

# When political elites talk, citizens reply. Affective polarization through temporal orientation and intergroup emotions

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## Abstract

Political polarization on social media, particularly during electoral campaigns, has become a growing concern. This study aimed to assess levels of affective polarization in political communication, considering temporal orientation, delegitimizing beliefs, and intergroup emotions. Two studies were conducted: one during the Andalusian elections in Spain, and another during the Colombian presidential campaign. Tweets from candidates and X users were analyzed in both studies. Linguistic analysis was used to develop an index for measuring affective polarization in linguistic pieces. This index offers an alternative to the lack of linguistic measurement tools for psychological processes regarding political polarization. Findings showed that communicative strategies often exhibited high indicators of ingroup bias in contexts without political violence, resulting in lower polarization that increased with positive emotions and a forward-looking perspective. Conversely, in contexts of political violence, strategies shifted towards outgroup discrimination and delegitimization. Positive emotions decreased polarization in these situations, while a past focus intensified it. The study

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concluded that affective polarization could indicate the willingness to pursue reconciliation in violent contexts. Consequently, this research provides a map of emotions associated with polarization.

**Public significance statement:** Two studies conducted in Spain and Colombia analyzed how political figures and users of the social network X communicate during elections. It was identified that the use of emotions can contribute to political polarization in both populations. Positive emotions can exacerbate polarization by glorifying one's group, while negative emotions can fuel polarization through attacks on opponents.

#### KEYWORDS

Colombia, electoral campaigns, polarization, political communication, Spain

## INTRODUCTION

Democracy implies openness to diverse opinions, positions, and beliefs, where debate and discussion are necessary. However, in the last decades, it has become increasingly notorious that citizens and politicians are gravitating toward opposing extremes across ideological spectrums on political, social, and economic issues. This phenomenon, known as political polarization, entails the clustering of groups around ideological poles, resulting in a stark separation between groups regarding their political preferences to the extent of mutual impermeability (Bordonaba-Plou, 2019; Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Thornal, 2015; Wojcieszak, 2016).

Polarization is not entirely negative, it enables contrasting and debating about different political positions. However, it becomes detrimental when it reaches pernicious levels, adversely impacting individual, intergroup, and societal dimensions. At the individual level, polarized people tend to extremize their attitudes and oversimplify their perspective on others and politics (Waisbord, 2020). This widens the gap between groups, leading to deteriorating communication and intergroup trust, thereby fostering the generation of prejudice (Jung et al., 2019).

At a societal level, polarization affects elites and citizens. Focusing on elites, it is difficult to reach the consensus and cooperation necessary to achieve democratic solutions. Consequently, a polarized Congress may encounter difficulties reaching agreements on socially relevant laws, known as policy gridlock (Quirk, 2011; Schaffner, 2011). Nevertheless, polarized citizens often exhibit a heightened distrust toward government institutions and a decreased interest in politics within a polarized society. This decline in democratic participation stems from perceiving politics as a battleground rather than a means to reach agreements that benefit most citizenry (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Layman et al., 2006).

Polarization leads people to ignore and even delegitimize the position of others, exacerbating existing conflicts and potentially escalating them to violence (Jung et al., 2019). Thus, understanding and intervening polarization can have far-reaching effects across individual, intergroup, and societal levels. Indeed, intervening polarization could promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts and strengthen the construction of democracies based on cultures of peace.

Intervening polarization requires an examination of its social underpinnings, from the need for group affiliation to intergroup relations. Deciphering polarization requires a comprehensive understanding of how individuals identify with groups, categorize the social world between them and us, and permanently privilege their affiliations to maintain a positive social identity.

## **Polarizing implies categorizing: The role of us vs. them**

As social beings, individuals are inherently driven to seek belonging within groups. This affiliation is often guided by their affinity toward the members or principles of a particular group, a phenomenon known as *social self-categorization*. Within the groups, individuals adopt normative beliefs and behaviors to self-identify as relevant members (Turner et al., 1987). Thus, some individuals may align with right-wing or left-wing ideologies, identifying themselves with corresponding groups and leaders, such as political parties and elites.

Group membership significantly shapes both self-perception and the perception of others, resulting in a simplified social reality characterized by the delimitation between “us” and “them”. This process involves categorizing individuals as either members of their group [ingroup] or other group members [outgroup]. This categorization is enhanced by *the accentuation principle* (Hogg et al., 1995). Consequently, individuals who experience polarization tend to accentuate intergroup differences, reinforcing their sense of belonging within their group and distancing themselves from those who are different.

This social categorization entails constant comparison where individuals compare their ingroup with outgroups in a manner that elevates the status of their group. People need to maintain their self-concept positively, to achieve this, one common strategy, among others, is distorting the perception of their ingroup and outgroup members to maintain a sense that others are inferior. This phenomenon known as Intergroup Attributional Bias entails positive behaviors are attributed to the ingroup and negative behaviors to the outgroup. The bias could lead to people perceiving outgroup members in a depersonalized and stereotyped way (Cottam et al., 2009).

Through stereotyped thinking, individuals reinforce self-social identity and associated beliefs, fostering the perception of ingroup superiority [ingroup favoritism], while viewing outgroup members as inferior or mistaken [outgroup extremity effect] (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987). Consequently, people may employ language that denigrates supporters of opposing ideologies, perceiving them as threatening to the ingroup due to their differences, thereby fostering social distrust.

The salience of social categorization relies partially on the relative accessibility of a social category; that is, people will be able to classify others more easily according to how common or relevant a category is. For instance, if individuals place considerable emphasis on political affiliation within their identity, they are likely to categorize others as either Progressive or Conservative. This categorization process could foster polarized thinking (Cottam et al., 2009; Turner, 1999).

Therefore, individuals tend to attribute the same beliefs, emotions, and behaviors to others exhibited by their categorical reference group, a phenomenon known as the group attribution error. Thus, it is common for individuals to assume that categorizing someone as a left-winger implies alignment with specific stances, such as supporting abortion rights and advocating for state regulation of the market, despite the potential divergence in individual beliefs. Such shortcomings in social information processing could contribute to the proliferation of discriminatory behaviors predicated on unfounded assumptions regarding others’ beliefs and attitudes (Turner, 1999).

Social comparison involves a range of intergroup emotions triggered by the prominence of social categories. When individuals identify with a particular ideology and presume certain traits of outgroup members, interacting with a member of the opposing ideology—whether in digital or physical form—can elicit emotions such as resentment, discomfort, fear, anger, or even hatred. These emotions have specific functions in the framework of intergroup relations. For instance, positive emotions make the group more cohesive, whereas negative emotions enable the group to respond to perceived threats by attacking others or protecting the ingroup (Mackie et al., 2008).

Polarization occurs when group members identify normative beliefs, emotions, or behaviors and adopt them more extremely to strengthen their membership and stand out. Thus, the inclination towards extremity becomes a norm, and could eventually be manifested as a group behavior that further delineates the divide between ingroups and outgroups (Wojcieszak, 2016).

## Affective polarization

This intergroup gap is exacerbated by intense emotions such as hatred and distrust. These emotions are related to affective polarization, characterized by feelings of dislike, animosity, or aversion towards members of other groups (Iyengar et al., 2012; Serrano-Puche, 2021). The intergroup framing of polarization is emphasized, as it is not personal antipathy toward individuals based on their characteristics, but their group membership. This dynamic further fuels polarization by fostering a hostile perception of the other group and encouraging increasingly extreme views on political issues (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020).

