, 'because the way we view politics matters a lot in contemporary times, so if someone is a supporter of some political party that has been super sexist, racist and overall staunch in a denial of human rights for the unprivileged minority, I don't see how I can be friends with them.' And another interesting response was, 'It depends on what the ideology is, if it stands to support oppression in any capacity, it would hinder the friendship. Apart from trying to understand their perspective or reaching a middle ground, I may just cut all contact if it's extremely right winged lol.'

Next questions asked respondents if their bonding has been affected with peers because of their ideology. The divide of answer was almost 50-50. While half of them felt it has definitely been affected, the others didn't. Someone mentioned that few of their friends were becoming increasingly Islamophobic/ xenophobic/ radical/ chauvinistic so they thought it was best to stop talking to them often to avoid any conflict. Whereas someone felt that their friends felt threatened when they shared their ideology stance and thus affected their relationship. Another person said that too many aggressive posts on social media platforms like Instagram by their friends has led to a shift in way them perceive them. Someone shared interesting information, 'A girl rejected me because she's a hardcore leftist.'

There were many who also felt that different political ideology has done no damage to their friendship. On one hand the view was that there are frequent debates but that has not hindered their bond, and on the other hand the bond had not been hindered because frequent debates and discussions were consciously avoided. It was also noted that if your friends are of similar view then the chances of having conflict is less and bond remains intact. A respondent spoke about understanding how family might play role in different political ideology of a person, "Most of my peers have similar views as mine. The very few who don't, don't normally talk about political stuff so it hasn't. Also, if you understand why the person is following the herd, who the person looks up to, what's the default setting at home and environment then there's a high chance that you let it go."

Next discussion focused on nature of relationship of students with those of difference of opinion. For few the relationship was difficult when it came to consensus, especially in contentious times and it may also lead to a blame game, where everyone fail to see the larger picture in context and only narrow down to certain ideologies, for instance, someone shared their experience of people labelling others as a commie and downgrading every action and line of thought which streams through that school of thought, without realising that no matter how strange some ideologies may seem, there's a reason why they're still a part of today's discourse. Everyone tries to reach a middle ground with the other person otherwise there is danger of friendship deteriorating. Respecting each other's political ideology and having civility during debates also plays a factor in having healthy friendships. Friendships, one might say, are candid but with friends from different political ideology description may differ, "I would describe it as a comfortable friendship but cause of ideological limitations; I can't be a 100% candid with them and vice versa." For others friendship is beyond political ideology, heated debates and respecting each other's opinion or completely avoiding political topics is a part of it. Some words used to describe their friendship were, 'cordial', 'interesting', 'weak', 'normal' and 'chill'.

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Next question wanted to explore the tolerance of students and asked them if they would be willing to give space to ideologies different to what they pursue in students space. Everyone seemed to agree on giving different ideology space in student space. As long it is based on logical arguments people wouldn't mind engaging in constructive manner. It is seen as healthy by most of the people to have diverse opinion. Someone even responded by saying this is what defines a smart individual and is the right mindset to have. Different ideology shouldn't promote unrest and violence. Main point is that people should be satisfied by the argument of the opposition ideology. As one of respondents replied, "Yes, it is naive to believe that the student space is an absolute in terms of politics. There is a lot more to see and understand, and I am willing to keep an open mind about it."

Next question wanted to dig deep into the issues which student felt strongly about and cannot tolerate any other opinion on. The responses to this question were rich with diversity. There were many different issues, making it difficult to generalise it. For some 'Feminism' is an issue which is beyond criticising left and right ideologies as both ideologies have failed to create safe space for women. It is also a concept which is misunderstood by people. One of the respondents believed, "It's either a feminist/feminist ally or none. There's no between or grey area here." Feminism and basic human rights are a necessity and any other view regarding this cannot be tolerated by few of respondents. Even LGBTQ+ rights, misogyny and, sexism were included in the broader issue. Entitlement by men also triggered few of respondents. Another issue was regarding caste, religion, right of minorities, and underprivileged section of society where respondents couldn't tolerate any oppressive or insensitive ideology. One of the responses was, "Anything that is extremist or blatantly accusing of a community/ethnicity/race, without understanding the deep-rooted system it 'may' have or which is biased in nature, or not accurately backed up by facts, I. Cannot. Tolerate". On the other hand, appeasement, glorifying poverty and glorifying Marxism was also an issue.

