

**CULTURE WARS, PERCEPTION GAP AND AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION:
AN APPROACH FROM THE SPANISH CASE**
BATALLAS CULTURALES, BRECHA PERCEPTIVA Y POLARIZACIÓN AFECTIVA:
UNA APROXIMACIÓN DESDE EL CASO ESPAÑOL

José Miguel Rojo Martínez¹

University of Murcia, Spain
josemiguel.rojo@um.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9491-4839>

Alberto Mora Rodríguez

University of Murcia, Spain
alberto.mora@um.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2247-6846>

Ismael Crespo Martínez

University of Murcia, Spain
icrespo@um.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2600-8839>

Cómo citar / Citation: Rojo-Martínez, J. M., Crespo-Martínez, I., & Mora-Rodríguez, A. (2023). Culture wars, perception gap and affective polarization: An approach from the Spanish case. *OBETS. Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, 18(1): 79-96.

<https://doi.org/10.14198/obets.21976>

© 2023 José Miguel Rojo Martínez, Ismael Crespo Martínez y Alberto Mora Rodríguez

Este es un artículo de acceso abierto distribuido bajo los términos de la licencia de uso y distribución Creative Commons Reconocimiento 4.0 Internacional (CC BY 4.0) <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.es>

Abstract

Previous research has shown the existence of strong relationships between affective polarization and culture wars, but it is unknown to what extent this emotional division is, in fact, a 'false polarization' generated from second-order beliefs in those identity issues that categorize and define group membership. Using data from the 'First National Survey of Political Polarization' in Spain, an operationalization of the concept of 'perception gap' is proposed and an individual measurement of it through a formula that adapts the coefficient of Average Deviation ($D_{\bar{x}}$), defined as the arithmetic mean of the absolute values of the deviations from the mean. This seeks to describe the 'perception gap' in Spain around two relevant culture wars in the discursive articulation of the ideological blocs: gender violence and national symbols. In the same way, the relationship between the partisan affiliation of the voters and the levels of perceptive gap is analyzed. In this regard, it is shown that, in those matters that are claimed as a

Resumen

Investigaciones previas han mostrado la existencia de fuertes relaciones entre polarización afectiva y batallas culturales, pero se desconoce hasta qué punto esta división emocional es, de hecho, una "falsa polarización" generada a partir de creencias de segundo orden en aquellas cuestiones identitarias que categorizan y definen al grupo. Utilizando datos de la "Primera Encuesta Nacional de Polarización Política" en España, se propone una operacionalización del concepto de "brecha perceptiva" y una medición individual del mismo a través de una fórmula que adapta el coeficiente de Desviación Media ($D_{\bar{x}}$), definida como la media aritmética de los valores absolutos de las desviaciones de la media. La fórmula pretende describir la brecha de percepción en torno a dos batallas culturales relevantes en la articulación discursiva de los bloques ideológicos: la violencia de género y los símbolos patrios. Del mismo modo, se analiza la relación entre la afiliación partidista de los votantes y los niveles de

¹ Corresponding author.

Funding. The author José Miguel Rojo Martínez has a FPU predoctoral contract from the Spanish Ministry of Universities (Ref. FPU20/01033), thanks to which he has participated in this paper.

symbolic property of an ideological bloc, the supporters of this bloc have a higher level of 'perception gap', that is, they tend to exaggerate their differences with the outgroup distorting the real positions of the adversaries. When the thematic battle redirects to a position of moral superiority of the group and becomes a key issue for intergroup differentiation, the homogeneity of the positions of its members is more accentuated and a greater perceptual deviation bias is also produced.

Keywords: Affective polarization; perception gap; culture wars; identity; social groups.

brecha perceptiva. Al respecto, se muestra que, en aquellos asuntos que se reivindican como propiedad simbólica de un bloque ideológico, los partidarios de este bloque tienen un mayor nivel de "brecha perceptiva", es decir, tienden a exagerar sus diferencias con los demás, distorsionando las posiciones reales de los adversarios. Cuando la batalla temática se redirige a una posición de superioridad moral del grupo y se convierte en un tema clave para la diferenciación intergrupala, se acentúa más la homogeneidad de las posiciones de sus miembros y se produce también un mayor sesgo de desviación perceptiva.

Palabras clave: Polarización afectiva; brecha perceptiva; batallas culturales; identidad; grupos sociales.

1. INTRODUCTION. CULTURE WARS AND INTERGROUP CONFLICT: FROM MORAL SUPERIORITY TO AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION

In recent years, the fundamental differentiation between political parties in Western democracies seems to be articulated around a series of post-materialist-based cultural and moral issues (Abou-Chadi and Wagner, 2019; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Frank, 2004) that shift the public debate towards essentially identitarian spaces, whenever the classic more positional economic contents, related to the redistributive struggle, lose relevance in the left/right competition (De Vries, Hakhverdian and Lancee, 2013). As Miller (2020) has pointed out, Spaniards 'are much more polarized concerning identity issues (ideological or territorial) than regarding specific public policies'. These cultural and identity issues seek to install an order of values that serves, in turn, as a shaper of the 'common sense' of society. The diffusion among political strategists of Gramscian thought (Bar-On, 2021), who maintained that the elementary political question is the struggle for 'cultural hegemony' (Gramsci, 1999), is directly related to this drift.

Feminism, environmental protection, respect for minorities, patriotism or the defense of traditions are just some examples of these apparently polarizing 'culture wars' (Hunter, 1991; Fiorina, Abrams and Pope, 2010) that have symbolic owners on the left and right in party systems. In this sense, these cultural topics have become dimensions of electoral competition and 'positional issues', issues that generate a division of opinions and they are not a general point of consensus,

the opposite of what occurs with 'valence issues' (Green, 2007). Progressives claim moral superiority on women's rights, environmentalism, or recognition of the LGTBIQ+ community. Conservatives feel similarly about national symbols, family, constitutional institutions, or patriotism. These 'culture wars' are, in short, disputes structured around moral codes, values, and lifestyles (Williams, 1997).

For decades, studies on issue ownership have been pointing out the existence of issues in which a certain party or candidate has a greater advantage and reputation because it is assumed to have a superior capacity to face a specific challenge (Petrocik, 1996; Petrocik, Benoit and Hansen, 2003; Hayes, 2008). In the current context, the symbolic ownership of issues does not refer exclusively to precise problems of society concerning to which there is a belief of an expected differential performance of each party based on discursive imaginaries (e.g.; 'the right will end unemployment and reactivate the economy'; 'the left will redistribute resources better and enhance public services'). Now, a struggle has been established around values that do not refer to a concrete public policy, but to an extensive emotional field that redirects to the most deeply rooted and influential moral convictions on the forms of political and social organization (Goren and Chapp, 2017). It is also possible to observe how the symbolic ownership of the issues derives in monopolization exercises, such as happens with patriotism (Bar-Tal, 1997). At this time, these issues become 'value-laden issues'.

As Johnston and Wronski (2015: 37) rightly point out, cultural issues can be defined as 'easy' or 'non-

hard issues' of low technical component and high symbolic content, so that citizens can establish secure positions on them and thus satisfy their demands for certainty. This happens even if it has not necessarily been proven that the decisive concerns for voters have consistently moved from the economic to the cultural (Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder, 2006). Returning to Johnston and Wronski (2015), it is possible the growing complexity of economic challenges and the transformation of the class system generate incentives to prioritize moral debates as preliminary filters or preludes to any economic dilemma. It can be then stated that the economy has not disappeared, but rather that the messages related to this area renew their bases building on cultural anchors.

The themes of the culture war also serve as elements of group characterization (referents that allow us to know who we are and what makes us different from others), creating homogeneous political communities that establish affective boundaries between ourselves and others. If economic policy no longer succeeds in distinguishing us, it becomes necessary to seek new spaces for the articulation of group identity. Recent studies on affective polarization have evidenced that cultural issues provoke a more salient emotional divide (Hetherington, Long and Rudolph 2016; Gidron, Adams and Horne, 2020; Hartevelde, 2021).