In the intergroup framework, polarization implies attitudes and emotional intensification, which is characterized by outgroup aversion and ingroup favoritism. The former is the predominant component, whereas the latter remains a topic of scholarly debate. It is important to note that ingroup bias does not necessarily imply animosity towards the outgroup (Bliuc et al., 2021). Similarly, it is still uncertain whether affective polarization is a cause or a consequence of other types of polarization, such as ideological polarization, that is, the widening ideological gap between political groups, marked by a significant divergence in attitudes and positions between political adversaries (Moore-Berg et al., 2020; Orian Harel et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2020).

However, it is known that emotions related to affective polarization influence the perception of others and the perception of intergroup differences, particularly in contexts involving ideologies or political parties. This amplifies the accentuation principle and undermines intergroup relations, fostering affective climates that could promote aggressive and even violent management of intergroup conflicts (Moore-Berg et al., 2020).

Measuring affective polarization encompasses various methodological approaches, including trait characterization, sentiment thermometers, and social distance metrics (Jost et al., 2022). Nevertheless, these measures rely on subjective self-reports provided by individuals willing to participate in research studies. Consequently, there is a pressing need for more objective measurement techniques that do not require data collection directly from participants. One promising avenue involves employing linguistic analysis of natural and spontaneous digital behaviors as a methodology to achieve this objective.

Linguistic measures provide the capability for ongoing polarization monitoring, particularly during critical junctures such as elections. Research indicates that affective polarization is exacerbated by political campaigns, particularly those with negative undertones. This is attributed to campaigns reinforcing citizens' partisan identities and perpetuating stereotypical beliefs about opponents. Moreover, studies have demonstrated that partisan identity is predominantly rooted in

affective rather than ideological affiliations, underscoring the importance of affective polarization within democratic systems (Iyengar et al., 2012).

## Polarization in elections and social media

A common strategy in political communication involves mobilizing voters by stimulating ingroup identification and outgroup differentiation, thereby emphasizing political identities wherein voters align themselves with ideals, parties, or candidates (Huddy, 2001). Consequently, heightened levels of ingroup identification are associated with an increased likelihood of polarization, and in turn, greater polarization correlates with heightened engagement with online publications (Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2017; Serrano-Puche, 2021; Wilson et al., 2020).

Interaction on social media enables political elites to establish direct communication with citizens and receive real-time feedback. Thus, political figures adjust their approaches to tailor to their audience based on the immediate responses they receive from citizens. This dynamic may contribute to heightened affective polarization, as political figures tend to strive to maintain relevance in the media landscape, while citizens, deeply committed to their political identities, express their opinions fervently through emotive responses (Dang-Xuan et al., 2013; Serrano-Puche, 2021).

To this end, emotions play an important role, as their intensity correlates with the likelihood of prompting the public's behaviors (Boccia Artieri et al., 2021; Dang-Xuan et al., 2013; Mackie et al., 2008; Sunstein, 2002). Research indicates that candidates from ruling parties tend to amplify their utilization of positive emotions as elections draw near (Jordan & Pennebaker, 2020). Likewise, politicians characterized as extremists usually employ more negative emotional tones and manifest similar emotions, even though they have different political affiliations.

In addition to emotions, political elites communicate beliefs through their messages. Drawing on persuasive arguments, political actors contribute to shaping public opinion by promoting propositions that reflect social beliefs aligned with collective narratives. Implicitly, these propositions suggest societal norms regarding what is acceptable or unacceptable, and what is deemed virtuous or objectionable within society (Páez et al., 2007).

## Delegitimizing beliefs and polarization

Beliefs conveyed through political communication are distinctive according to the socio-political context. In times of social, political, or economic crises, the emphasis is often on addressing the situation, whether through fostering social cohesion or alerting citizens to external threats. Alternatively, in contexts of conflict, promoted beliefs may aim to prepare citizens for confrontation—by delegitimizing the adversary or emphasizing the victimization of the ingroup—or to facilitate de-escalation and promote reconciliation (Bar-Tal, 2000; López-López et al., 2014).

Negative emotions and beliefs that anticipate conflict often lead to delegitimizing views, where the outgroup members are seen as less than human, evaluated negatively, and perceived as violating social norms (Bar-Tal, 2000). Delegitimization involves questioning the outgroup's validity, morality, or legitimacy because it is seen as deviating from the ingroup norms. This process reinforces the dehumanization of outgroup members, denying them equal human status. Dehumanization involves categorizing the outgroup in an extremely negative way, which can justify extreme actions. Consequently, this fosters a sense of superiority within the ingroup, which can

lead to aggression, attempts to eliminate, or domination of the outgroup. Thus, dehumanization can be seen as a delegitimation type that incorporates elements of authority, morality, and rationality (Tutkal, 2023).

Research indicates that individuals with higher levels of polarization are more likely to engage in symbolic violence, mirroring how polarized democracies are more susceptible to political violence (Piazza, 2023). In societies under armed conflicts, communication between politicians and civilians often becomes considerably confrontational, involving strategies that delegitimize the outgroup. These strategies are also prevalent in politically polarized societies, even in those not engaged in war (Bar-Tal & Hammack et al., 2012; Borja-Orozco et al., 2008).

## Temporal orientation and its possible role in affective polarization

The beliefs and emotions promoted by political elites in specific contexts may vary according to the temporal orientation adopted. Research suggests that conservative political elites often emphasize the past in their discourse, focusing on tradition preservation and a sense of certainty. In contrast, progressive elites usually emphasize the future and embrace openness to experience (Robinson et al., 2015).

The attitudes of individuals and groups towards time frames [past, present, and future] and how they relate to certain behaviors and emotions have been studied broadly. For instance, at the individual level, Zimbardo and Boyd (2009) proposed a theoretical framework called time perspective, which links people's attitudes toward the past, present, and future to personal beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that affect well-being. According to this model, attitudes toward the past can be positive or negative. Positive attitudes are associated with better self-esteem indicators, well-being, and emotional stability, while negative attitudes are linked to lower indicators of emotional control, anxiety, and aggressiveness. Present orientations can be hedonistic or fatalistic; the former focuses on current sensations and immediate rewards, while the latter focuses on an external locus of control and is associated with indicators of depression and emotional instability. Finally, future orientation typically involves behaviors aimed at pursuing future goals and rewards (Stolarski et al., 2018). Zimbardo and Boyd (2009) proposed an ideal temporal profile characterized by a positive evaluation of the past, a forward-looking perspective on the future, and moderate engagement with the hedonistic present.

Temporal orientation is influenced by cultural contexts, collective narratives, and psychosocial, economic, and political conditions (Stolarski et al., 2018). Therefore, at a collective level, people with socioeconomic vulnerability tend to focus on the past in a traumatic way, live almost permanently in the present as it is more adaptive, and give little attention to the future. Consistently, people in areas of political conflict often have negative temporal orientation [negative past and fatalistic present] (Fieulaine & Apostolidis, 2015; Senyk et al., 2022; Sircova et al., 2015). In contrast, people living in structured societies tend to be more engaged with the future. A positive view of the future is consistently associated with trust in the government (Klicperová-Baker et al., 2020; Zhi et al., 2021).

At the group level, attitudes toward the past, present, and future influence intergroup dynamics. Narratives about historical events shape social identities. When people evaluate the past through nostalgia, it often drives efforts to recreate aspects of the past in the present. The impact of such efforts on intergroup relations can be either positive or negative, contingent upon the nature of the nostalgic sentiment and whether it is shared with other groups. Similarly, a strong emphasis on the past can engender constructive and detrimental outcomes, depending on how

historical memories are framed. Instances of past conflicts and perceptions of victimization may foster resentment and strain intergroup relations. Conversely, actively engaging in collective narrative-building and acknowledging diverse historical perspectives can foster forgiveness and contribute to reconciliation efforts (Liu & Hilton, 2005; Stefaniak et al., 2021; Wohl et al., 2023).

