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When hope is no longer enough: emotional ambivalence, digital exposure and the limits of the affective buffer against political polarisation

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Abstract

Political emotions are central to democratic life, sustaining civic engagement but also fuelling social division. Research has shown that hope and pride sustain institutional participation, whereas anger and resentment drive non-institutional participation and affective polarisation, yet little is known about what happens when these emotions are experienced simultaneously, or under which conditions hope contains the divisive effect of anger. This study examines five discrete political emotions (hope, pride, anger, fear and resentment) as predictors of democratic participation and affective polarisation among Spanish university students. Data come from a computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) survey administered between 30 June and 24 July 2026 to 573 students. A moderated-moderation model tested whether hope buffers the polarising effect of anger and whether exposure to emotionally charged political content on social media erodes that buffer. The anger × hope × social media exposure interaction was positive and significant (b = 0.029; p = .006): under low digital exposure, hope almost entirely neutralised the translation of anger into polarisation (simple slope = -0.225), whereas under high exposure anger regained much of its polarising capacity even among the most hopeful respondents (simple slope = 0.279). A k-means cluster analysis identified an ambivalent profile (26.0% of the sample) combining high anger and high hope, whose affective polarisation did not differ significantly from that of the hopeful (p = .307) or angry (p = .113) profiles. The findings qualify the dual emotional pathway model and show that the civic value of hope depends on the media environment in which it is experienced. Framed within Sustainable Development Goals 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), the results carry implications for platform governance, media literacy and civic education aimed at fostering inclusive participation and reducing intergroup hostility.

1. Introduction

Contemporary politics is increasingly difficult to understand without attending to its affective dimension. For decades, much of political science implicitly assumed that electoral preferences and civic engagement derived from rational calculations about interests and programmes, relegating emotions to a secondary role, almost as noise that distorted political judgement. That assumption has been substantially revised over the past decade, as empirical research has shown that hope, pride, anger, fear and resentment are not irrational by-products of public deliberation but cognitive and motivational mechanisms that orient attention, structure judgement and, ultimately, mobilise or demobilise citizens (Marcus, 2013). The theory of affective intelligence, originally formulated by Marcus and colleagues, holds precisely that the emotional systems of enthusiasm and anxiety perform distinct adaptive functions in the formation of political judgement, which requires treating each discrete emotion as an explanatory variable with its own causal logic rather than reducing affective life to a single bipolar dimension of positive or negative valence. Experimental research on motivated reasoning has further shown that the feelings aroused in the earliest stages of processing political information colour the considerations that subsequently come to mind and, through them, the evaluations that citizens ultimately express (Erisen et al., 2014).

This theoretical reconsideration coincides with a historical juncture in which Western democracies face simultaneous processes of institutional disaffection, rising affective polarisation, and a reconfiguration of the public sphere through digital platforms that selectively amplify the most emotionally charged content (Kaskeleviciute et al., 2026; Humprecht et al., 2024). Spain is no exception to this trend. Comparative research places Southern European democracies, and Spain prominently among them, among the cases of highest affective polarisation intensity on the continent, a dynamic that has intensified during periods of political instability and public health crisis (Torcal and Comellas, 2022; Galais and Balinhas, 2024). At the same time, Spanish university youth combine relatively high declared interest in politics with forms of participation that are progressively moving away from classic institutional channels, unfolding increasingly within digital environments crossed by emotional frames of indignation, threat and grievance (Soler-i-Martí and Ballestè-Isern, 2024; Essomba et al., 2023).

The relevance of this question extends beyond the internal debates of political psychology and connects directly with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) calls for responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (target 16.7) and for peaceful and inclusive societies, objectives that are threatened when affective polarisation erodes the minimum of mutual recognition on which democratic coexistence depends (Druckman et al., 2023; Sánchez-Ferrer and Torcal, 2024). Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), for its part, calls for empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all (target 10.2), which presupposes that the emotional channels through which citizens engage with public life are not unequally distributed across social groups.