In particular, Hartevelde (2021: 10) showed the existence of a 'culture wars effect', according to which disagreement on migration policy (e.g., what should be done with refugees) and, especially, different positions on the role of women (e.g., traditional gender role vs. feminist perspective), provoked more antipathy than disagreement on economic issues related to the welfare system. Likewise, the possibility that the affective distance is greater between parties with opposing cultural visions than between parties with different economic models, but with similar approaches to cultural and social issues, is also discussed (ibid.: 9).

These results point to the presence of strong relationships between affective polarization and 'culture wars', understanding affective polarization as a phenomenon originated by the constitution of partisanship as a social identity (Mason, 2018), which causes discriminatory and distorted evaluative processes: viewing those who belong to your group positively and perceiving outgroup members negatively

(Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Iyengar, Lelkes, Levendusky, Malhotra and Westwood, 2019).

Discussions on the high levels of affective polarization in Western democracies have generated various research concerns about the real extent of these disagreements, being aware that affective polarization is not necessarily explained by a radicalization of our ideological or thematic positions (Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012). The possibility that this polarization is a mere sensation that makes us reject others because we see them as more distant than they actually are, leads us to wonder to what extent the partisan affiliation of an individual causes him to distort the image of people who do not share his ideas, assigning them attitudes that they do not really have. It is pertinent to specify this question for those issues, those of the 'culture wars', which, as it has been proved, provoke a higher affective distancing.

2. PERCEPTION GAPS

2.1. Perception, categorization and stereotyping: an approach from the Social Identity Theory (SIT).

Understanding the mechanisms that organize the process of social perception implies attending to the effect that social categories have on the different stimuli that subjects receive. Tajfel (1984: 93) argued that perceptual judgments were influenced by categorization in the sense that they sharpened the objective differences between the stimuli. The 'accentuation of differences' occurs more intensely in people with marked prejudices and with respect to issues that assign social value (ibid.: 93). This accentuation coincides in a certain way with the phenomenon of 'perceptual overestimation' also discussed by Tajfel (1957) and explained again from the postulates of the theory of social categorization. Likewise, stereotypes, insofar as they are 'perceptions about a person based on his or her belonging to certain groups or social categories' (Smith Castro, 2006: 47), represent an example of deviant perception and over-dimensioning of differences through an exercise of categorization. Stereotypes act, at the same time, homogenizing the perception of individuals of the same social group, according to a function for which the greater the presence of stereotypes the lesser the degree of differentiation between individuals (Tajfel, 1984: 148).

All these concepts help to understand the so-called ‘polarization of perception judgments’, which is nothing more than the explanation that supports the frequent and in the first-place appearance, when determining the attributes of other individuals, of extreme evaluations, especially when we are faced with negative judgments (Tajfel 1984: 139). If how we view others is mediated by social categories and stereotypes related to our social identity and the social identities we observe, what happens when, as more and more studies point out (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Mason, 2015; Kalin and Sambanis 2018), political identities become a form of social identity?

To this question, Mason (2018: 49-50) accurately answers: group membership not only creates a self-image, but it also fosters feelings of superiority vis-à-vis outgroups. She goes on to assert that, according to Social Identity Theory (SIT), ingroup members are driven to view the outgroup as essentially different. In short, when we belong to a social group, whether political or not, we sharpen our differences with non-ingroup people and create biases that link perception. This takes place especially when identity divisions are not cross-cutting, but rather reinforce each other (Westwood *et al.*, 2018).

2.2. What we believe others believe: second-order beliefs.

Second-order beliefs are associated with the Theory of Mind (ToM), a concept initially applied to child development psychology, since the classic study by Perner and Wimmer (1985), and which designates the ‘ability to understand and predict the behavior of other people, their knowledge, their intentions, and their beliefs’ (Tirapu-Ustárrroz, Pérez-Sayes, Erekatxo-Bilbao and Pelegrín-Valero, 2007: 479).

The application of second-order belief theory to the political field is still scarce. Brady and Sniderman (1985) dealt early on with ‘attitude attributions’, stating that research was not extensively assessing the impact that beliefs about others could have on our views and, beyond that, even on our behavior. These researchers did not yet address deviant perception gaps. They were simply interested in how through an ‘affective calculus’ citizens perceived other groups and their issue positioning. Analyzing the estimates made about what others think would, according to the study,

remarkably change our understanding of mass belief systems (*ibid.*: 1061). These reflections opened the way to new scientific literature that left behind an excessive interest in the individual expression of preferences and also began to concern itself with the perception of the preferences, opinions, or values of others as a determining component of its own.

Another of the referential works on second-order beliefs in politics is that of Chambers, Baron and Inman (2006), in which inaccurate perceptions about the attitudes of the outgroup were concentrated on those issues central to one’s position, issues that were differential and, so to speak, the patrimony of a given political group. When issues were classified as conservative rather than liberal, a greater deviant perception of disagreement was generated in Republicans than in Democrats. The reverse was true for respondents identified as Democrats. The paradox is that people ‘disagreed about what they disagreed about’ because, although in practice they were more similar in their views than expected, they confused the scale of values of the adversaries, attributing to their own concerns an unreal priority place in the minds of the adversaries (*ibid.*: 43).

For Chambers *et al.* (2006: 43), misperceptions can increase feelings of hostility towards outgroups and favor intergroup conflict. Thus, the Perception Gap (P_G) is defined as the difference between the position we assign to the supporters of different political options and the position they claim to have. The perception gap is positioned as an explanatory element of affective polarization, by promoting a false impression of polarization that, by maximizing the differences between subjects, reinforces our identity. However, this hypothesis still needs more evidence in its favor, especially in the sense of verifying significantly different levels of P_G in each partisan group. Yet, the perception of polarization, understood itself as a component of polarization, is not homogeneously distributed among the population. It seems to occur more intensely, at least in the North American context, in those people who are more politically active and who have a strong partisan identification and more extreme attitudes, as long as they categorize the thoughts of the rest as outgroup thoughts (Westfall *et al.*, 2015).

Recently, new work has taken up Brady and Sniderman (1985) and Chambers *et al.* (2006) endeavor,

to unravel what individuals believe that others believe. One of the most prominent works is Mildenerger and Tingley (2017) who focused on positions on climate change as a problematic reality among masses and elites in the United States and China. These researchers were convinced that inferences about other people's mental states had their origin in an imputation process of other people's beliefs from one's own, determining the final attributions made the degree of difference perceived between subjects (ibid.: 1282). In this sense, the study identified second-order beliefs dominated by egocentric biases, prejudices, and deviant estimates of certain types of positioning. Americans were found to underestimate the percentage of their country's population that believed in climate change and its unnatural causes (ibid.: 1289-1293). The underestimation of popular support for scientific theories of climate change and climate-friendly policies is a good example of second-order belief based on false perception.

Then, why do we have false perceptions about the political attitudes of others? Firstly, because in politics we relate according to the dynamics of group identity. Secondly, because the problem of biased political perceptions, as defined by Graham, Nosek and Haidt (2012: 12), is a matter of 'moral stereotyping' in the context of a 'culture war' that causes a propensity to exaggerate the distance separating each person from the moral ends of opposing partisans. In the data collected by Graham *et al.* (2012), it was observed that all participants, regardless of their ascription, exaggerated, for example, liberal detachment to authority values and conservative detachment to justice values (ibid.: 12). As Levendusky and Malhotra (2016) point out after evidencing that Americans felt more alienated than they actually were², two hypotheses about exaggerated moral differences can be posited. The first is that the media may favor exposure to partisan stereotypes that may later become cognitive shortcuts ('availability heuristics'), to elaborate verdicts on the other groups. The second hypothesis is that of the 'projection effect', that is, the predisposition to distance people from the outgroup (ibid.: 388), with the implicit aim of reinforcing our own group identity.