Focusing on the present enables groups to address current social, economic, and political matters collaboratively. Positive intergroup relations can be fostered by actively building the present and considering the near future. However, an exclusive focus on immediate, ingroup-oriented solutions may strain relationships with outgroups (Van Lange & Joireman, 2008). Conversely, contemplating the distant future often leads individuals to anticipate more favorable outcomes for their ingroup than the outgroup and ingroup past events (King & Bee, 2020). The orientation towards time also influences how emotions correlate with support for policies. Chernyak-Hai and Cohen-Chen (2023) discovered that lower levels of future focus tend to heighten negative emotions among leftists, leading to increased support for aggressive policies, which aligns them more closely with rightists. On the other hand, a strong future orientation weakens the link between positive emotions among leftists and their conciliatory attitudes.

Populist leaders often manipulate discourse about past or future events to influence favorable opinions of the ingroup and sometimes cultivate hostile sentiments toward others (Wohl et al., 2023). The beliefs and emotions promoted in political communication vary according to the collective narratives of the sociopolitical context. For instance, some political actors may use the past positively to highlight achievements, while others may use the past to condemn outgroup actions. These beliefs and emotions embedded in messages can either increase or decrease polarization. Thus, a comprehensive examination of these variables across contexts is significant for understanding their dynamics during election periods known for heightened levels of polarization.

Considering the growing importance of affective polarization in electoral campaigns, this research aims to determine the levels of affective polarization in electoral campaigns, through the temporal orientation, beliefs, and intergroup emotions of political elites and social media users. To achieve this goal, two studies are developed: the first in a Spanish regional electoral campaign and the second in the Colombian national elections, where the methodology is replicated with a larger sample and in a different socio-political context. The studies were conducted considering that Spain enjoys social, political, and economic stability, while Colombia has been embroiled in internal conflict for several decades. This conflict has plunged Colombia into social and political conditions that fluctuate between the transition to peace and the resurgence of violence.

The following hypotheses were proposed in these two studies:

- H1: Positive temporal orientation [positive past and future] directed toward the ingroup will be associated with lower levels of affective polarization.
- H2: Negative temporal orientation [negative past and fatalistic or negative present] will be associated with higher levels of affective polarization if directed toward the outgroup.
- H3: Intergroup emotions, temporal orientation, and beliefs presented by elites will not be significantly different from those shown by citizens.

## STUDY 1

Data: Two datasets were used: tweets issued by candidates for the 2022 Andalusian regional presidency and messages related to the election from unofficial users. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

1. Political elites: A total of 1197 tweets were issued by the six candidates for the presidency of the Andalusian community from May 18 [date of official registration as candidates] to June 19, 2022 [election date]. This is a census of all tweets posted by candidates during the official campaign period. The candidates represent a balance between right-wing and left-wing ideologies in the elections, in which the previous president wins: Juan Manuel Moreno, a member of the Popular Party [right].
2. Citizens: A total of 9837 tweets were issued by 4690 accounts, from May 18 through June 19, 2022, by non-official users that mentioned the candidates or used hashtags associated with the election or candidates. This is a non-probabilistic sample of all the tweets published regarding the candidates, campaigns, and elections.

## Procedure

1. Data download: Tweets were downloaded through the X API using the R tweet libraries. In the first dataset, tweets posted on the candidates' accounts during the established dates were downloaded. In the second, a keyword search was performed on X [candidates' names or tags related to the candidate, campaign, or election].
2. Data cleaning: Retweets, duplicate records, and tweets with less than 10 words were eliminated in both samples. The citizen sample eliminated tweets corresponding to media accounts, political parties, or governmental organizations.
3. Linguistic analysis: The contents of the tweets were linguistically analyzed using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count—LIWC, a software that classifies words based on linguistic and psychological categories. The dictionary for LIWC of intergroup emotions by Garzón-Velandia et al. (2020) was used, which calculates the percentage of words associated with 38 discrete emotions, per tweet. The scores of linguistic categories proper to the LIWC Spanish dictionary (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2007) were obtained, such as we, they, verbs conjugated in the first-person plural, verbs conjugated in the third person plural; positive emotions and negative emotions; past, present, future. These variables were taken as numerical and, in turn, were coded into three categorical variables assigning them to the highest-scoring category and facilitating comparison between groups. Thus, the first variables [we, first-person plural conjugated verbs, they and third-person plural conjugated verbs] determined (1) the social category [endo-group]; the next two [positive and negative emotions] made up (2) the emotional valence and, the next three [past, present, and future] in combination with the emotional valence established (3) the temporal orientation [positive and negative past, positive and negative present and, positive and negative future].
4. Data analysis: First, descriptive statistics of affective polarization [based on the ALP index], temporal orientation, social categorization, intergroup emotions, and delegitimizing beliefs of candidate and user tweets were determined. Affective polarization scores were analyzed as a function of social category [ingroup—outgroup] and temporal orientation through database segmentation and comparison with Student's *t*-test. Next, the emotions with the highest frequency in the tweets and the affective polarization in interaction with these were analyzed using the same statistic used previously. Finally, the words associated with legitimizing beliefs were listed to provide context to political communication.

## Affective linguistic polarization index (ALP)

Based on the LIWC word classification and its linguistic categories, six direct scores were taken: *They plus verbs conjugated in third-person plural* to create the outgroup variable; *We plus verbs conjugated in the first-person plural* to create the ingroup variable, positive emotions, and negative emotions. The four variables [Ingroup, outgroup, positive and negative emotions] were multiplied to facilitate their interaction. Based on these values, the equation was developed:

$$ALP\ index = \frac{(Outgroup-) + \left(\frac{Ingroup+}{3}\right)}{\Sigma (Outgroup+, Outgroup-, Ingroup+, Ingroup-)}$$

Outgroup -: (The score + third-person plural conjugated verbs) \* (scores in negative emotions). Implies messages are negatively addressed to the outgroup.

Outgroup +: (They score + third-person plural conjugated verbs) \* (positive emotion scores). Involves messages positively directed toward the outgroup.

Ingroup +: (We score + first-person plural conjugated verbs) \* (positive emotion scores). Involves messages positively directed toward the ingroup.

Ingroup -: (We score + first-person plural conjugated verbs) \* (negative emotion scores). Involves messages negatively directed toward the ingroup.

NOTE: In English, it is recommended only to use the pronouns “we” and “they” since the conjugation of verbs does not denote the subject.

The index is an affective polarization measure for each textual piece, in this case, for each tweet, and takes values between 0 and 1. The indicator gives less weight to ingroup favoritism (Ingroup +) because it is often used in political communication to keep the group together rather than to polarize citizens. It corrects ingroup bias and avoids overestimating polarization.

In a divergent validity analysis, 7929 tweets from political figures and users related to political issues in Colombia and Spain were taken, and their measures were contrasted with 3666 tweets related to entertainment content in both countries. The student's *t*-test comparison shows statistically significant differences [ $p = .00$ ] with a *t*-value = 16.16. It is indicated that the polarization value of political tweets [ $\mu = .12$ , S.D = .23] is significantly higher than the polarization calculated in entertainment tweets [ $\mu = .06$ , S.D = .16]. Additionally, internal consistency scores indicate medium reliability [ $\alpha = .40$ ], considering language measures have lower indicators than psychometric test standards.