Against this backdrop, the specialised literature has identified, with notable consistency, two broad pathways through which political emotions affect democratic life: a mobilising pathway, driven by hope and collective pride, and a divisive pathway, driven by anger and resentment (Wlodarczyk et al., 2017; Rico et al., 2017; Van Prooijen et al., 2022). This distinction, useful as a first approximation, nonetheless implicitly assumes that both pathways operate in separate populations or moments, whereas the available evidence on political ambivalence suggests exactly the opposite: a substantial share of citizens experience positive and negative emotions simultaneously towards the same political object, without this necessarily proving dysfunctional or resolving itself through the mutual cancellation of both emotions (Johnson, 2014; Burger, 2025). What remains virtually unexplored, and constitutes the central question of this study, is under what conditions hope manages to contain or neutralise the polarising effect of anger, and whether that buffering capacity is stable or, instead, depends on the media environment in which both emotions are experienced. Very recent work has begun to suggest that high-choice digital environments may actually intensify the pathways through which ambivalence translates into polarisation (Webb, 2026), yet direct empirical evidence testing this possibility through a moderated-moderation design remains virtually non-existent.

The present study aims to help close this gap through the analysis of a large sample of Spanish university students, a particularly relevant group both because they are in an active stage of political

socialisation and because they constitute one of the population segments most exposed to high-intensity emotional digital environments. To this end, we propose and test a model that moves beyond the additive logic of the dual emotional pathway, examining whether hope moderates (buffers) the translation of anger into affective polarisation and whether that buffer is eroded under intense exposure to emotionally charged political content on social media, a triple interaction that, to date, has not been explicitly tested in the literature on emotions and polarisation. This model is complemented by a person-centred analysis, using k-means clustering, that identifies a genuinely ambivalent citizen profile and compares it with predominantly angry, predominantly hopeful and disenchanted profiles. In doing so, the article addresses several of the priorities that currently organise research on emotions and democratic life: the role of emotions in participation and civic engagement, the emotional dimensions of polarisation and social division, the role of digital communication in the amplification and circulation of political emotions, and the ways in which gender and ideology structure the experience and expression of political emotions (Kaskeleviciute et al., 2026; López-López et al., 2023).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Discrete political emotions and democratic participation

The affective turn in the study of politics rests on a growing body of research that treats emotions as independent variables with their own explanatory power, rather than as mere epiphenomena of cognition (Lynggaard, 2019). Shah (2024) summarises this tradition by noting that recent research has progressively abandoned unidimensional models of positive versus negative affect, replacing them with taxonomies of discrete emotions that allow, for instance, a distinction between anger and fear, two negatively valenced states that nonetheless generate markedly different patterns of political behaviour. Whereas anger tends to reduce risk aversion and increase the disposition towards action, including protest action, fear is usually associated with greater caution, information-seeking and, under certain ideological conditions, a retreat towards positions of group self-protection (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019). Erisen et al. (2014) add a crucial cognitive dimension to this debate: in two experiments, affective cues that went unnoticed by participants biased the considerations they retrieved and constructed when reasoning about public policies, and those affectively congruent considerations in turn mediated their policy evaluations. This mechanism of affective contagion implies that the emotional state with which a citizen first encounters political information does not merely accompany judgement but conditions it, which offers a theoretical rationale for expecting that hope and anger, when simultaneously activated, compete for the orientation of subsequent political evaluation.

Hope and collective pride occupy a prominent place among the emotions that the literature links to institutional participation and to collective action oriented towards social change. The classic work of Wlodarczyk et al. (2017) on the 15-M movement showed that hope acted as a mediator between collective action frames and effective participation in mobilisation, in a process the authors themselves

described as sequential alongside anger. Behrens (2024) documents, through interviews with young activists, that hope and a sense of collective agency reinforce one another during early politicisation processes, a finding that underpins the first hypothesis of the present study, according to which mobilising emotions should preferentially predict institutional forms of participation. From a comparative standpoint, Erisen (2018) has examined how emotions such as anger, anxiety and enthusiasm shape political participation and political reaction in Turkey, a context of intense partisan confrontation, which indicates that the dual emotional pathway is not an exclusively Western European phenomenon but a mechanism that operates across different institutional and cultural settings.