² Levendusky and Malhotra (2016: 384) showed that, although people also view those who think like them (their co-supporters) in a deviant way (higher perceived radicalism), the deviance was much more pronounced with respect to opponents.

New findings on second-order beliefs in politics can be found in Ahler and Sood (2018), authors who verified how US citizens overrepresented the presence of partisan stereotypes in the set of each of the political groups. In the data provided, the perceived percentage of atheist, LGBTI, or union-affiliated Democrats was much higher than the actual percentage. Respondents were convinced that 31.7% of Democrats were gay, lesbian, or bisexual, while only 6.3% were. It was also argued that the number of evangelical or high-income Republicans was much higher than the exact composition of the party's voters indicated. It went so far as to estimate that 38.2% of Republicans earned more than \$250,000, but only 2.2% did (ibid.: 966). In short, the general idea emerges that the stereotyped party groups are much more dominant in each type of electorate as a whole than the data suggest. The symbolic representation of the parties is reduced to operational stereotypes. This implies that the partisan collectives appear before us summarized according to easily distinguishable elements that are in accordance with the most exceptional attributes of some of their members, but that are elevated to generalities to sustain mental structures of simplification.

The extension of partisan as a general group attribute is consistent with previous findings by Linville, Salovey and Fischer (1985) on the 'outgroup homogeneity hypothesis' and which we also saw in Tajfel (1984). According to this hypothesis, the characteristics of the outgroup members are seen as more homogeneous while, however, concerning one's group, with which one is familiar, one is more able to attend to individual differences (ibid.: 166). Stereotypes that arise within the framework of intergroup relations should be measured by paying attention to statistical properties that report on the central tendency or variability of the perceived distribution and thereby allow for insight into possible processes of exaggerated generalization and uniform view (ibid.: 187). We can understand that to determine the perception of an outgroup that we do not know to some extent we resort to stereotypical elements that maximize differentiation. Once these extreme elements are used as points of reference, our mind thinks that this group is more homogeneous than it possibly is.

Along the lines of Ahler and Sood (2018), *The Perception Gap* report by Yudkin, Hawkins and Dixon (2019) for *More in Common*, conducted as part of the

Hidden Tribes project, worked to find out, not only ‘the extent to which Republicans and Democrats *think* they disagree with the amount they *actually* disagree’, but also how this ‘perception gap’ related to aspects such as media consumption or educational attainment (ibid.: 6). Democrats underestimated the percentage of Republicans who thought that controlled immigration could be good for the country (they saw Republicans in general intransigent positions on immigration). In turn, Democrats claimed that only 51% of Republicans believed that racism was still a problem in the country, while 79% actually supported this idea. Republicans imagined that a majority of Democrats thought police were bad, while more than 85% disagreed with this view, (Yudkin *et al.*, 2019).

The relationship of these perceptual gaps with media consumption and educational level revealed some interesting patterns: consuming information through strongly partisan, left and right-wing media such as *Fox News*, *Buzzfeed*, *Daily Kos* or *Breitbart* increased the perception gap. The consumption of other types of media, such as ABC, CBS, or NBC was related to a reduction in the perception gap. Simultaneously, those who did not regularly consume any media turned out to be the most accurate people (Yudkin *et al.* 2019: 28). Regarding the impact of educational level, correlations indicated that the more educational background Democrats had, the more they misperceived Republicans, but in the case of Republicans, no significant relationships were observed between these variables (ibid.: 37).

Beyond this evidence, Ahler (2014) argued years earlier that the media insistently disseminated the narrative of mass political polarization, selling a growing division of the population that did not match the available evidence on the true positions of the electorate. Ahler did not focus in this 2014 study on the perception that groups had of each other, but rather on the perception that citizens had of those others who belonged to their same political group and related this phenomenon to that of ‘pluralistic ignorance’, a tendency to hold that everyone believes something that no one actually believes (ibid.: 608). The findings of his research indicated that the participants saw their fellow members as more polarized than they really were (ibid.: 617) and this could be expected to affect their political attitudes and opinions (ibid.: 618). Ahler argued that

second-order beliefs do not only operate in relation to the outgroup, but also in the internal comparison between individuals of the same collectivity, where erroneous perceptions are produced.

In Spain, a first attempt to conceptualize the perception gap and propose its measurement was made by Crespo, Rojo and Mora (2021), who developed a possible connection between the perception gap (exaggeration of the level of disagreement) and affective polarization. Viciano, Hannikainen and Gaitán Torres (2019) also provided evidence on partisan prejudice dynamics related to group identity in Spain.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Does sympathy or closeness to a party make you have more perception gap (P_G) with respect to the topic that is symbolic property in cultural terms of your ideological/partisan bloc? This is the research question that this paper seeks to answer. It is considered that those issues assumed as belonging to a party or ideological bloc become identity delimiters of that political space, so it would be expected, according to the Social Identity Theory, that citizens close to the party that owns the issue in question develop deviant perceptions in their evaluation of the position of citizens of other external party groups on that same issue. In relation to this question, two research objectives are formulated: RO1. To describe the perception gap in Spain around two relevant culture wars in the discursive articulation of the different blocs: gender violence and national symbols. RO2. To analyze the relationship between the partisan affiliation of voters and the levels of the perception gap.

$$P_G = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N |X_{IP} - \bar{X}_{IP}|}{N}$$

The data analyzed below come from the first National Survey of Political Polarization, prepared by the CEMOP Special Research Group of the University of Murcia and whose fieldwork was carried out between March 18 and April 7, 2021. The universe of the study corresponds to the Spanish population of both sexes aged 18 years and over, with a sample size of 1,236 interviews. The error for the whole sample, assuming simple random sampling, is $\pm 2.8\%$, for a confidence level of 95.5% (two sigmas) and $P = Q$.

The study introduces the measurement of the perception gap through an adaptation of the still scarce measurement attempts detected in the North American literature. With this intent, the study questionnaire asks respondents about different issues of national political confrontation, first asking them to indicate their position on a 0-10 scale regarding these issues³, and then asking them to place the voters of the different parties on a scale of 0-10.

For the calculation of the perception gap (P_G) in each of the two subjects under study, the average Deviation coefficient (D) is used as an indicator, which is defined as the arithmetic mean of the absolute values of the deviations from the mean. Consequently, an individual and not an aggregate measurement of the phenomenon is proposed, understanding the subjective implications present in the analyzed concept.

Considering the components of the proposed formula: X_{IP} is the value that the individual gives to the voters of a given political party with respect to the analyzed issue (perception of the groups); \bar{X}_{IP} is the average value that each political party electorate has with respect to that issue (understood as the voters of a party based on the direct voting intention plus sympathy variable); and, finally, N refers to the number of political parties under study, in our case four (PSOE, PP, VOX, and *Unidas Podemos* -UP-), which are currently the most systemically and electorally relevant national parties⁴.

The maximum P_G value is 10, for which the distances between the value assigned by the individual to the voters of a party and the averages obtained by the respective electorates must be maximum. In the case of a perfect match between the individual's assignment and the averages obtained by the different electorates, P_G value is

3 Regarding the issue "Gender violence", 0 means "Gender violence is a very serious problem and the State should increase all its resources to fight it" and 10 means "Gender violence does not exist and the State should worry about other more important issues". In relation to the issue "National symbols", 0 means "I am ashamed of the flag and the national anthem" and 10 means "I feel deep pride in the flag and the national anthem". The first issue has a more valence condition, while the second is clearly positional in the Spanish context.