From this sample, percentiles were calculated to estimate standard scores for interpreting the results of the studies to be conducted. The scores shown in Table 1 were estimated as standard and they have assigned an interpretation according to percentiles:

**TABLE 1** ALP index percentiles.

| Percentiles | Standard score | Interpretation           |
|-------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1           | .06            | <No polarization         |
| 10          | .16            | Low polarization         |
| 20          | .20            | Low polarization         |
| 30          | .25            | Medium-low polarization  |
| 40          | .33            | Medium polarization      |
| 50          | .33            | Medium polarization      |
| 60          | .44            | Medium-high polarization |
| 70          | .50            | Medium-high polarization |
| 80          | .60            | High polarization        |
| 90          | .75            | High polarization        |
| 100         | 1              | Too high polarization    |

**TABLE 2** Affective polarization as a function of social category and temporal orientation.

| Temporal orientation | Social category ( <i>t</i> ) | Political elites |                                |     | Citizens     |                                |     |
|----------------------|------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|-----|--------------|--------------------------------|-----|
|                      |                              | Frec. tweets     | Mean polarization ( <i>t</i> ) | S.D | Frec. tweets | Mean polarization ( <i>t</i> ) | S.D |
| Positive past        | <u>Ingroup</u> (−2.83)       | 3                | .35                            | .01 | 14           | .29 <sup>a</sup> (2.44)        | .06 |
|                      | Outgroup                     | 2                | .27                            | .08 | 32           | .21 <sup>a</sup> (2.44)        | .16 |
| Negative past        | Ingroup                      | –                | –                              | –   | 3            | .25 <sup>a</sup> (−5.10)       | .25 |
|                      | Outgroup                     | 2                | .57                            | .05 | 13           | .80 <sup>a</sup> (−5.10)       | .15 |
| Positive present     | Ingroup                      | 361              | .40 <sup>a</sup> (11.68)       | .07 | 1446         | .28 <sup>a</sup> (25.68)       | .05 |
|                      | Outgroup                     | 274              | .19 <sup>a</sup> (11.68)       | .14 | 2279         | .19 <sup>a</sup> (25.68)       | .15 |
| Negative present     | Ingroup                      | 23               | .21 <sup>a</sup> (−13.15)      | .11 | 184          | .13 <sup>a</sup> (−56.02)      | .12 |
|                      | <u>Outgroup</u> (−4.78)      | 51               | .65 <sup>a</sup> (−13.15)      | .16 | 708          | .75 <sup>a</sup> (−56.02)      | .19 |
| Positive future      | Ingroup                      | 1                | .50                            | –   | 19           | .30 <sup>a</sup> (5.88)        | .04 |
|                      | Outgroup                     | 1                | .17                            | –   | 18           | .12 <sup>a</sup> (5.88)        | .13 |
| Negative future      | Ingroup                      | –                | –                              | –   | 3            | .07                            | .06 |
|                      | Outgroup                     | –                | –                              | –   | 7            | .95                            | .13 |

Notes: Tweets with equal values in the social categories were eliminated. Frequencies and percentages represent the number of tweets classified in each category. Underlining represents the difference in affective polarization between citizens and the elite.

<sup>a</sup>There were significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between ingroup and outgroup polarization from the same orientation.

## RESULTS

### Affective polarization, social category, and temporal orientation

Table 2 shows the mean scores obtained in the ALP Index, measured on a scale from 0 to 1. These scores correspond to affective polarization according to social category and temporal orientation. When classifying tweets as a function of temporal orientation, most of the corpus that does not

have affective or temporal scores is eliminated. However, there is a clear trend that differentiates communication between the ingroup and the outgroup, positive orientation increases polarization only if they focus on the ingroup, while the same happens when the orientation is negative and focuses on the outgroup, following the dynamics of the ALP index. The small number of tweets directed toward the future and the higher polarization of citizens are notable.

Consistently, polarization is higher in citizens when the orientation is negative and leaning towards the outgroup, which is associated with discrimination towards the outgroup, particularly referring to the future. Conversely, polarization is higher among elites when the orientation is positive and ingroup-oriented, indicating ingroup bias. It is noteworthy that elites exhibit greater polarization than the populace when referencing the past achievements of their ingroup. At the same time, citizens are more polarized than elites when they refer negatively to the outgroup in the present.

## Intergroup emotions

Table 3 shows the intergroup emotions with the highest frequency in the two samples, indicating that elites have a higher emotional tone, both positive and negative, than citizens. Emotions such as passion and tranquility are characteristic of the elites, while gratitude and despair are characteristic of citizens. Distrust is constant among citizens and sadness among elites. In general, hope is the emotion of the positive future orientation, pride of the positive present, and guilt of the negative past.

An analysis of affective polarization based on the most frequent intergroup emotions (Table 4) shows that elites increased their polarization in digital communication with tranquility and hope, while citizens did so with satisfaction and passion. These emotions are polarizing from the perspective of ingroup bias. However, when analyzed from a temporal orientation, citizens decrease affective polarization when communication reflects hope or gratitude only if they address the past or future.

Regarding negative emotions, it was identified that all negative emotions significantly increased polarization, in particular, sadness and disappointment. However, emotions such as distrust and despair are more influenced on citizens. An analysis based on temporal orientation found that sadness decreases polarization for elites and citizens, but only if the discourse is focused on the outgroup and the present or past.

## Delegitimizing beliefs

Words associated with beliefs that delegitimize the adversary and prepare for conflict are more frequent among citizens who focus on corruption [f. 11] and use words of delegitimization with the outgroup, such as fascists [f. 77], cowards [f. 21], and corrupt [f. 21]. In contrast, elites use fewer words to delegitimize the outgroup and focus on violence [f. 27] and corruption [f. 12].

## DISCUSSION

Aiming to identify the levels of affective polarization of the Andalusian election campaign in social media, tweets from elites and citizens during the campaigns were taken. Temporal orientation, delegitimizing beliefs, and intergroup emotions were measured to identify them in

**TABLE 3** Intergroup emotions with greater frequency in elites and citizens.

| Temporal orientation | Elite               |                   |      | Citizens            |                   |      |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------|---------------------|-------------------|------|
|                      | Emotion             | Mean ( <i>t</i> ) | S.D  | Emotion             | Mean ( <i>t</i> ) | S.D  |
| Positive past        | Love                | 2.91              | 3.52 | Hope                | 1.71              | 2.64 |
|                      | <u>Happiness</u>    | 2.86 (2.21)       | 2.67 | Trust               | 1.58              | 2.15 |
|                      | Passion             | 1.81              | 3.20 | Satisfaction        | 1.49              | 2.50 |
| Negative past        | Disappointment      | 3.35              | 1.85 | Guilt               | 1.77              | 2.29 |
|                      | Sadness             | 2.33              | 3.29 | Distrust            | 1.48              | 2.41 |
|                      | Guilt               | 2.19              | .21  | Disappointment      | 1.39              | 2.17 |
| Positive present     | <u>Hope</u>         | 2.21 (3.85)       | 2.55 | <u>Hope</u>         | 1.85 (3.85)       | 2.57 |
|                      | <u>Satisfaction</u> | 2.02 (4.55)       | 2.51 | Pride               | 1.79              | 2.58 |
|                      | Pride               | 1.96              | 2.38 | <u>Satisfaction</u> | 1.63 (4.55)       | 2.38 |
| Negative present     | Distrust            | 2.03              | 2.44 | Distrust            | 1.72              | 2.55 |
|                      | Sadness             | 1.88              | 2.24 | Despair             | 1.42              | 2.19 |
|                      | <u>Fury</u>         | 1.84 (2.66)       | 2.42 | Sadness             | 1.41              | 2.24 |
| Positive future      | <u>Hope</u>         | 11.84 (3.01)      | 3.47 | <u>Hope</u>         | 3.34 (3.01)       | 3.94 |
|                      | <u>Tranquility</u>  | 3.95 (3.13)       | 1.15 | Gratitude           | 1.62              | 2.76 |
|                      | Trust               | 3.95              | 1.15 | Satisfaction        | 1.34              | 2.53 |
| Negative future      | –                   | –                 | –    | Anger               | 1.64              | 2.01 |
|                      | –                   | –                 | –    | Distrust            | 1.63              | 2.38 |
|                      | –                   | –                 | –    | Disappointment      | 1.29              | 2.93 |

Note: Underlined text represents the difference in emotions between citizens and the elite.

political communication. The results highlight three important aspects: the discourse tendencies based on temporal orientation, the dynamics of polarization when discourse is targeted towards the ingroup or the outgroup, and the affective polarization mediated by the most significant emotions. These aspects will be discussed in greater depth below.