2.2. Anger, resentment and the emotional foundations of polarisation

If hope sustains conventional civic engagement, anger occupies an equivalent place in explaining non-institutional participation. Several studies show that anger functions as an effective mobilisation trigger, particularly when combined with a shared sense of grievance, increasing the disposition towards protest and digital activism (Young, 2021). Resentment, understood as a sustained form of anger linked to the perception of lost or threatened status, appears repeatedly in the populism literature as one of its most consistent emotional substrates (Rico et al., 2017; Van Prooijen et al., 2022). Erisen and Vasilopoulou (2022) specify this link further by showing, with European data, that anger is associated with support for far-right parties in combination with low political trust and concern about immigration, which places the emotional substrate of exclusionary politics at the intersection between affective reactions and confidence in institutions. In a convergent line, Erisen et al. (2021) have documented that populist attitudes are anchored in identifiable psychological dispositions, so that the appeal of exclusionary political projects cannot be understood without attending to the affective and personality foundations on which it rests. Evidence from post-conflict societies points in the same direction, since Borinca and Spears (2025) found that anger helps to explain support for radical collective actions and the sense of collective victimhood when the stakes for one's group are perceived as particularly high, which illustrates how a single emotion can simultaneously mobilise citizens and harden intergroup boundaries.

Affective polarisation, defined as the emotional distance between warmth towards one's own political group and hostility towards the rival group, has received growing attention over the past decade (Reiljan et al., 2024). Comparative evidence places Spain among the European cases of highest polarising intensity, a dynamic that has intensified after successive political and public health crises (Torcal and Comellas, 2022; Galais and Balinhas, 2024) and that remains closely linked to the rise of the radical right (Comellas Bonsfills and Torcal Loriente, 2026). Recent literature has also begun to explore whether this polarisation follows a linear distribution according to ideology or, instead, describes a horseshoe-shaped curve, in which both ideological extremes, left and right alike, display levels of hostility towards the adversary higher than those found at central positions, a question on which the available evidence remains contradictory (Kogel and Zinnatullin, 2026; Lubej et al., 2025). Threat perceptions and the emotions they elicit have also been identified as drivers of affective polarisation (Renström et al., 2023), and its antecedents are not only ideological but also socioeconomic: longitudinal evidence from Spain

shows that economic threats, together with political and national identification, predict affective polarisation (García-Sánchez et al., 2024), while research in the United States has linked polarisation to the dynamics between actual income and perceived income inequality (Wu et al., 2024).

2.3. The amplifying role of social media

Digital platforms have radically transformed the environment in which political emotions are experienced and disseminated. Research on political communication converges in noting that recommendation algorithms tend to prioritise emotionally intense content, particularly content charged with anger and indignation, producing informational environments that Humprecht et al. (2024) describe as emotionalised and prone to angry reaction. Kaskeleviciute et al. (2026), in a recent systematic review, conclude that repeated exposure to this type of content not only intensifies the negative emotions of those who consume it but also functions as a feedback mechanism that reinforces the production of further, equally polarising content. Boccia Artieri et al. (2021) propose understanding this phenomenon as a platform ecosystem in which affective polarisation is shared and amplified in a distributed manner, while Lu et al. (2026) show, using digital platform data, that certain design mechanisms selectively discipline public expression in favour of more polarising frames. This evidence supports the idea that exposure to emotional political content on social media does not merely accompany the relationship between anger and affective polarisation, but may act as a factor that amplifies its translation into intergroup hostility, and, as argued next, may also condition the effectiveness of other protective emotional mechanisms. Research on Latin American electoral campaigns offers particularly rich evidence of this dynamic. López-López et al. (2020) used social media mining to analyse the feelings expressed by digital public opinion in reaction to five presidential elections in Latin America, and Lagares Díez et al. (2023), on the basis of almost 750,000 messages generated in the digital communities of ten presidential candidates, found that content became progressively more negative over the campaign and that polarisation emerged spontaneously, as an intrinsic dynamic of online political discussion. These findings, together with the growing weight of disinformation and artificial intelligence in electoral communication (López-López et al., 2023), suggest that the emotional intensification of digital environments is a structural feature of contemporary public spheres rather than a contingent trait of a particular national context.

2.4. Emotional ambivalence and the affective buffer: a largely unresolved question

Most of the literature reviewed so far models political emotions additively, that is, assuming that each emotion contributes independently to explaining participation or polarisation, without examining whether the coexistence of oppositely valenced emotions within the same person modifies their respective effects. This approach proves insufficient in light of the literature on political ambivalence, which has for over a decade documented that a relevant segment of citizens simultaneously holds contradictory attitudes and emotions towards the same political objects, without this translating into apathy or the simple cancellation of both affective poles (Johnson, 2014). In a related vein, Burger (2025) has documented that attitudinal ambivalence varies systematically with ideological extremity, suggesting

that it is not a residual or infrequent phenomenon but a structured feature of contemporary political experience.