4 *Ciudadanos* party has not been included because at the time the survey was conducted, in addition to the systemic relevance that this party had lost since the General Elections of November 2019, it had notably decreased its electoral relevance. The latter generated an insufficient number of cases showing their voting intention or sympathy towards this formation.

zero. This calculation is made regardless of the party for which the individual feels greater sympathy or support, and as long as the person is able to give a score to all the political parties present in the study. Once the P_G has been estimated for each of the two topics analyzed in this study, and in order to respond to OE1 above, we describe how this indicator behaves in aggregate terms and in relation to a series of sociodemographic variables of interest, such as sex, age, religiosity, level of education and occupation. Likewise, in relation to RO2 of this research, the statistical relationship between the P_G indicator and the partisan affiliation of voters is contrasted using Student's t-test for independent samples. The partisan affiliation of the voters is defined from the variable direct voting intention in a hypothetical general election plus sympathy (in the case that the respondent does not indicate any political party in the direct voting intention question).

Finally, this methodological section must consider the social desirability biases that can intervene in the expression of the opinion in a survey. Although we assume that the opinion given is the real one, in valence and morally charged issues such as gender violence, it is possible that processes of accommodation to the majority opinion intervene (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Being a participant in a survey can be considered a social situation of a discursive nature in which, as Martín Criado (1998: 67) points out, symbolic imperatives that link the response action may be present.

4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a) *How do we identify ourselves and how homogeneous are we?*

The positions of the parties' electorates show a moderate real polarization with respect to the issue of gender violence, although with notable differences between the ideological extremes. All the electorates are far from denialism and, in general, seem to consider gender violence as a major public problem that deserves more attention from the State. However, a greater number of individuals with positions deviating from the general consensus are observed in the right-wing bloc, especially among those who support VOX, resulting in closer to skeptical views on the political importance of gender violence. As for the issue called 'national symbols', which includes the level of attachment to the flag and the national anthem, the real polarization

is much greater and it is possible to conclude that there are accentuated differences of position between, especially, the voters of UP (4.8), on the one hand, and those of PP (9.0) and VOX (9.1), on the other. It could be affirmed, at least with these data, that the division in Spanish society is much more accentuated with respect to national identity and patriotism than with respect to the treatment and perception of gender violence.

Once these introductory data, which describes how each group is self-positioned in two key culture wars, has been presented, we must then consider the degree of intra-group homogeneity in each of the issues as an indicator of its importance in the group's self-perception. It is supposed that in those issues symbolically owned by an ideological bloc voters will differ less in their personal views because, the opinion on this issue is precisely a common denominator that determines group membership.

Table 1. Parties' voter positions on the issues on a scale of 0 to 10.

\bar{x}	Gender violence			National symbols		
	SD	N	\bar{x}	SD	SD	N
PP	2.10	2.56	211	9.00	1.71	214
PSOE	0.90	1.85	310	7.20	2.48	309
VOX	3.40	3.10	134	9.10	1.91	137
UP	0.60	1.34	147	4.80	2.69	145

Source: Own elaboration based on CEMOP's National Survey of Political Polarization (June 2021).

Table 1 shows that the standard deviation of the data is lower in each of the electorates in that issue that is assumed as a symbolic culture war of the ideological group in which these electorates participate. The homogeneity in ideological self-positions is greater, that is, the electorates hold more similar and less dispersed positions, when the issue is a relevant content for the substantive definition of the group, in line with Tajfel's theorizing (1984: 93) on the 'accentuation of differences' in issues that assign social value.

When the issue is specific to the outside bloc, the standard separation of the data increases, and the existence of greater diversity of opinions within each

group shows this issue is not relevant in defining collective ideological identity. The fact that the supporters of PSOE and UP are more homogeneous than those of PP and VOX when positioning themselves on gender violence, and that the opposite happens with the issue of national symbols, would prove that group identity is indeed articulated around these types of issues; those in which the members of the group are very similar and the non-members differ from each other.

b) How do we see our own group and others?

In the previous section, we dealt with what the different electorates really thought (or say think). We address now the perceptions and beliefs held about groups, both about the ingroup (how I see my own) and the outgroups (how I see others).

As seen in Table 2, all voters see VOX supporters as more radical in their positions on gender-based violence than they actually are, somewhat similar to what happened with Republicans and immigration in the Yudkin *et al.* (2019) study. They are perceived closer to denialism and less sensitive to this problem and this happens even in the average of how VOX voters themselves see their co-supporters, connecting this fact with what was exposed by Ahler (2014) and by Levendusky and Malhotra (2016). The lowest perceptual distortion with respect to VOX voters occurs among PP voters and, logically, among voters of VOX itself, while the most accentuated differences are found among voters of UP. The further away a group is from my group, the more polarized the perception judgments become (to use Tajfel's terms), and the more common is the appearance of an erroneous view of their thoughts, thereby intensifying a sense of false polarization. Accordingly, the strict exogenous group of each party is not each of the other parties in the system, but those parties aligned in an opposing ideological bloc with which it is possible to establish a relevant contrast. In this respect, it is found that the greater the ideological distance between the voters of two parties, the greater the detected P_G .

Table 2. Position in which the voters of each party place the voters of other parties as a whole with respect to gender violence on a 0-10 scale.

\bar{x}		VOX			PP			PSOE			UP		
		SD	N	\bar{x}	SD	N	\bar{x}	SD	N	\bar{x}	SD	N	\bar{x}
Vote + sympathy	PP	5.37	2.95	194	4.1	2.54	197	2.91	2.34	195	1.88	2.58	192
	PSOE	7.59	3.14	300	5.02	2.91	303	1.99	2.06	304	1.63	2.21	302
	VOX	4.97	3.32	126	3.87	2.61	126	2.65	2.6	124	1.89	3.01	125
	UP	8.83	2.37	146	6.75	2.4	146	2.59	1.96	145	0.99	1.57	146

Source: Own elaboration based on CEMOP's National Survey of Political Polarization (June 2021).

Also in the case of the PP, its voters are unanimously perceived to be closer to gender violence denialism than they actually are. Let us recall that the actual average position of PP supporters (Table 1) was 2.1 (highly inclined to value gender violence as a public priority), but those of UP perceive them at 6.75 and those identified as socialists do so at 5.02. Again, the lowest second-order reality/beliefs perceptual deviation is found among ideologically related groups. P_G is consistently lower in in-group members ('how PP people think PP people are') and in the immediately related partisan group ('how VOX people think PP people are'). It is thus confirmed both Levendusky and Malhotra's (2016) findings and the fact that PG is a demonstration of an underlying identity conflict promoting feelings of moral superiority (Mason, 2018).

The voters of UP are quite accurate in estimating the beliefs of their group, and, to a lesser extent, something similar happens with respect to themselves with those of the PSOE. Together with a high estimation precision, we observe that PSOE and UP -voters see those of their own ideological space more homogeneously (lower SD) with respect to this issue than the homogeneity presented with respect to the positions of 'outsider voters'. This contradicts the postulates of the 'out-group homogeneity hypothesis' advocated by

Linville *et al.* (1986), according to which we would see outsiders homogeneously, but would be able to appreciate the heterogeneity and individual differences within the group itself. Our results indicate that we reduce false perceptions when dealing with groups close to us or the group we are part of (we increase them otherwise) and, moreover, we agree more internally on how we see people the closer they are to us.

If with gender violence the perception gap was especially accentuated by left-wing voters with respect to right-wing voters, in the field of national symbols, a culture war where the right claims to be morally superior, those who have a greater prejudice in the estimates are the voters of PSOE and UP.

Table 3 shows how those who feel sympathy or have voted for the PP place those close to UP at 1.83, while we know that these voters are placed at 4.8, not clearly ashamed of the national anthem and flag. The gap becomes even more notable in the case of VOX voters, who place those of UP 3.55 points below their true positioning (1.25 vs. 4.8). Also, PP and VOX supporters strongly distort the reality of what PSOE voters believe about national symbols: they place PSOE voters at 4.91 and 3.82, respectively, compared to the 7.2 at which these voters are positioned.