First, evidence suggests that elite and citizen communication tends to focus on the present, a notable observation given that campaign rhetoric typically emphasizes future community benefits if the candidate is elected. However, directing communication towards the present may serve as a strategy to render discourse more concrete in cognitive and temporal terms, facilitating communication with citizens (Aguilar-Pardo et al., 2024). This strategy constitutes a polarizing variable: affective polarization scores increase when elite and citizenry communication is negatively focused on the present and directed towards the outgroup. Conversely, positive elite communication focused on the future or past and directed towards the ingroup results in polarized discourse exhibiting a characteristic ingroup bias.

Second, the political communication of elites is distinguished by a higher emotional tone compared to that of citizens. While both groups exhibit similar levels of polarization overall, citizens tend to lean towards outgroup discrimination, intensifying negativity and aligning with the use of delegitimizing words. Conversely, elites gravitate towards ingroup bias, wherein positive

**TABLE 4** Affective polarization according to the most frequent intergroup emotions.

| Emotion        | Elite                                      |     |   |     | Citizens                                   |     |   |     |
|----------------|--|-----|---|-----|--|-----|---|-----|
|                | Mean polarization without discrete emotion | S.D | Mean polarization with discrete emotion | S.D | Mean polarization without discrete emotion | S.D | Mean polarization with discrete emotion | S.D |
| Tranquility    | <u>.20<sup>a</sup></u> (−3.12)             | .18 | <u>.23<sup>a</sup></u> (−3.12)          | .14 | .20 <sup>a</sup> (−2.80)                   | .24 | .21 <sup>a</sup> (−2.80)                | .18 |
| Hope           | <u>.19<sup>a</sup></u> (−2.32)             | .19 | <u>.21<sup>a</sup></u> (−2.32)          | .14 | .20 <sup>a</sup> (−2.82)                   | .26 | .21 <sup>a</sup> (−2.82)                | .17 |
| Passion        | .20  | .18 | .20                                     | .13 | <u>.20<sup>a</sup></u> (−4.67)             | .24 | <u>.22<sup>a</sup></u> (−4.67)          | .17 |
| Pride          | .20  | .19 | .21                                     | .13 | <u>.19<sup>a</sup></u> (−3.37)             | .26 | <u>.21<sup>a</sup></u> (−3.37)          | .17 |
| Satisfaction   | .20  | .19 | .21                                     | .13 | <u>.19<sup>a</sup></u> (−3.58)             | .26 | <u>.21<sup>a</sup></u> (−3.58)          | .16 |
| Trust          | .19  | .19 | .21                                     | .14 | .20 <sup>a</sup> (−2.12)                   | .25 | .21 <sup>a</sup> (−2.12)                | .17 |
| Sadness        | <u>.18<sup>a</sup></u> (−8.87)             | .16 | <u>.30<sup>a</sup></u> (−8.87)          | .18 | <u>.18<sup>a</sup></u> (−19.52)            | .22 | <u>.31<sup>a</sup></u> (−19.52)         | .26 |
| Anger          | .19 <sup>a</sup> (−5.97)                   | .17 | .27 <sup>a</sup> (−5.97)                | .17 | .18 <sup>a</sup> (−16.92)                  | .23 | .31 <sup>a</sup> (−16.92)               | .24 |
| Fury           | .18 <sup>a</sup> (−7.78)                   | .16 | .28 <sup>a</sup> (−7.78)                | .18 | .18 <sup>a</sup> (−17.54)                  | .23 | .29 <sup>a</sup> (−17.54)               | .23 |
| Distrust       | <u>.18<sup>a</sup></u> (−9.13)             | .16 | <u>.29<sup>a</sup></u> (−9.13)          | .18 | <u>.17<sup>a</sup></u> (−24.84)            | .22 | <u>.33<sup>a</sup></u> (−24.84)         | .25 |
| Despair        | .19 <sup>a</sup> (−6.31)                   | .16 | .27 <sup>a</sup> (−6.31)                | .17 | <u>.18<sup>a</sup></u> (−20.24)            | .22 | <u>.31<sup>a</sup></u> (−20.24)         | .25 |
| Disappointment | <u>.19<sup>a</sup></u> (−8.42)             | .16 | <u>.30<sup>a</sup></u> (−8.42)          | .16 | <u>.18<sup>a</sup></u> (−20.21)            | .22 | <u>.32<sup>a</sup></u> (−20.21)         | .26 |
| Guilt          | .18 <sup>a</sup> (−8.21)                   | .16 | .29 <sup>a</sup> (−8.21)                | .17 | .18 <sup>a</sup> (−17.83)                  | .23 | .31 <sup>a</sup> (−17.83)               | .25 |

Note: Underlining indicates statistically significant changes of a greater magnitude.

<sup>a</sup>There are statistically significant differences in emotion whether it is present in the discourse, analyzing citizens, and elites independently.

emotions like tranquility and hope heighten polarization by asserting that the preferred candidate is the right choice for the community. These findings align with the theory of intergroup emotions (Mackie et al., 2008), suggesting that emotions framed within a social identity, particularly in a political context, prompt individuals to evaluate based on their group affiliation and its preservation. Given the strong ideological and partisan identification among network users, polarization levels escalate even in instances of ingroup bias rather than outgroup discrimination.

Third, within this theoretical framework, analyzing discrete emotions provides more detailed information about affective polarization in communication. For instance, pride plays a fundamental role in reinforcing party identity and fostering group cohesion, thereby directing focus towards the campaign objectives. This aligns with the function of hope as a transversal emotion, known for its capacity to create future expectations, making it highly mobilizing (Widmann, 2021).

Despite exhibiting a higher emotional tone, elites express less polarization in their use of emotions than citizens, who show polarization with emotions such as passion and satisfaction. These emotions are characterized by increasing ingroup bias and fostering a strong attachment to political convictions (APA, 2023). Similarly, another polarizing emotion is despair, which arises from feelings of loss of control and self-efficacy when confronted with the belief that significant issues will not improve. In the sample, this emotion was associated with citizens' complaints about resolving socially relevant subjects, such as corruption.

These data are contextualized during the victory of Juan Manuel Moreno and the Partido Popular -PP- [right-wing ideology] with an absolute majority of votes, which assured him the presidency of the Andalusian community for four more years. Although the voting predicted the continuity of Moreno in power as president, the parliament shifted to the right with the victory of the Partido Popular [Popular Party] over the Partido Socialista Obrero Español -PSOE- [Spanish

Socialist Workedxr's Party—left wing], which has been the party that has governed in most of the periods of the Community (Junta de Andalucía, 2022). This panorama and parliamentary system provide clarity in the face of the high ingroup bias of the elites, who try to unite the group with emotions such as hope, tranquility, and trust to obtain an absolute victory that avoids the negotiation of the parliament. It also allows us to understand the frequency of words associated with despair on the part of citizens, possibly leftists, who saw the hegemony of their ideology fall in parliament and who used more delegitimizing words, such as *fascists*.

In this political context, all statistically significant emotions were found to be polarizing in discourse. However, sadness was depolarizing only when directed towards the outgroup and oriented towards the past or present. Similarly, gratitude or hope depolarizes only when directed toward the past or future. This significant observation clarifies which emotions can potentially reduce political polarization in social media.