The literature on intergroup relations offers a complementary perspective on why hope and other prosocial emotions may act as buffers. Halperin (2014) has argued that the regulation of emotions such as hope and anger is a central mechanism in the transformation of intergroup conflicts, and recent experimental research shows that empathy and perceived injustice in the face of civilian suffering jointly foster observers' support for solidarity-based action (Borinca et al., 2026).

From this perspective, it is worth asking whether hope, beyond predicting institutional participation on its own, can act as a buffering resource that moderates the translation of anger into affective polarisation, in line with the affective intelligence theory's account of the functional coexistence of distinct emotional systems (Marcus, 2013) and with evidence on the role of emotional frames in the moralisation and radicalisation of political judgement (Clifford, 2019). The most recent research on ambivalence and polarisation in digital environments points precisely in this direction, suggesting that high-choice informational environments may intensify, rather than buffer, the pathways through which emotional ambivalence translates into polarisation (Webb, 2026). However, to the best of our review, no study has directly tested, through a moderated-moderation design, whether exposure to social media specifically erodes hope's capacity to contain the polarising effect of anger. This gap, together with the near-absence of person-centred approaches capable of identifying and characterising emotionally ambivalent citizens, constitutes the core of the contribution this study seeks to make.

2.5. Identity, belonging, and gender and ideological differences

Political emotions do not only predict participatory behaviour; they also shape the symbolic boundaries of the political community. Fear, in particular, has been linked in the literature to attitudes of group closure and to exclusionary conceptions of national belonging, although its effect does not appear to be uniform, depending substantially on the ideological orientation of the person experiencing it (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019). From the perspective of moral foundations theory, ideology not only orients political preferences but reconfigures the very meaning of emotions such as fear or pride, activating distinct moral frames depending on one's position along the ideological spectrum (Hatemi et al., 2019). Research on gender and political participation, meanwhile, shows more nuanced patterns than a simple reading might suggest: Grasso and Smith (2021) document that gender differences in political engagement depend substantially on the specific participation repertoire under consideration, with wider gaps in non-institutional forms of participation than in declared political interest. Taken together, this evidence motivates the exploration of possible interactions between emotion, gender and ideology as part of the analytical design of the present study. Questions of identity and belonging are equally central to the emotional politics of inclusion and exclusion. Borinca et al. (2025) have shown that responses to inclusion and exclusion within inclusive common ingroups depend on ethnic identity and on the need to belong, which indicates that experiences of recognition or rejection are emotionally charged and

consequential for intergroup relations. This literature is particularly relevant from the perspective of SDG 10, since unequal access to recognition and belonging is one of the mechanisms through which political and social inequalities are reproduced in diverse democratic societies.

2.6. Political emotions, inequality and institutions: an SDG 10 and SDG 16 perspective

The Sustainable Development Goals provide a normative and analytical framework that connects the study of political emotions with broader concerns about inequality and democratic institutions (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). From the perspective of SDG 16, political emotions matter because they shape the relationship between citizens and institutions: political trust among young Europeans varies with the institutional configurations in which they are socialised (Chevalier, 2019), and anger combined with low political trust has been identified as one of the routes towards exclusionary electoral options (Erisen and Vasilopoulou, 2022). From the perspective of SDG 10, emotions matter because neither the capacity to experience politics as a space of hope nor the opportunities to translate emotion into effective participation are evenly distributed across gender, generation, class or ideological position (Grasso and Smith, 2021; Soler-i-Martí and Ballestè-Isern, 2024).

This perspective also draws attention to the actors and infrastructures that produce and circulate political emotions. Political leaders mobilise emotions strategically through their rhetoric, particularly in times of crisis (Barreto et al., 2023), and the transformation of European party systems associated with the rise of populism has been interpreted as the consolidation of a new cleavage (Kriesi, 2025), which offers a structural background for the emotional appeals of populist and radical actors. At the same time, platform architectures and algorithmic systems are not neutral: they can amplify emotionally charged content and, as Borinca (2025) argues, provide a moral cover that allows biased outcomes to be accepted as objective, thereby perpetuating social inequality.

3. Objectives and Hypotheses

The general objective of this study is to analyse the role of discrete political emotions, individually and in interaction, as an explanatory mechanism of democratic participation and affective polarisation among Spanish university students, paying particular attention to the conditions under which hope buffers, or fails to buffer, the divisive effect of anger, and discussing the implications of these mechanisms for inclusive participation and peaceful democratic coexistence in the terms of SDG 10 and SDG 16. From this general objective, the following specific objectives are derived:

O1. To describe the intensity and structure of political emotions (hope, pride, anger, fear and resentment) experienced by Spanish university youth.