Table 3. Position in which the voters of each party place the voters of other parties with respect to the national symbols, on a 0-10 scale.

\bar{x}		VOX			PP			PSOE			UP		
		\bar{x}	SD	N	\bar{x}	SD	N	\bar{x}	SD	N	\bar{x}	SD	N
Vote + sympathy	PP	8.99	1.89	196	8.3	1.61	199	4.91	2.41	198	1.83	2.39	196
	PSOE	9.12	2.17	297	8.4	2.09	297	6.48	2.19	298	3.92	2.65	297
	VOX	9.39	1.47	130	7.45	2.12	129	3.82	2.77	129	1.25	2.27	129
	UP	9.59	1.58	145	8.92	1.29	144	6.49	2	144	4.17	2.41	144

Source: own elaboration based on CEMOP's National Survey of Political Polarization (June 2021).

The lowest standard deviations of the means of perception of national symbols occur when estimating the position of VOX and PP voters. In general, all electorates tend to see PP and VOX voters as homogeneous in terms of national symbols. This is evidence, not only of the strong capacity of identity categorization of the subject for the right-wing parties, but, again, that the homogeneous vision of what others think is not always given in relation to the outgroup.

Taken together, the results indicate that in those issues that are decisive for the substantive differentiation of each group, it is easier to produce mistaken 'attitude attributions' (Brady and Sniderman, 1985), higher P_G , by means of which we think that others are much further away from us than they are in fact. Second-order beliefs lead us to see ourselves, in what is crucial for us to know who we are, as remarkably similar. Perceptual homogeneity points to the formation of increasingly closed and less plural social groups.

c) Perception gap, culture wars and intergroup dynamics

The interest aroused by the phenomenon of the perception gap (P_G) has to do with the possibility that, behind the affective polarization, there is a complex system of false beliefs that leads us, first, to attribute extreme positions to others and, second, as a consequence of this stereotyped attribution, to characterize them as detestable subjects. However, the aim is not only to demonstrate the existence of perception distortions but also to delve deeper into the reasons that encourage them, concluding whether partisan groups or ideological groups have a greater gap in those issues in which symbolic owners are claimed. This would allow us a higher quality analysis of the reasons that explain certain processes of identity reinforcement and group belonging, contributing to the debate on false polarization.

The existence of 'false polarization' (Van Boven, Judd and Sherman, 2012; Kenyon, 2014; Lees and Cikara, 2021) appears grounded in dominance of categorical social thinking and extreme simplification (Fernbach and Van Boven, 2022). For Blatz and Mercier (2018), this false perception of extremism is accompanied by a deviant belief of individuals that makes them see themselves and their group as subjects with an accurate and objective opinion on political issues (this causes a

high degree of security in positions). On the contrary, they cast doubt on the certainty, and ultimately the validity, of all other opinions. This naïve realism, the authors argue, leads one to believe that one's judgments are impartial and valid, forcing one to evaluate the positions of others as wrong and prejudiced (ibid.: 2).

Table 4. Aggregate perception gap (P_G).

	Gender Violence		National symbols	
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD
Total	2.86	1.21	1.96	1.01

Source: Own elaboration based on the CEMOP National Survey of Political Polarization (June 2021). Note: P_G has been estimated on the totality of voters (being vote + sympathy) for any of the four parties under analysis (UP, PSOE, PP, and VOX). N=808 cases.

In our study, as reflected in Table 4, there is a higher aggregate P_G on gender violence than on national symbols. The first of the culture wars provokes more intense attribution errors, and leaves a greater presence of intergroup stereotypes, despite the fact it is an issue in which the real positions of the voters are closer than the real positions on national symbols. The false polarization argued by Lees and Cikara (2021), is particularly intense in the context of gender violence debates, to such an extent that we could argue, building on Blatz and Mercier (2018), of a false perception of extremism in the left-wing electorate about Spanish right-wing voters.

We should not forget, however, that the aggregate results do not show the specific perceptual differences between pairs of groups already analyzed above (Tables 2 and 3). The consequence of the above is clear; if the different possibilities of inter-group evaluation in a subject show mostly low deviations, the result will be low (tending to 0), even if there is a significant dispersion between two groups in particular. This is the case of the P_G VOX-UP on national symbols, really intense, despite the fact the aggregate of the indicator on this topic yields more discrete data compared to those derived from the question on gender violence. With the aggregate P_G we seek to know, beyond the particular tensions between groups, how the whole of the electorate behaves in terms of the sum of their deviant perceptions.

Showing aggregated perceptual gap data only allows us to compare the extent of the phenomenon in the two selected wars. Exploring the results further,

Table 5 provides an estimate of the aggregate average of the perceptual gap indicator according to a series of sociodemographic variables of interest, such as gender, age, religiosity, educational level, and occupation.

Heterogeneous results in the P_G depending on the constituent categories of these sociodemographic variables should be analyzed assuming the impact that researchers have given to these same variables in the explanation of electoral behavior. If previous studies

have shown significant differences in voting behavior according to certain variables such as sex or religiosity, it is to be expected that an analysis of the perception gap from these same variables would reflect consistent results (sociodemographic differences in voting for a group should also explain sociodemographic differences of greater P_G in the issue of that bloc), taking into account the presumed influence of partisan affiliation.

Table 5. The perception gap (P_G) by population segments.

\bar{x}		Gender Violence			National Symbols		
		\bar{x}	SD	Test	\bar{x}	SD	Test
Sex	Male	2.83	1.29	n.s	2.01	1.10	n.s
	Female	2.89	1.14		1.92	0.91	
Age	18-30	2.73	1.17	n.s	1.75	1.05	<0,01
	31-44	2.85	1.24		1.82	1.09	
	45-64	2.89	1.25		2.01	1.01	
	65 and over	2.91	1.17		2.14	.87	
Religiosity	Practicing Catholic	2.84	1.13	<0,01	2.30	.90	<0,01
	Non-practicing Catholic	2.67	1.28		2.09	1.07	
	Agnostic (do not deny the existence of God but do not rule it out)	3.13	1.12		1.68	1.07	
	Indifferent, non-believer	2.95	1.02		1.71	.68	
	Atheist (denies the existence of God)	3.18	1.10		1.55	.89	
Studies	Uneducated, but can read and write.	2.74	.79	n.s	2.73	.45	<0,01
	Primary school.	2.94	1.28		2.30	1.02	
	Secondary school.	3.02	1.41		2.35	1.20	
	Professional training.	2.79	1.26		1.91	1.04	
	High School.	2.84	1.21		2.06	1.02	
	University studies.	2.94	1.16		1.85	.94	
	Postgraduate studies.	2.59	1.14		1.62	.87	
Occupation	Working	2.79	1.26	n.s	1.89	1.08	<0,05
	Retired or pensioner (previously worked).	2.98	1.14		2.17	.94	
	Pensioner (has not worked before, housewives and similar).	3.40	1.42		1.94	.68	
	Unemployed and has worked before.	2.87	1.11		2.00	.96	
	Unemployed and looking for the first job.	2.64	.91		1.82	1.36	
	Affected by an ERTE.	2.80	.94		1.75	.83	
	Student.	2.90	1.07		1.48	.88	
	Unpaid domestic work	3.05	1.36		2.08	.69	

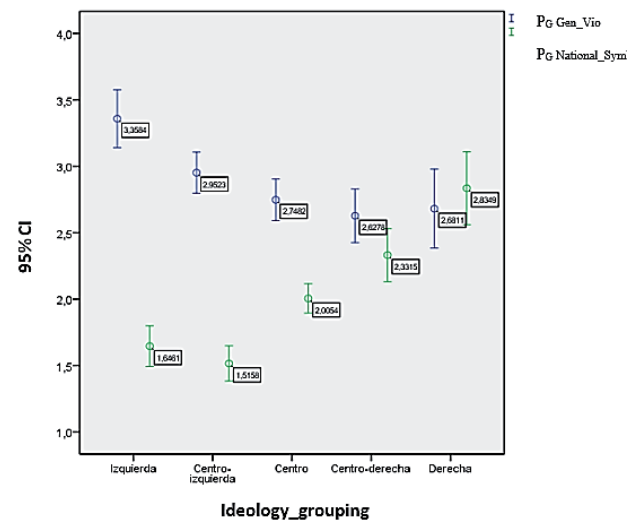
Source: own elaboration based on the CEMOP National Survey of Political Polarization (June 2021). Note: The PG has been estimated, exclusively, on the totality of voters with vote + sympathy for any of the four parties under analysis (UP, PSOE, PP, and VOX). N=808 cases. Bivariate analysis: Significance level $p < .01$; $p < .05$; not significant T test for dichotomous variables and ANOVA for multichotomous.