## STUDY 2

Data: Two datasets were used: tweets issued by candidates for the 2022 Colombian presidency and messages related to elections from unofficial users. Inclusion criteria were determined as follows:

1. Elites: A total of 6566 tweets issued by the eight candidates for the presidency of Colombia from March 11 [date of official registration as candidates] to June 19, 2022 [election date] by presidential candidates. This is a census of all tweets posted by candidates during the official campaign period. Half of the candidates tend to the political right, one to the center and three to the left, including the winning candidate, Gustavo Petro, one of the first declared left-wing presidents and a former member of a guerrilla that transitioned to peace.
2. Citizens: A total of 27782 tweets were issued by 13425 accounts, from March 11 to June 19, 2022, by non-official users that mentioned the candidates or used tags associated with elections or candidates. This is a non-probabilistic sample of all the tweets published regarding the candidates, campaigns, and elections.

In both datasets, tweets with fewer than ten words, retweets, and duplicate entries were removed. In total, 34348 tweets were collected from both samples.

## Procedure and data analysis

Because this study replicates Study 1 methodology, the same steps were followed to download the tweets, clean the data, prepare the variables, and analyze the data. The same instruments were used, and statistical tests were performed.

## RESULTS

### Affective polarization, social category, and temporal orientation

In general, the highest levels of polarization correspond to negative temporal orientation, in which the negative past stands out, as shown in Table 5. It is important to note that elites polarize more

**TABLE 5** Affective polarization as a function of social category and temporal orientation.

| Temporal orientation | Social category (t)     | Elites       |                           |     | Citizens     |                           |     |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|-----|--------------|---------------------------|-----|
|                      |                         | Frec. tweets | Mean polarization (t)     | S.D | Frec. tweets | Mean polarization (t)     | S.D |
| Positive past        | Ingroup                 | 20           | .29 <sup>a</sup> (3.84)   | .04 | 44           | .29 <sup>a</sup> (10.97)  | .05 |
|                      | Outgroup                | 47           | .20 <sup>a</sup> (3.84)   | .15 | 420          | .17 <sup>a</sup> (10.97)  | .16 |
| Negative past        | Ingroup                 | 4            | .15 <sup>a</sup> (-6.24)  | .12 | 21           | .15 <sup>a</sup> (-22.25) | .12 |
|                      | Outgroup                | 18           | .77 <sup>a</sup> (-6.24)  | .19 | 245          | .78 <sup>a</sup> (-22.25) | .18 |
| Positive present     | <u>Ingroup (-2.74)</u>  | 1689         | .27 <sup>a</sup> (20.74)  | .05 | 1990         | .28 <sup>a</sup> (44.45)  | .05 |
|                      | Outgroup                | 1514         | .19 <sup>a</sup> (20.74)  | .14 | 7062         | .19 <sup>a</sup> (44.45)  | .16 |
| Negative present     | <u>Ingroup (3.05)</u>   | 206          | .16 <sup>a</sup> (-48.72) | .11 | 336          | .13 <sup>a</sup> (-87.63) | .11 |
|                      | <u>Outgroup (-8.29)</u> | 486          | .67 <sup>a</sup> (-48.72) | .16 | 2850         | .73 <sup>a</sup> (-87.63) | .17 |
| Positive future      | <u>Ingroup (-2.65)</u>  | 59           | .27 <sup>a</sup> (2.62)   | .05 | 51           | .29 <sup>a</sup> (9.85)   | .05 |
|                      | Outgroup                | 19           | .19 <sup>a</sup> (2.62)   | .14 | 74           | .12 <sup>a</sup> (9.85)   | .15 |
| Negative future      | Ingroup                 | 2            | .12 <sup>a</sup> (-4.22)  | .18 | 4            | .08 <sup>a</sup> (-7.12)  | .17 |
|                      | Outgroup                | 3            | .58 <sup>a</sup> (-4.22)  | .08 | 16           | .77 <sup>a</sup> (-7.12)  | .17 |

Notes: Tweets with equal values in the social categories were eliminated. Frequencies and percentages represent the number of tweets classified in each category. Underlining represents the difference in affective polarization between citizens and the elite.

<sup>a</sup>There were significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between ingroup and outgroup polarization from the same orientation.

when they refer to the outgroup negatively in the past. In contrast, citizens polarize when communicating about the positive future and the negative past. Greater polarization is evidenced in citizens, especially in negative orientation directed at the outgroup.

## Intergroup emotions

Table 6 shows the intergroup emotions with the highest frequencies in both samples. The elites manifested more positive and negative emotions in their communication. In general, trust is constant in the temporal orientation of the two samples, although elites express happiness, love, and satisfaction, whereas the citizens express gratitude and pride.

However, negative emotions such as distrust, hatred, and disappointment were maintained at different temporal orientations. Nevertheless, elites present a greater frequency of emotions, such as fear and fury, while citizens present emotions such as guilt and sadness.

The analyses of affective polarization according to the emotions listed (Table 7) show that the elites are statistically more depolarized with emotions such as gratitude, happiness, hope, and love. In contrast, this phenomenon only occurs in citizens with pride.

When discriminating the analyses according to temporal orientation, it is identified that hope, love, and happiness decrease polarization if they are focused on the future, mainly towards the ingroup, although to a lesser extent towards the outgroup. The same happens with citizens, but only if hope is focused on the present in the ingroup and the outgroup.

Regarding negative emotions, hatred, distrust, and disappointment were highly polarizing in both samples. However, citizens were more polarized with negative emotions in general, highlighting emotions such as fury and guilt, in addition to those mentioned. Nevertheless, sadness depolarizes citizens in both social categories when directed toward the past.

**TABLE 6** Intergroup emotions with higher frequency in elites and citizens.

| Temporal orientation | Elite               |                   |      | Citizens              |                   |      |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------|-----------------------|-------------------|------|
|                      | Emotion             | Mean ( <i>t</i> ) | S.D  | Emotion               | Mean ( <i>t</i> ) | S.D  |
| Positive past        | Trust               | 2.17              | 2.86 | Trust                 | 1.84              | 2.70 |
|                      | <u>Happiness</u>    | 1.87 (2.88)       | 2.26 | Gratitude             | 1.60              | 2.75 |
|                      | Love                | 1.82              | 2.89 | Hope                  | 1.23              | 2.40 |
| Negative past        | Distrust            | 2.65              | 3.44 | Distrust              | 2.64              | 3.36 |
|                      | Hate                | 2.45              | 3.24 | Hate                  | 1.78              | 2.86 |
|                      | Disappointment      | 1.99              | 2.52 | Guilt                 | 1.73              | 2.74 |
| Positive present     | <u>Trust</u>        | 2.54 (13.21)      | 2.92 | <u>Hope</u>           | 1.99 (3.32)       | 2.81 |
|                      | <u>Hope</u>         | 2.15 (3.32)       | 2.66 | <u>Trust</u>          | 1.88 (1321)       | 2.63 |
|                      | <u>Satisfaction</u> | 2.03 (14.60)      | 2.47 | <u>Pride</u>          | 1.66 (2.14)       | 2.54 |
| Negative present     | <u>Distrust</u>     | 4.11 (8.29)       | 3.71 | <u>Distrust</u>       | 3.00 (8.29)       | 3.61 |
|                      | <u>Hate</u>         | 2.51 (4.76)       | 2.96 | <u>Hate</u>           | 2.00 (4.76)       | 2.90 |
|                      | <u>Fury</u>         | 2.31 (6.91)       | 2.58 | <u>Disappointment</u> | 1.71 (-4.52)      | 2.63 |
| Positive future      | <u>Hope</u>         | 3.35 (-2.01)      | 3.26 | <u>Hope</u>           | 4.20 (-2.01)      | 3.93 |
|                      | <u>Trust</u>        | 2.88 (3.06)       | 3.53 | <u>Trust</u>          | 1.68 (3.06)       | 2.74 |
|                      | <u>Satisfaction</u> | 2.02 (2.40)       | 2.29 | Pride                 | 1.52              | 2.98 |
| Negative future      | Distrust            | 5.51              | 4.64 | Distrust              | 2.93              | 4.08 |
|                      | Fear                | 3.31              | 2.70 | Sadness               | 2.62              | 3.41 |
|                      | Fury                | 3.10              | 4.24 | Hate                  | 2.43              | 5.48 |

Note: Underlined text represents the difference in emotions between citizens and the elite.