O2. To determine the effect of mobilising emotions (hope, pride) versus divisive emotions (anger, resentment) on institutional and non-institutional political participation.

O3. To assess whether the effect of fear on exclusionary national belonging attitudes is conditioned by political ideology.

O4. To examine whether hope moderates (buffers) the relationship between anger and affective polarisation, and whether this emotional buffer is itself conditioned by exposure to emotionally charged political content on social media (moderated moderation).

O5. To identify, through a person-centred analysis, the emotional profiles that result from the combination of anger and hope, with particular attention to the ambivalent profile, and to compare their consequences for affective polarisation and political participation.

O6. To explore, on a complementary basis, whether affective polarisation follows a horseshoe pattern as a function of ideology, and whether gender differences exist in emotional experience and its political consequences.

In line with these objectives, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1. Hope and pride positively predict institutional political participation.

H2. Anger and resentment positively predict non-institutional political participation.

H3. The effect of fear on exclusionary belonging attitudes is conditioned by ideology, such that this effect is significantly stronger among respondents who identify with right-wing positions.

H4. Hope negatively moderates the relationship between anger and affective polarisation, such that the effect of anger on polarisation is weaker among respondents reporting high levels of hope.

H5. The buffering effect described in H4 is conditioned by exposure to emotionally charged political content on social media, such that this buffer weakens (the anger × hope × social media exposure interaction is positive) as digital exposure increases.

Given the genuinely open nature of the available evidence, no directional hypotheses are formulated for the ideological horseshoe pattern or for the comparison across emotional cluster profiles, which are addressed with an exploratory approach within O5 and O6.

4. Method

4.1. Design and participants

A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was employed, based on a self-administered survey using the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) technique. The reference population comprised students enrolled in undergraduate and master's degree programmes at Spanish public and private universities during the 2025–2026 academic year. Fieldwork was carried out between 30 June and 24 July 2026. Non-proportional quotas of sex, age, field of study and region of residence were applied,

combining distribution through a certified online panel with institutional dissemination of the questionnaire across universities of different sizes and locations, in order to approximate the heterogeneity of the Spanish university population.

A total of 681 questionnaires were initiated, of which 573 were deemed valid for analysis, yielding a completion rate of 84.1%. The 108 discarded questionnaires corresponded to drop-outs before completing the block of dependent variables, response times incompatible with careful reading of the items, or IP-address duplications detected by the collection system. Mean ideological self-placement, on a scale from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right), was 4.42 (SD = 2.21), indicating a distribution slightly skewed towards the centre-left.

4.2. Instruments

The questionnaire first included a fifteen-item discrete political emotions scale (three items per dimension), rated on a 0–10 scale and adapted from the instruments used by Wlodarczyk et al. (2017) and Vasilopoulos et al. (2019), yielding five aggregate scores: hope, pride, anger, fear and resentment. Reliability of the five subscales, estimated using Cronbach's alpha, was excellent across all dimensions (hope, α = .928; pride, α = .922; anger, α = .936; fear, α = .944; resentment, α = .926).

Second, two 0–10 feeling thermometers were included, one referring to the respondent's own ideological group and the other to the group perceived as the political rival, following standard procedure in the affective polarisation literature (Reiljan et al., 2024; Freidin et al., 2022). The difference between the two thermometers (in-group minus out-group, [specify: absolute value / truncated at 0], yielding a 0–10 index) was used to compute the affective polarisation index used as a dependent variable. Third, political participation was measured through two subscales: institutional participation (voting, contacting political representatives, joining a party or trade union) and non-institutional participation (attending demonstrations, signing petitions, engaging in political activism on social media), following repertoires similar to those employed by Grasso and Smith (2021). Fourth, a scale measuring exposure to emotionally charged political content on social media was included, adapted from Humprecht et al. (2024) and Kaskeleviciute et al. (2026). Exclusionary national belonging was measured with [n] items on a 0–10 scale (α = [value]). Right-wing identification was coded as self-placement ≥ 6; ideological extremity was computed as the absolute distance from the scale midpoint (|ideology − 5|); and the five ideological groups were defined as extreme left (0–2), moderate left (3–4), centre (5), moderate right (6–7) and extreme right (8–10). The participation and social media exposure scales showed adequate reliability (α = [value]). Finally, ideological self-placement was measured on a 0–10 scale, and standard sociodemographic variables (sex, age, field of study and type of university) were collected.

