



# PRÉCIS OF THE RISE OF POLARIZATION: AFFECTS, POLITICS, AND PHILOSOPHY

Manuel Almagro<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> University of Valencia, Spain

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## ABSTRACT

The following is a short synopsis of the book *The Rise of Polarization: Affects, Politics, and Philosophy*. It presents an overview of the book's central claims concerning the nature and significance of affective polarization.

**Keywords:** affective polarization; political disagreement; political narratives.

*The Rise of Polarization* (2025) offers a philosophical account of the phenomenon of affective polarization. The book first makes a case against what it calls the two-dimensional view of affective polarization. According to this view, affective polarization is fundamentally a matter of political identity and negative feelings toward the outgroup. Citizens become attached to partisan identities, divide the world into “us” and “them”, and increasingly dislike or distrust those on the other side. While this picture captures something important, the book argues that it gives rise to an overly simple diagnosis of polarization: polarized citizens are merely cheerleading for their side, driven by identity and emotion rather than by reasons, evidence, and genuine political disagreement.

Against this, the book develops a multi-dimensional view of affective polarization. According to it, affective polarization involves not only identity and emotion, but also political narratives, degrees of credence in those narratives, and forms of linguistic expression through which political attachments are voiced. Polarization is therefore a broader social and rational process in which public narratives and other linguistic phenomena reshape public opinion in a particular way. As a result of it, citizens end up endorsing, in the abstract, conflicting narratives that shape their sense of what matters, who and what is a danger for the country, which events are salient to understand the current situation, and which political responses seem reasonable. Thus, being affectively polarized is having a high degree of confidence, in the abstract, in the political narratives of a certain political identity, which manifests in the practices we engage with.

A book’s central point is that when citizens report that they dislike, distrust, fear, or resent the political outgroup, such reports should not be understood just as transparent descriptions of inner emotional episodes. They rather function expressively: they voice attachments, alignments, and degrees of confidence in a political narrative. In this respect, the book brings the tools of philosophy of language to bear on political psychology for detection goals. What matters is not only what citizens feel, but what they are doing in saying that they feel certain things about their opponents.

In this way, *The Rise of Polarization* reframes affective polarization as a problem at the intersection of political epistemology, social philosophy, and the philosophy of language. Its central insight is that polarization is not merely a matter of feeling more negatively about those on the other side. It is a process by which political narratives come to organize affect, identity, judgment, and expression, thereby reshaping the conditions under which democratic citizens can understand one another as interlocutors.

## REFERENCES

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