## Delegitimizing beliefs

Regarding the words associated with delegitimizing beliefs that prepare for conflict, the elites use this resource less, focusing on relevant topics in the national context such as corruption [f. 260], violence [f. 156], war [f. 83], hate [f. 64]; although they use several words that delegitimize the adversary such as: corrupt [f. 122] criminals [f. 109], tyrant [f. 57], politicians [f. 36] and violent [f. 34]. On the other hand, citizens used these words significantly, particularly when referring to relevant problems in the country, such as corruption [f. 789] and hate [f. 156], FARC [f. 201], violence (f. 185) and continuismo [f. 111], as well as delegitimizing words, such as corrupt [f. 384], guerrilla [f. 155] and criminals [f. 205].

## DISCUSSION

A sample of elites' and citizens' tweets in the Colombian presidential elections was taken to determine the levels of affective polarization in a national electoral campaign in social media from a temporal orientation, delegitimizing beliefs, and intergroup emotions. The temporal orientation maintained in political communication during the campaign and how affective polarization fluctuated based on specific emotions were identified through the collected data. These two aspects will be discussed in depth below.

TABLE 7 Affective polarization according to the most frequent intergroup emotions.

| Emotion        | Elite  |     |   |     | Citizens                                       |                           |   |                           |     |
|----------------|--|-----|---|-----|--|---------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----|
|                | Mean polarization without discrete emotion (t) |     | Mean polarization with discrete emotion (t) |     | Mean polarization without discrete emotion (t) |                           | Mean polarization with discrete emotion (t) |                           |     |
|                | S.D  | S.D | S.D   | S.D | S.D  | S.D                       | S.D   |                           |     |
| Gratitude      | .25 <sup>a</sup> (3.86)                        | .21 | .23 <sup>a</sup> (3.86)                     | .16 | .22  | .22                       | .28   | .22                       | .20 |
| Happiness      | .25 <sup>a</sup> (3.17)                        | .22 | .24 <sup>a</sup> (3.17)                     | .15 | .22  | .22                       | .28   | .21                       | .20 |
| Hope           | .25 <sup>a</sup> (3.43)                        | .22 | .24 <sup>a</sup> (3.43)                     | .15 | .22  | .22                       | .29   | .22                       | .20 |
| Pride          | .25  | .21 | .24   | .15 | .22 <sup>a</sup> (2.01)                        | .21 <sup>a</sup> (2.01)   | .28   | .21 <sup>a</sup> (2.01)   | .20 |
| Love           | .25 <sup>a</sup> (6.28)                        | .21 | .23 <sup>a</sup> (6.28)                     | .15 | .22  | .22                       | .28   | .22                       | .20 |
| Satisfaction   | .25 <sup>a</sup> (2.16)                        | .22 | .24 <sup>a</sup> (2.16)                     | .15 | .22  | .22                       | .28   | .21                       | .20 |
| Sadness        | .22 <sup>a</sup> (-15.25)                      | .18 | .32 <sup>a</sup> (-15.25)                   | .21 | .19 <sup>a</sup> (-41.05)                      | .19 <sup>a</sup> (-41.05) | .25   | .36 <sup>a</sup> (-41.05) | .27 |
| Hate           | .22 <sup>a</sup> (-19.80)                      | .17 | .35 <sup>a</sup> (-19.80)                   | .22 | .18 <sup>a</sup> (-49.17)                      | .18 <sup>a</sup> (-49.17) | .24   | .38 <sup>a</sup> (-49.17) | .28 |
| Fury           | .22 <sup>a</sup> (-18.24)                      | .18 | .33 <sup>a</sup> (-18.24)                   | .22 | .18 <sup>a</sup> (-46.26)                      | .18 <sup>a</sup> (-46.26) | .25   | .37 <sup>a</sup> (-46.26) | .27 |
| Distrust       | .20 <sup>a</sup> (-25.17)                      | .16 | .33 <sup>a</sup> (-25.17)                   | .22 | .16 <sup>a</sup> (-58.69)                      | .16 <sup>a</sup> (-58.69) | .23   | .37 <sup>a</sup> (-58.69) | .28 |
| Fear           | .23 <sup>a</sup> (-14.42)                      | .18 | .33 <sup>a</sup> (-14.42)                   | .22 | .19 <sup>a</sup> (-36.12)                      | .19 <sup>a</sup> (-36.12) | .25   | .35 <sup>a</sup> (-36.12) | .27 |
| Disappointment | .23 <sup>a</sup> (-15.91)                      | .18 | .34 <sup>a</sup> (-15.91)                   | .22 | .18 <sup>a</sup> (-44.72)                      | .18 <sup>a</sup> (-44.72) | .25   | .37 <sup>a</sup> (-44.72) | .28 |
| Guilt          | .23 <sup>a</sup> (-12.57)                      | .19 | .32 <sup>a</sup> (-12.57)                   | .21 | .19 <sup>a</sup> (-38.66)                      | .19 <sup>a</sup> (-38.66) | .25   | .38 <sup>a</sup> (-38.66) | .28 |

Note: Underlining indicates statistically significant changes of a greater magnitude.

<sup>a</sup>There are statistically significant differences in emotion whether or not it is present in the discourse, analyzing citizens and elites independently.

Firstly, a tendency of communication focused on the present was common among elites and citizens. Additionally, there is a tendency for levels of polarization to increase when referring to the past. This temporal strategy involves attributing socially relevant problems to external groups, such as corruption and political violence in recent years. This pattern aligns with the emotion of blame attributed by citizens to the outgroup and is consistent with the temporal orientation observed in people living in socioeconomically vulnerable environments (Fieulaine & Apostolidis, 2015). Furthermore, citizens exhibited polarization when referring to the future negatively, which is associated with high distrust in candidates and a pessimistic outlook.

Secondly, both elites and citizens employ a particularly polarizing and relevant emotion in the context of political violence: hatred. This emotion is characterized as hostile, combining intense feelings of aversion, anger, and often, a desire to cause harm (APA, 2023). In the social context, elites used it to express grievances about crime, war, and armed groups. In contrast, citizens used it to criticize candidates from opposing groups for their links with drug trafficking, paramilitarism, and guerrilla groups. The emergence of this emotion suggests that symbolic violence in the country has not diminished, even amidst a transition to peace due to peace agreements with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia [FARC], as both elites and citizens' discourse remains hostile and delegitimizing (Rico & Barreto, 2022).

Despite this, emotions such as gratitude, hope, and love depolarize the elites' discourses. This suggests that group cohesion mitigates polarization arising from outgroup discrimination and regulates it even in hostile environments. This is because the language associated with these emotions emphasizes aspects in which citizens engage and focus on their affections, such as family, health, work, or freedom. This method of regulating polarization likely aims to reduce the intensity of the divide between the outgroup and the ingroup by shifting focus away from the differences that drive hostility, consistent with Social Identity Theory.

The ambivalence between positive emotions that depolarize and negative emotions that polarize, alongside delegitimizing beliefs, suggests that elite communication serves a dual purpose: it fosters cohesion within the ingroup while simultaneously targeting the adversary. This phenomenon is consistent with citizens' communication which depolarizes when their political identification is strengthened through feelings of pride and polarizes with negative emotions.