Other issues were based on economic concerns. Few believed that each person should be compensated proportionately for the amount of work and effort put in. While welfare is extremely necessary to bridge the gaps caused by socio-economic realities, it is but essential to ensure that it doesn't lead to distribution of freebies. Free trade and capitalism are issues based on which people pursue an ideology and cannot tolerate any difference of opinion. As one of the responses was, "Capitalism is the only way for humans to become a more advanced species."

Another issue was based on right-left wing political agenda where some respondents wanted to rise above it. One of the issues shared was that being apolitical is seen as ignorance. Few responses hinted that people should move beyond viewing issues as black and white, right and wrong. One of the responses put it up this argument, "I can't put my ideology in a watertight category but a main component of it is recognising my comfort level and recognising that everyone in society doesn't have that comfort level. It's a reality check for some others who think that if I put that "comfort level/privilege" debate, I'm trivialising their issues."

Other issues mentioned, but not broadly were, 'The idea of structure', 'historical facts being presented as they are', 'proper understanding of Indian culture', 'the freedom to protest and criticise whenever we want' where different opinions were not welcomed. One of the statements was, 'Kashmir not being "azaad" is the worst thing these guys have come up with'

The rest of the people felt that every ideology has its core principle and even if you have strong opinions about an issue, being intolerant to other opinions isn't right. Tolerance leads to discussions and intolerance leads to war. Tolerance isn't bowing down to other's opinions. Some felt that listening to others is a very instrumental part of forming ideology, "A lot of things that I strongly believed in a year ago are things that I oppose now because I had my ears open to refuting opinions. Change for the betterment should be welcomed with open arms."

Next question wanted to know if respondents wanted their political ideology to be pursued by masses. Most of the respondents replied with a 'yes'. Few added, as long as others are okay and understand the logic. Someone said that they are liberal with morals intact and believes in calling out right as right and wrong as wrong and wouldn't mind others following it too. Though, it has to be voluntarily. Some believed it would be much smarter and better if society could follow their ideology like having a society safe for women is a big issue for some and if it means getting people to follow their ideology, then be it. In the end it will benefit society itself. Some other words used in favor were, 'absolutely', 'frankly, we need it', 'Definitely'. Few also believed that their ideology was already followed by the masses.

The few people who responded with 'no' believed that everyone should pursue political ideology according to their needs. A better option would be to educate the masses so they could choose their own political ideology. Otherwise, if they are uneducated and misinformed about their ideology then masses can turn violent and chaotic easily.

There was also a group of respondents who felt, "Not necessarily. But I believe everyone has an inclination to some ideology, even the ones who think they are very privileged and don't want to think about it also have certain inclinations.' And on the other end the views were opposite, "Ideologies tend to cloud reason as one begins justifying actions and circumstances based on their pre-conceived notions. Such a scenario is precisely what I object to. Hence, I don't advocate for the adoption of any ideology." In summary, few felt that people who claim to be apolitical also have political inclinations whereas others felt that it is not important to have any political ideology, one should just be aware about what is happening around them and have an opinion about it.

The follow up question was that, given a chance, would they want people to adopt their ideology forcefully or voluntarily. Everyone agreed that method has to be voluntary. Everyone would like to engage in debates and discussions instead of fiat and fear, and expose other people to their own ideology. Forcing any ideology on anyone would be going against democracy of our country. If

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an ideology is forced upon anyone it will be short term and will lead to backlash in the long term. Change in ideology wouldn't change the attitude of a person anyway according to some. If any ideology is preached well, people would adopt it voluntarily. One of the responses which reflect this view was, "My ideology is based on understanding and viewing people as individuals with different backgrounds. It stands for contextualising. This can't be forced on people. It's a way of thinking that has to be harboured in people and thus voluntarily adopted. Would I prefer schools to encourage such thinking so that children grow up with an urge to question everything holistically? Yes. But do I want adults who've already formed their opinions to adopt mine? Not if they are willing to see that the world is beyond close minded thinking."

Last Question asked the respondents if they would change their political ideology if their friend's ask them to do so. Most of the responses were not in favor of changing their ideology. They would consider hearing out other's opinion through healthy debates and discussions but peer pressure wouldn't work on them. They have already reached their ideology through their own judgment. For some, their political ideology is their identity and they wouldn't change their identity for someone else. They might bend or modify their ideology a bit but not in its entirety. This response can summarise all of them, "No, they can buzz off".