From the analysis carried out, no relevant differences by sex were observed, although the perception gap is slightly higher among women with respect to gender violence (2.89 vs. 2.83) and slightly higher among men with respect to national symbols (1.10 vs. 0.91), a symbolic issue for VOX, a party with a highly masculinized electorate (Aladro Vico and Requeijo Rey, 2020). The age variable reports a linear behavior in the perception gap indicator: the older the age in both subjects, the greater the perception gap. The fact that older people have a more incorrect perception of others may be related to recent studies that detect how affective polarization in Spain, measured through the formula proposed by Marcus Wagner, grows as the age of the interviewees increases (Mayordomo Zapata, 2021).

Likewise, in the case of religious subgroups, it is observed that atheists and agnostics have, in comparison with Catholics and indifferent people, a greater perception gap in the culture war led by the left (gender violence). Catholics, in comparison with atheists, indifferent and agnostics, express a greater perception gap in the culture war championed by the right (national symbols). These results are consistent with the traditional religious composition of the electorate of the main political parties in the country and the available scientific evidence on the influence of religious beliefs on Spanish electoral behavior (Montero, Calvo and Martínez, 2008). Finally, the absence of a linear relationship between the level of education of the interviewee and the perception gap is striking, assuming an initial conception that would assign to a higher level of education a lower propensity to prejudicial evaluation and to the consideration of simplified and deformed images of reality. People with university studies have an average gap equal to participants with primary studies on gender-based violence. It is also found a remarkable pattern indicating a larger perception gap in highly educated groups (university students in general) with respect to gender violence than with respect to national symbols, resembling that found in relation to Democratic university students in the study by Yudkin *et al.* (2019).

Having reviewed certain basic sociodemographic variables, it is also important to know whether the perception gap behaves differently depending on the ideological spaces in which the participants place themselves (left, center-left, center, center-right, and right).

Figure 1. Perception gap (P_G) as a function of ideological spaces.



Source: Own elaboration based on the CEMOP National Survey of Political Polarization (June 2021). Note: the P_G has been estimated, exclusively, on the totality of voters with 'vote+sympathy' for any of the four parties under analysis (UP, PSOE, PP, and VOX). N=808 cases.

For those on the left, the P_G is notably higher on gender violence (3.3584) than on national symbols (1.6462), evidence of the significance that this culture war has within the left. The P_G is equally higher in gender violence than in national symbols among center-left, center, and center-right citizens, but as we move to the right, the intensity of the differences is lower. In contrast, among right-wing citizens, the perception gap is slightly larger on national symbols (2.8349) than on gender violence (2.6811).

These data indicate, first, that false perceptions are most intensely, transversally, and repeatedly provoked when it comes to thinking about how others position themselves in terms of gender violence and, second, that this happens mainly on the left and center-left, ideological spaces that claim for themselves the symbolic ownership of feminist public debates. On the other hand, national symbols are less prone to deviant perception, except on the right, which, by using them as a prominent discursive and constituent substratum, observes the others much further away than they are in order, at the same time, to be able to differentiate and reinforce itself from this discrepancy.

To conclude, and having presented all the data sets related to OE1 (*describing the perception gap in Spain around two key culture wars*), it is time to answer OE2

and analyze what role partisan affiliation plays in the levels of the perception gap.

The variable ‘vote+sympathy’ has been kept as an indicator of party affiliation and the comparative analyses have been carried out based on partisan groups that unite, respectively, the parties of the left-wing government coalition and the main right-wing opposition parties. The treatment of intergroup dynamics as essentially ideologically based partisan groups dynamics is related to recent patterns of interaction in Spanish politics, originating from the 2018 censure motion (Orriols 2021). Multipartisanship in Spain functions, in essence, as a bibloquism that exacerbates polarization and hinders inter-block cooperation practices.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the perception gap (P_G) by partisan blocs.

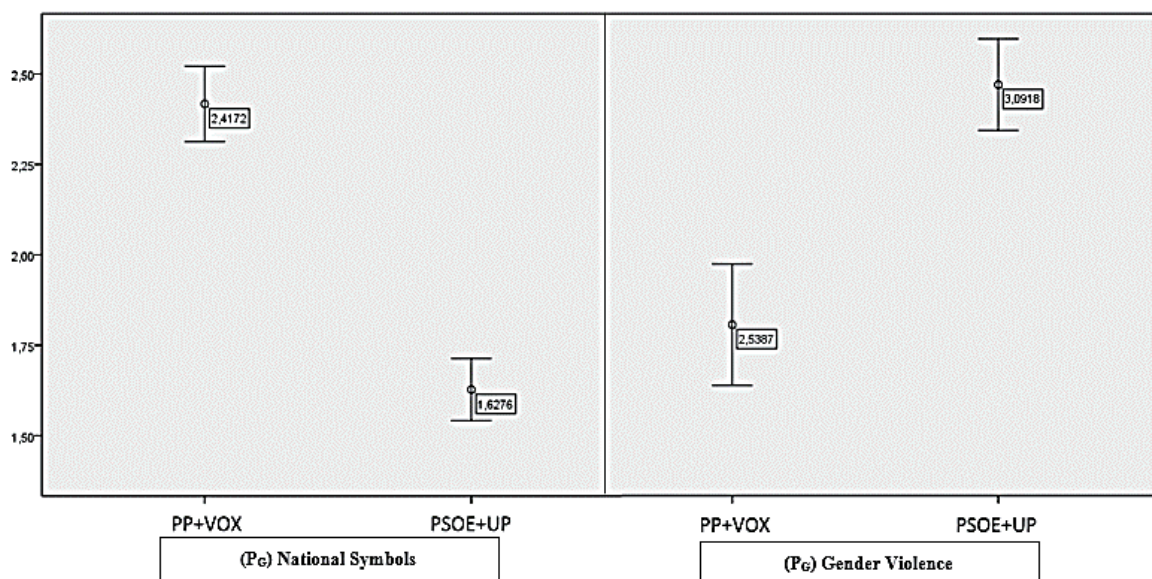
	Party blocs	N	\bar{x}	SD	Standard error of the mean
Gender violence	PP+VOX	311	2.5387	1.25376	0.07109
	PSOE+UP	444	3.0918	1.13208	0.05373
National symbols	PP+VOX	323	2.4172	0.95104	0.05292
	PSOE+UP	437	1.6276	0.91582	0.04381

Source: Own elaboration based on CEMOP’s National Survey of Political Polarization (June 2021).

The behavior of the P_G by party blocs is as expected: the highest gap for gender violence (culture war of the left) is in the bloc formed by PSOE and UP, while the opposite is true for national symbols (culture war of the right). Can we conclude, then, that partisan affiliation is significantly related to a propensity for deviant perceptions of cultural issues assumed as one’s own?