These tendencies concerning temporal orientation and emotions occur within an ideological shift context in Colombia, marked by the historic election of one of the first leftist candidates in a traditionally conservative country, Gustavo Petro. Petro's victory came amid continued inflation and devaluation, accompanied by promises of significant change and total peace. However, his past as a former guerrilla member was repeatedly highlighted by both his adversaries and citizens who did not share his ideology, as a strategy to delegitimize him.

In summary, linguistic analyses have revealed that, in general, elites display more intense emotional tones, greater affective polarization, and a higher frequency of delegitimizing beliefs per tweet than citizens. However, from a temporal orientation, citizens demonstrate higher polarization and more frequent use of words associated with delegitimizing beliefs. This suggests that elites significantly influence the political agenda by shaping the tone of citizens' opinions on social networks. Citizens tend to adopt communicative strategies consistent with those of the elites, although some studies suggest that this phenomenon may be prevalent only in certain sectors of society (Widmann, 2022).

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Through two studies conducted in different sociopolitical contexts, affective polarization, along with temporal orientation, intergroup emotions, and delegitimizing beliefs, has been measured. The differences in these contexts allow us to conclude that polarization could be nuanced according to the elections' dynamics and the campaigns' objectives. The data shows that when the possibility of reelection is high, as in the Andalusian case, polarization could focus on ingroup bias to ensure victory. Conversely, competition tends to increase polarization through outgroup delegitimization in contexts of ideological shift, such as the Colombian context.

Although this article does not directly compare the two samples, it demonstrates a significant increase in polarization in response to outgroup discrimination in a hostile scenario similar to that in Colombia. However, in such a conflict context, a strategy centered on the other allows positive emotions to depolarize as they foster group cohesion instead of delegitimization. This contrasts with the Spanish scenario, where positive emotions favored ingroup bias as the strategy focused on the ingroup. In the absence of direct attacks and hostile emotions such as hatred, emotions such as tranquility and hope, which are oriented towards the present and future, reinforce bias and heighten affective polarization.

The delegitimization of the outgroup observed in Colombian political communication implies greater symbolic violence. This violence entails increased affective polarization aimed at discriminating against the outgroup, wherein their actions and positions are consistently delegitimized, characterized by a constant sense of distrust. Thus, the presence of emotions such as hatred, anger, and fear indicates the persistence of a conflict ethos, hindering reconciliation (Bar-Tal et al., 2012).

The two studies' results elucidate how temporal orientation, intergroup emotions, and beliefs adjust according to social contexts and collective narratives, as political polarization does not occur in a contextual vacuum. Nevertheless, the results remain consistent and complementary, as depicted in Figure 1, which summarizes the emotions contributing to the increase or decrease of affective polarization. The dual role of emotions such as satisfaction, hope, and sadness are noteworthy. In the first two cases, these emotions decrease polarization in hostile environments and increase it in ingroup bias strategies. Conversely, sadness heightens polarization when directed towards the outgroup and diminishes it when focused on the ingroup.

The significance of the temporal orientation resides in the polarizing role of intergroup emotions within a specific timeframe, as exemplified by guilt, which primarily focuses on the past, or fear, which is directed towards the future as a strategy to foster uncertainty (Bar-Tal, 2020). Similarly, intergroup emotions also depolarize within specific time frames, such as hope for the future or pride in the present.

This enables us to delineate a potential profile of temporal orientation linked with depolarization, akin to what Zimbardo & Boyd (2009) conducted at an individual level. This profile should prioritize a past orientation centered on acknowledging harm towards the other [sadness], facilitating increased empathy and recognition of the other; fostering an inclusive rather than partisan national identification, which is grounded in the present and elicits pride and satisfaction, while also fostering an outlook [hope] rooted in socially significant aspects beyond the political agenda alone, thus avoiding discrimination and allowing for the integration of proposals from the outgroup that benefit the community [gratitude].

The implications of these findings hold significant relevance for peaceful coexistence and democracy, as polarization undermines trust in political systems and governments. Therefore,

|         | Polarizing emotions   |   | Depolarizing emotions |   |
|---------|---|---|-----------------------|---|
| Past    | <b>Hate</b><br>Guilt<br><b>Distrust</b><br><b>Disappointment</b><br><b>Sadness*</b>                 | <b>Satisfaction</b>                             | Sadness               | Gratitude**<br>Love<br>Happiness  |
| Present | <b>Hate</b><br><b>Distrust</b><br>Fury<br><b>Sadness*</b><br><b>Disappointment</b><br>Despair       | Pride<br>Passion<br><b>Satisfaction</b><br>Hope | Sadness               | Hope**<br><b>Satisfaction</b><br>Pride  |
| Future  | <b>Hate</b><br><b>Distrust</b><br>Fury<br>Fear<br>Anger<br><b>Disappointment</b><br><b>Sadness*</b> | <b>Satisfaction</b><br>Tranquility<br>Hope      |                       | Hope**<br><b>Satisfaction</b><br><b>Gratitude**</b><br>Pride<br>Love<br>Happiness |
|         | Negative  | Positive  | Negative              | Positive  |

\* Must be directed to the ingroup to polarize

\*\* It must be directed to the outgroup to depolarize

Bold implies that the emotion is repeated at all time verbs.

**FIGURE 1** Emotions that polarize and depolarize according to temporal orientation.

there is a need to develop discourses and communication strategies on social media that depolarize language and promote more inclusive identities. In doing so, reducing polarization emerges as an indicator of the transformation of conflict ethos, providing the opportunity to initiate reconciliation and symbolic peacebuilding processes.

In these studies, we examined different contexts, but it is not reasonable to assume that differences in the political contexts of each country have no impact on polarization. We hypothesized that political conflict scenarios would result in higher affective polarization scores and adversarial beliefs that delegitimize outgroup candidates, accompanied by a prevalence of hostile emotions such as hatred and fear. Conversely, in contexts devoid of political violence, positive emotions reinforcing ingroup bias are polarizing, along with negative emotions targeting the outgroup. We encourage academics to sample online speeches from conflict and non-conflict countries to identify trends in polarization.

Although the methodology employed does not allow us to conclude definitively that citizen communication is contingent upon the communication strategies of the elites, the results suggest that elites establish a political agenda and emotional climate that either fosters polarization or depolarization. Another significant limitation is ensuring the sample of tweets represents the entire population. While a census of the candidates' tweets is conducted, collecting all tweets published over an extended period is impractical. Furthermore, only social network X was utilized, without considering other platforms, which limits the generalizability of the data. Finally, it's important to note that this linguistic analysis does not account for negations, ironies, or satirical language, potentially introducing a margin of error in the measurements.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the evidence collected, it is possible to contrast the hypotheses that were originally formulated:

- H1: Positive temporal orientation directed towards the ingroup was associated with lower levels of polarization when the socio-political context was hostile, such as in the case of the Colombian armed conflict and the economic crises generating uncertainty in the country; thus, communicative strategies focused on positive emotions toward the ingroup decreased such tension.
- H2: Negative temporal orientation is associated with higher levels of affective polarization if directed towards the outgroup in both social contexts and samples, in which emotions such as distrust and hatred stand out.
- H3: The intergroup emotions, temporal orientation, and beliefs presented by the elites were significantly different than those exhibited by the citizens. In the Spanish case, the elites focused on the ingroup, while the citizens focused on the outgroup. However, in the Colombian case, they were statistically different but consistent.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data is available at <https://osf.io/xkvbj/>.

## OPEN RESEARCH BADGES

 This article has earned Open Data badges. Data are available at <https://osf.io/xkvbj/>.

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