Few said they would consider it if they are provided with a logical argument as to why they should change their stance, then perhaps as they like to learn new things. Next, respondents were asked if, they would like to share anything which they find relevant to the discussion above.

Following are their responses-

"I've had friends with different political viewpoints and ideologies, and recently there were many posts regarding, people who had different ideologies, shouldn't be friends but I personally think we've always existed with differences and grown with that, the more we constrict ourselves to people with the same ideologies since we don't want to be friends with the opposite faction, we are constricting ourselves from growing. One should be open and accommodative, the more you narrow down the People around you the more extremist you become which is even worse. It's better to have kinds of friends and people around you to keep a rain check."

"I feel that in today's time a lot of people try to force their ideologies on their peers and undertake practices such as defamation or public calling out with respect to politics. I feel this is extremely problematic as politics, as much as being a collective idea, is also a personal choice. Each system has its merits and demerits, and there is a clear line of objective morality that one must hold while endorsing an idea politically, but to shun someone for their leanings is nothing but a tyrannical oppression too."

"I don't support any party as such. I always form opinion on policies that a government brings about. Example - I support GST but not demonisation. I might support article 370 but not CAA. This has often created problem for me for not having a strong ideology that supports/ hates a particular party. So would like to say its fine to be aware and form an opinion about a circumstance and not necessary to support a party in particular."

"Any recent event is likely to serve as an example, all very contentious ones. But from what I've seen, there are privileged people and there are those who speak for the minority. Sometimes when both can get excessive, I prefer a delayed reaction. I know that there is excessive right wing and a too critical left wing, sometimes. I lie in the middle."

"People tend to lose their humanity, civic sense, calm and common sense just so they could validate something that their respective political party's person has said or done. I think this is something that a lot of people do irrespective of what political opinion they hold. They should not."

"I just feel like a lot of things in this country get politicised without a reason. A lot of times people ignore the wrong subconsciously just because it hurts their political ideology in a manner. Morality, in my opinion, should be place higher than one's political alignment/ideology."

"Read before you think, and think before you speak, and speak for what is needed and not just for mere agendas and politics that feeds the self interest of a handful, speak up for what you feel strongly about but speak up with the required ethics- A note to our youth."

"For now, I'll avoid this as I myself have been learning a lot about ideologies and figuring out my own ideology in these college years (which gave me a kind of a "nirvana" to social realities)."

"Yes. I and my friend had a really different political ideology over the issue of CAA NRC. We discussed it at length but since we had different views ... we agreed to differ."

"Haha, my school/college juniors who I have taught a lot of stuff, don't want to engage with me suddenly. But it's alright. They'll come around eventually."

VIII. DISCUSSION

This study is relevant because it helps to understand how political ideology impacts the social bonds amongst college students in India. This study can give a 'vice-versa' view to studies that just examine how friend circle and family affects the political ideology of a person. In Educational institutions where students are exposed to limitless resources, they form their own opinion and can indulge in dissociative patterns or form even closer bonds based on their political ideology [10]. This can also be studied as an early stage of how a political cleavage comes into existence; almost as early as when a person comes to age of voting.

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IX. CONCLUSION

The youth mostly have strong political ideology. They respect political ideology of others and demand the same amount of respect from others towards their own political ideology. They prefer friends who have similar ideology but don't mind having diversity of opinion as long as it is based on logical arguments. They value friendship and difference of opinion in their friend circle but it is not absolute. They do have strong opinions about certain issues and cannot tolerate any insensitive opinion about those issues. They are not afraid to cut off from friends who they think have problematic opinions, though they would try to reach the middle ground first. There are also few people who are flexible in their opinions and would lie in the middle. Sometimes these people are called out or are thought to be ignorant.

The common goal of everyone is to have a better society but their paths in terms of ideology are different. They respect the goal thus wouldn't want to force their ideology on the masses and strive to make a difference through discussions. In such times, they may need a friend circle that supports their ideology as people see it as their identity. Thus, it may be easier to form closer bonds with friends with similar political ideology whereas with friends of different political ideology there might be some topics which are off limit, forbidding a candid relationship. Students wouldn't want to change their political ideology due to peer pressure.

All this political emphasis on political ideology might be too overwhelming for a few. Further studies could be done on mental health of students who actively engage in political discussions in a very varied opinionated space.

Where students are exposed to limitless resources, they form their own opinion and can indulge in dissociative patterns or form even closer bonds based on their political ideology. This can also be studied as an early stage of how a political cleavage comes into existence; almost as early as when a person comes to age of voting.

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