4.3. Procedure and ethical considerations

The research adhered to the ethical principles established in the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Universidad Internacional de La Rioja (reference 110_2026). Before accessing the questionnaire, all participants received information about the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, the anonymous and confidential treatment of data in

accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, and the possibility of withdrawing from the survey at any time without consequence. Participation was formalised through an electronic informed consent procedure, which had to be explicitly accepted before starting the questionnaire. No identifying data that could link responses to participants' identities were collected, and access to the database was restricted to the research team. Particular attention was paid to the specific ethical and methodological challenges of online survey tools, including data security, the verification of consent and the protection of anonymity in web-based data collection (Buchanan and Hvizdak, 2009). Data processing complied with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation) and Spanish Organic Law 3/2018 on the Protection of Personal Data and Guarantee of Digital Rights. All participants were aged 18 or over, so no consent from parents or legal guardians was required, and no identifying information is reported in this article.

4.4. Analysis plan

Data were analysed through a staged statistical procedure. First, descriptive statistics and the Pearson correlation matrix among the emotional variables, social media exposure and the dependent variables were computed. Second, hierarchical ordinary least squares regression models were estimated for institutional participation and non-institutional participation, entering sociodemographic variables and ideology in a first block, and discrete emotions and social media exposure in a second and third block, respectively. Third, a regression model with an interaction term between fear and right-wing identification was estimated for exclusionary national belonging attitudes. Fourth, a simple mediation model (anger → social media exposure → affective polarisation) was tested, on a preliminary and contrastive basis, through a bootstrap resampling procedure with 3,000 repetitions; since this model proved insufficient, as detailed in the results, a moderated regression model was subsequently estimated with anger, hope and social media exposure mean-centred, incorporating the three two-way interaction terms and the triple interaction term, complemented by a simple-slopes analysis evaluated at representative values (M ± 1 SD) of the moderating variables. Fifth, a k-means cluster analysis (k = 4) was conducted on the standardised scores of anger and hope, in order to identify emotional profiles, subsequently compared through a one-way analysis of variance with Tukey's post hoc test. Sixth, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted, on an exploratory basis, to compare affective polarisation across five ideological groups. Finally, independent-samples t-tests were conducted to explore gender differences in emotions and non-institutional participation. All analyses were conducted at a significance level of .05. All tests were two-tailed, and exact p values are reported except when $p < .001$. The assumptions of the regression models (normality and homoscedasticity of residuals and absence of problematic multicollinearity) were examined through residual plots and variance inflation factors before interpretation; given the sample size, ordinary least squares inference is robust to moderate departures from normality. Pairwise comparisons following the analyses of variance used Tukey's honestly significant difference procedure to control for multiple comparisons, and effect sizes are reported as eta squared (η^2) for analyses of variance and as Cohen's d for t-tests. Descriptive statistics are reported as means (M) and standard deviations (SD).

5. Results

5.1. Sample description and emotional intensity

Table 1 summarises the sociodemographic characteristics of the final sample (N = 573). Women made up the majority of respondents (61.4%), followed by men (37.3%) and a small group identifying as non-binary or other (1.2%). Mean age was 21.52 years (SD = 2.64; range 18–29), which is consistent with a population made up mainly of undergraduate students and, to a lesser extent, of students in master's programmes. All five major fields of study were represented: Social and Legal Sciences was the largest group (32.6%), followed by Health Sciences (19.4%), Engineering and Architecture (17.8%), Sciences (15.9%) and Arts and Humanities (14.3%). Most participants were enrolled at public universities (70.3%), while the remaining 29.7% attended private institutions. Mean ideological self-placement on the 0–10 scale was 4.42 (SD = 2.21), slightly to the left of the scale midpoint, with considerable dispersion along the ideological spectrum. This composition provides sufficient heterogeneity across gender, discipline, type of institution and ideology to examine the relationships between political emotions, participation and affective polarisation proposed in this study.