The analysis of the results of the t-test for independent samples shows the existence of statistically significant differences ($p < 0.01$) between the gap presented by the voters of the PSOE+UP bloc and the bloc formed by the voters of PP + VOX in gender violence ($t = -6.320$; $df = 753$; $sig. = 0.000$; mean difference: -0.55313) and also in national symbols ($t = 11.559$; $df = 758$; $sig. = 0.000$; mean difference: 0.78960). The partisan affiliation is related to a greater perception gap on culture wars that determine the current political competition; when the war is articulated on an issue owned by the partisan group, the gap is greater.

Figure 2. Representation of perception gap (P_G) by partisan groups.



Source: Own elaboration based on CEMOP’s National Survey of Political Polarization (June 2021). Note: 95% confidence interval for the mean.

The previous findings highlight the formation of ideological groups, currently coinciding with the government/opposition axis, as social groups of belonging in the field of political identities, without forgetting that these groups are constituted from partisan affiliation. Group identity as a reference identity explains the intergroup biases revealed, which are common among the members of the parties of a bloc and which do not occur, strictly speaking, with respect to any party other than one's own, but essentially with respect to those parties of the opposing bloc, constituted as an outgroup. To verify the existence of a differential perception gap between blocs-groups is a relevant way to explore which are the social groups of political origin that link in the Spanish case our way of understanding and classifying the socio-political reality.

Similarly, we can highlight the strength of ideological identity as a collective meaning as opposed to partisan identities, an ideological identity crystallized in a series of culture wars that come to intensify the sense of community. The need to establish horizons of reference (distinction) between these social groups of *bibloquism* leads to misperceive others, to distance them from us, in order, by increasing the contrast, to further cohere the group's inner existence and reinforce the security of what we are.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Research on the perception gap refers directly to the concept of false polarization, an alternative view of affective polarization that focuses on the erroneous and stereotyped feelings that citizens have about those who do not think like them. It is thus based on a process of accentuation of differences that seeks to emphasize group identity in matters of outstanding symbolic value, such as, in this case, culture wars. If we feel that others are far removed from our own positions, even if this judgment is unrealistic, it is easy for us to tend to affectively reject those we have placed at the opposite extreme. Future research will have to delve into the direction of the relationship between perception gap and affective polarization, that is, it is necessary to be able to determine if the greater presence of false perceptions in an individual increases its level of affective polarization.

A rhetoric focused on demonstrating that we are not as far apart as we think would contribute to a personal and affective rapprochement, overcoming the impression that those who do not belong to my group think, as far as my morals and way of life are concerned, radically different.

Throughout this exploratory research, the authors have proposed a first approach to the study of second-order political beliefs in Spain as biased perceptions. To this end, the concept of the perception gap has been operationalized, and its measurement at the individual level proposed around two issues of strategic moral-cultural substrate for the Spanish partisan competition (gender and national identity). It has been shown that the actual levels of polarization on both issues are clearly lower than the perceived polarization, especially in gender violence, where the social consensus is transversal.

Indeed, results show we are not so far apart nor are we so different, although cultural issues, which had already been related in previous studies to intense levels of affective polarization, are evidenced as the exclusive property of each group. When the war is redirected to the moral superiority of the group, the homogeneity of the positions of its members is more accentuated and a greater bias of perceptual deviation is also produced. The assumption of certain conflicts as moral markers requires a displacement of the outgroup as far outward as possible, in order to reinforce the position of superiority. Metaperceptions favor dehumanization of the opponent, personal hostility, and social distancing (Moore-Berg *et al.*, 2020).

This study has found that the perception gap is significantly different and greater for those individuals who participate in an ideological group that claims ownership of the issue. Future research should delve deeper into other explanatory factors for these biases, beyond partisan affiliation and ideological identity. The role of the media, the discourse of the elites, or the dynamics of the permanent campaign are interesting aspects to explore the understanding of identity stereotypes and the definition of the processes of group belonging based on the culture wars that so intensely divide us. Considering Zaller's theories, it would be important to determine how political elites impose stereotypes that are also transmitted through the mass media, a model of public opinion guided by

the elite discourses and intergroup feelings (Zaller, 1992). Finally, it is necessary to broaden the catalog of culture wars by incorporating prominent debates such as environmentalism, multiculturalism, other aspects of feminism, religion or sexuality.

Underestimating our degree of moral agreement may be at the origin of the high affective polarization in Spain, which has even been pointed out as one of the most affectively polarized in the world (Gidron *et al.*, 2020). Social scientists are therefore called upon to show reality beyond any bias and to unravel the identity dynamics that are dividing us, thereby helping to reduce the amplifying discourses of a social disagreement that is more identity mirage than reality.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- Abou-Chadi, T. & Wagner, M. (2021). The electoral appeal of party strategies in postindustrial societies: When can the mainstream left succeed? *The Journal of Politics*, 81 (4), 1405-1419. <https://doi.org/10.1086/704436>.
- Ahler, D. & Sood, G. (2018). The parties in our heads: misperceptions about party composition and their consequences'. *The Journal of Politics*, 80 (3), 964-981. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/697253>.
- Ahler, D.J. (2014). Self-fulfilling misperceptions of public polarization. *The Journal of Politics*, 76 (3), 607-620. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381614000085>.
- Aladro Vico, E. & Requeijo Rey, P. (2020). Discurso, estrategias e interacciones de VOX en su cuenta oficial de Instagram en las elecciones del 28-A. Derecha radical y redes sociales. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 77, 203-229. <https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2020-1455>.
- Ansolabehere, S., Rodden, J. & Snyder, J.M. (2006). Purple America. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20 (2), 97-118. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.20.2.97>.
- Bar-On, T. (2021). The Alt-Right's continuation of the 'cultural war' in Euro-American societies, *Thesis Eleven*, 163 (1), 43-70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07255136211005988>.
- Bar-Tal, D. (1997). The monopolization of patriotism. In D. Bar-Tal & E. Staub (Eds.), *Patriotism in the life of individuals and nations* (pp. 247-270). Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall.
- Blatz, C.W. & Mercier, B. (2018). False polarization and false moderation: political opponents overestimate the extremity of each other's ideologies but underestimate each other's certainty. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 9 (5), 194855061771203. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617712034>.
- Brady, H.E. & Sniderman, P.M. (1985). Attitude attribution: a group basis for political reasoning. *American Political Science Review*, 79 (4), 1061-1078. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1956248>.
- Chambers, J.R., Baron, R.S. & Inman, M.L. (2006). Misperceptions in intergroup conflict: disagreeing about what we disagree about', *Psychological Science*, 17 (1), 38-45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2005.01662.x>.
- Crespo Martínez, I., Rojo Martínez, J. M., & Mora Rodríguez, A. (2021). La falsa percepción sobre las creencias de los otros: ¿Causa o consecuencia de la polarización afectiva? *Más Poder Local*, 45, 75-94.
- De Vries, C.E., Hakhverdian, A. & Lancee, B. (2013). The dynamics of voters' left/right identification: the role of economics and cultural attitudes. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 1 (2), 223-238. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2013.4>.
- Fiorina, M.P., Abrams, S. & Pope, J.C. (2010). *Culture War? The myth of a polarized America*, Longman, New York.
- Frank, T. (2004) *What's the Matter with Kansas? How conservatives won the heart of America*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Frenbach, P.M. & Van Boven, L. (2022). False polarization: cognitive mechanisms and potential solutions. *Current opinion in Psychology*, 43, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.06.005>.
- Gidron, N., Adams, J. & Horne, W. (2020). *American affective polarization in comparative perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108914123>.
- Goren, P. & Chapp, C. (2017). Moral power: How public opinion on culture war issues shapes partisan predispositions and religious orientations. *American Political Science Review*, 111 (1), 110-128. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000435>.
- Graham, J., Nosek, B.A. & Haidt, J. (2012). The moral stereotypes of liberals and conservatives: exaggeration of differences across the political spectrum. *PLoS ONE*, 7 (12), e50092. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0050092>.
- Green, J. (2007). When voters and parties agree: valence issues and party competition. *Political Studies*, 55 (3), 629-655. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00671.x>.
- Harteveld, E. (2021). Fragmented foes: affective polarization in the multiparty context of the Netherlands. *Electoral Studies*, 71, 102332. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102332>.
- Hayes, D. (2008). Party reputations, journalistic expectations: how issue ownership influences election news. *Political Communication*, 25 (4), 377-400. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600802426981>.
- Hetherington, M.J., Long, M.T. & Rudolph, T.J. (2016). Revisiting the myth: new evidence of a polarized electorate. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(1), 321-350. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfw003>.
- Hunter, J.D. (1991) *Culture wars: the struggle to define America*. New York: Basic Books.
- Iyengar, S. and Westwood, S.J. (2015). Fear and loathing across party lines: new evidence on group polarization. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59 (3), 690-707. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12152>.
- Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N. & Westwood, S.J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. *Annual Review*