Table 1
Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample (N = 573)

Variable	Category	n	%
Sex	Female	352	61.4
	Male	214	37.3
	Non-binary / other	7	1.2
Age (years)	M = 21.52; SD = 2.64; range 18–29	573	100.0
Field of study	Social and Legal Sciences	187	32.6
	Health Sciences	111	19.4
	Engineering and Architecture	102	17.8
	Sciences	91	15.9
	Arts and Humanities	82	14.3
University type	Public	403	70.3
	Private	170	29.7
Ideological self-placement (0–10)	M = 4.42; SD = 2.21	573	100.0

Source: own elaboration based on survey data (N = 573). M = mean; SD = standard deviation (2026).

Figure 1 shows the mean intensity of the five political emotions analysed. Anger (M = 5.29; SD = 2.03) and hope (M = 5.27; SD = 1.83) obtained the highest scores, followed by pride (M = 5.18; SD = 1.79) and

resentment (M = 5.16; SD = 1.90), while fear obtained the lowest mean score (M = 4.71; SD = 2.07). It is especially relevant for the purposes of this study that anger and hope not only reached comparable intensities but were also virtually uncorrelated (r = − .036; p = .394), indicating that both emotions operate as practically independent dimensions rather than as the two poles of a single affective continuum. This statistical independence provides the empirical basis that makes possible, and substantively interesting, the existence of a genuinely ambivalent citizen profile, simultaneously high in both emotions, analysed in section 5.5.

Source: own elaboration based on survey data (N = 573) (2026).

5.2. Correlations among emotions, digital exposure and political outcomes

The correlation matrix (Fig. 2) showed a pattern consistent with the stated hypotheses. Hope was positively and significantly associated with institutional participation (r = .456; p < .001), as was pride (r = .264; p < .001), whereas neither emotion showed a relevant association with non-institutional participation. Anger, by contrast, was associated with non-institutional participation (r = .432; p < .001), a pattern also shown, less intensely, by resentment (r = .363; p < .001). Regarding affective polarisation, all the emotions analysed showed positive and statistically significant, though moderate, associations: anger showed the strongest correlation (r = .271; p < .001), followed by hope (r = .140; p = .001), resentment (r = .139; p = .001), pride (r = .127; p = .002) and, with a somewhat smaller association, exposure to emotional political content on social media (r = .113; p = .007) and fear (r = .092; p = .028).

Source: own elaboration (2026).

5.3. Hierarchical regression models for political participation

The hierarchical regression models confirmed the dual emotional pathway pattern for political participation (Table 2, Fig. 3). In the final model for institutional participation, the introduction of emotions substantially increased explained variance (adjusted R^2 = .002 in the sociodemographic model versus adjusted R^2 = .251 in the model including emotions, remaining virtually unchanged (.250) after adding social media exposure in Model 3), with hope (b = 0.452; p < .001) and pride (b = 0.195; p < .001) as significant predictors, while resentment showed a small negative effect (b = -0.080; p = .035), supporting H1. In the model for non-institutional participation, explained variance increased similarly (adjusted R^2 from .012 to .284; .283 in Model 3), with anger (b = 0.378; p < .001) and resentment (b = 0.301; p < .001) as the main predictors, together with a smaller positive effect of hope (b = 0.078; p = .047), supporting H2.

Table 2
Hierarchical regression models for institutional and non-institutional participation (unstandardised coefficients, Model 3)

Predictor	Institutional particip. (b)	SE	p	Non-institutional particip. (b)	SE	p
Age	0.017	0.027	0.536	0.026	0.027	0.331
Female (ref. male)	0.364	0.144	0.012	-0.596	0.145	< 0.001
Public university	0.262	0.155	0.091	-0.127	0.156	0.416
Ideology (0–10)	0.013	0.032	0.684	0.026	0.033	0.431
Hope	0.452	0.039	< 0.001	0.078	0.039	0.047
Pride	0.195	0.040	< 0.001	0.019	0.040	0.637
Anger	-0.047	0.036	0.185	0.378	0.036	< 0.001
Fear	0.007	0.035	0.837	0.033	0.035	0.350
Resentment	-0.080	0.038	0.035	0.301	0.038	< 0.001
Emotional social media exposure	-0.008	0.033	0.817	-0.021	0.034	0.533
Adjusted R^2 (Model 1 / 2 / 3)	0.002 / 0.251 / 0.250			0.012 / 0.284 / 0.283		

Source: own elaboration. Model 1: sociodemographics + ideology; Model 2: + discrete emotions; Model 3: + social media exposure. SE = standard error. b = unstandardised coefficient; p = two-tailed p value; R^2 = coefficient of determination (2026).