- of *Political Science*, 22, 129-146. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034>.
- Iyengar, S., Sood, G., & Lelkes, Y. (2012). Affect, not ideology: a social identity perspective on polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 76 (3), 405-431. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfs038>.
- Johnston, C.D., & Wronski, J. (2015). Personality dispositions and political preferences across hard and easy issues. *Political Psychology*, 36 (1), 35-53. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12068>.
- Kalin, M., & Sambanis, N. (2018). How to think about Social Identity. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 21, 239-257. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-042016-024408>.
- Kenyon, T. (2014). False polarization: debiasing as applied social epistemology. *Synthese*, 191, 2529-2547. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-014-0438-x>.
- Less, J., & Cikara, M. (2021). Understanding and combating misperceived polarization. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 376 (1822), 20200143. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2020.0143>.
- Levendusky, M., & Malhotra, N. (2016). (Mis)perceptions of partisan polarization in the American public. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80 (1), 378-391. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfv045>.
- Linville, P.W., Salovey, P., & Fischer, G. W. (1986) 'Stereotyping and perceived distributions of social characteristics: An application to ingroup-outgroup perception'. In J. F. Dovidio & S. L. Gaertner (Eds.) *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism* (pp. 165-208). San Diego: Academic Press.
- Martín Criado, E. (1998). Los decires y los haceres. *Papers*, 56, 57-71. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/papers.1944>.
- Mason, L. (2015). 'I Disrespectfully Agree': the differential effects of partisan sorting on social and issue polarization. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59 (1), 128-45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12089>.
- Mason, L. (2018). *Uncivil agreement: how politics become our identity*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226524689.001.0001>
- Mayordomo Zapata, C. (2021). Diferencias de género y edad en la polarización afectiva española: ¿Quién está más polarizado? *Más Poder Local*, 45, 147-161.
- Mildenberger, M., & Tingley, D. (2017). Beliefs about climate beliefs: the importance of second-order opinions for climate politics. *British Journal of Political Science*, 49 (4), 1279-1307. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123417000321>.
- Miller, L. (2020). Polarización en España: más divididos por ideología e identidad que por políticas públicas. EsadeEcPol Center for Economic Policy, Barcelona. Available online at: <https://itemsweb.esade.edu/research/EsadeEcPol-insight-polarizacion.pdf>.
- Montero, J.R., Calvo, K., & Martínez, A. (2008). El voto religioso en España y Portugal. *Revista Internacional de Sociología*, 66 (51), 19-54. <https://doi.org/10.3989/ris.2008.i51.108>.
- Moore-Berg, S.L., Ankori-Karlinsky, L.A., Hameiri, B., & Bruneau, E. (2020). Exaggerated meta-perceptions predict intergroup hostility between American political partisans. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 117 (26), 14864-14872. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2001263117>.
- Norris, P. & Inglehart, R. (2019) *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108595841>.
- Orriols, L. (2021) *La polarización afectiva en España: bloques ideológicos enfrentados*. EsadeEcPol Center for Economic Policy. Available at: <https://www.esade.edu/ecpol/es/publicaciones/polarizacion-afectiva/>.
- Perner, J., & Wimmer, H. (1985). John thinks that Mary thinks that...: Attribution of second-order beliefs by 5- to 10-year-old children. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 39 (3), 437-471. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-0965\(85\)90051-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-0965(85)90051-7).
- Petrocik, J.R. (1996). Issue ownership in presidential elections, with a 1980 case study. *American Journal of Political Science*, 40 (3), 825-850.
- Petrocik, J.R., Benoit, W.L., & Hansen, G.L. (2003). Issue ownership and presidential campaigning, 1952-2000. *Political Science Quarterly*, 118 (4), 599-626. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1538-165X.2003.tb00407.x>.
- Smith Castro, V. (2006). La psicología social de las relaciones intergrupales: modelos e hipótesis. *Actualidades en Psicología*, 20 (107), 45-71.
- Tajfel, H. (1957). Value and the perceptual judgement of magnitude. *Psychological Review*, 64 (3), 192-204. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0047878>
- Tajfel, H. (1984) *Grupos humanos y categorías sociales*. Barcelona: Heder.
- Tirapu-Ustárroz, J., Pérez-Sayes, G., Erekatxo-Bilbao, M. & Pelegrín-Valero, C. (2007). ¿Qué es la teoría de la mente? *Revista de Neurología*, 44 (8), 479-489.
- Van Boven, L., Judd, C. M., & Sherman, D. K. (2012). Political polarization projection: Social projection of partisan attitude extremity and attitudinal processes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 103 (1), 84-100. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028145>.
- Viciano, H., Hannikainen, I.R. & Gaitán Torres, A. (2019). The dual nature of partisan prejudice: morality and identity in a multiparty system. *Plos One*, 14(7), e0219509. <https://doi.org/10.1371/>
- Westfall, J., Van Boven, L., Chambers, J.R., & Judd, C.M. (2015). Perceiving political polarization in the United States: party identity strength and attitude extremity exacerbate the perceived partisan divide. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10 (2), 145-158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691615569849>.
- Westwood, S.J., Iyengar, S., Walgrave, S., Leonisio, R., Miller, L. y Strijbis, O. (2018). The tie that divides: Cross-national evidence of the primacy of partyism. *European Journal of Political Research*, 57 (2), 333-354. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12228>.
- Williams, R.H. (1997) *Cultural wars in American Politics: critical reviews of a popular myth (social problems & social issues)*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

- Yudkin, D.A., Hawkins, S. & Dixon, T. (2019). *The perception gap: How false impressions are pulling Americans apart*. New York: More in Common. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/r3h5q>.
- Zaller, J.R. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511818691>.

Data availability statement

You can consult the database of the survey used in this link: <https://www.cemopmurcia.es/estudios/polarizacion-politica/>.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

JOSÉ MIGUEL ROJO MARTÍNEZ

Predocctoral researcher at the University of Murcia. He carries out his doctoral studies thanks to a FPU contract from the Ministry of Universities (FPU20/01033). Master in Applied Political Analysis, specialty «Political Communication». He has been a postgraduate fellow at the Center for Sociological Research (CIS).

ISMAEL CRESPO MARTÍNEZ

Professor of Political Science at the University of Murcia. Director of the Department of Political Science, Social Anthropology and Public Finance. Coordinator of the Knowledge Transfer Group “Political Communication Laboratory” (LABCOM). Principal Investigator of the political analysis group of the University of Murcia (E0C7-03). Co-Director of the Murcian Center for Public Opinion Studies (CEMOP).

ALBERTO MORA RODRÍGUEZ

Doctor in Political Science with Extraordinary Doctorate Award. Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Murcia. Coordinator of the Master in Applied Political Analysis of the University of Murcia. Technical director of the Murcian Center for Public Opinion Studies (CEMOP). Specialist in Applied Social Research and Data Analysis by the Center for Sociological Research (CIS).