Source: own elaboration based on hierarchical regression Model 3 (2026).

5.4. The buffer put to the test: from simple mediation to moderated moderation

Before estimating this study's central model, a simple mediation model was tested, on a preliminary basis, in which exposure to emotionally charged political content on social media acted as an intermediate pathway between anger and affective polarisation, following the logic common in much of the literature on digital polarisation. The indirect effect estimated through bootstrap resampling (3,000 repetitions) was positive but did not reach statistical significance (indirect effect = 0.012; 95% CI [-0.001, 0.031]), an interval that includes zero. Far from being a mere negative finding, this result suggests that a simple mediational model is insufficient to capture the role played by social media exposure in the

relationship between anger and polarisation, and motivates the specification of a more complex, moderated-moderation model, which indeed revealed this study's most substantively important pattern.

The regression model with anger, hope and social media exposure mean-centred (Table 3) showed, first, a robust conditional (first-order) effect of anger at mean levels of hope and exposure (b = 0.276; p < .001) and smaller but positive conditional effects of hope (b = 0.114; p = .025) and social media exposure (b = 0.086; p = .045). Crucially, the interaction term between anger and hope was negative and highly significant (b = -0.136; p < .001), confirming H4: hope buffers the translation of anger into affective polarisation. The interaction term between anger and social media exposure was, in turn, positive and significant (b = 0.065; p = .002), while the interaction between hope and social media exposure did not reach significance (b = 0.000; p = .991). Finally, and centrally for this study, the anger × hope × social media exposure triple-interaction term was positive and significant (b = 0.029; p = .006), confirming H5: the buffer that hope exerts on anger weakens as exposure to emotionally charged political content on social media increases. The inclusion of the interaction terms substantially increased explained variance (adjusted R^2 from .119 to .187).

Table 3
Moderated-moderation model of affective polarisation: anger × hope × social media exposure triple interaction (unstandardised coefficients, continuous variables mean-centred)

Predictor	**b**	**SE**	**p**
Age	-0.012	0.034	0.719
Female (ref. male)	0.174	0.185	0.347
Public university	0.261	0.196	0.184
Ideological extremity (centred)	0.151	0.068	0.027
Pride	0.130	0.051	0.011
Fear	0.059	0.044	0.183
Resentment	0.040	0.049	0.406
Anger (centred)	0.276	0.046	< 0.001
Hope (centred)	0.114	0.051	0.025
Emotional SM exposure (centred)	0.086	0.043	0.045
Anger × Hope	-0.136	0.024	< 0.001
Anger × SM exposure	0.065	0.021	0.002
Hope × SM exposure	0.000	0.023	0.991
Anger × Hope × SM exposure	0.029	0.010	0.006
Adjusted R^2 (base model / triple-interaction model)	0.119 / 0.187		

Source: own elaboration. Anger, hope and social media exposure mean-centred before computing products, to reduce non-essential multicollinearity. SE = standard error. SM = social media; b = unstandardised coefficient; p = two-tailed p value (2026).

The simple-slopes analysis, evaluated at representative values of hope and social media exposure (M ± 1 SD), allows this triple interaction to be interpreted substantively (Fig. 4). Among respondents reporting low levels of hope, the effect of anger on affective polarisation is markedly positive both under low digital exposure (simple slope = 0.498) and under high exposure (simple slope = 0.551), indicating that, in the absence of hope, the translation of anger into polarisation is practically insensitive to the media environment. Among respondents reporting high levels of hope, by contrast, the pattern is radically different: under low digital exposure, the effect of anger on polarisation reverses and becomes slightly negative (simple slope = -0.225), suggesting an almost complete buffering capacity; under high digital exposure, however, that same slope turns positive again (simple slope = 0.279), recovering roughly half of the magnitude observed among those with little hope. In other words, hope effectively protects against anger-driven polarisation only in low digital-exposure environments; intense exposure to emotional political content on social media substantially erodes that protection.

Source: own elaboration based on the triple-interaction regression model (simple slopes evaluated at M ± 1 SD) (2026).

5.5. Emotional profiles: a person-centred analysis

To complement the variable-centred analysis with a person-centred approach, a k-means cluster analysis (k = 4) was conducted on the standardised scores of anger and hope (Table 4, Fig. 5). The procedure identified four clearly differentiated profiles: a hopeful profile (25.5% of the sample; anger M = 3.41, hope M = 6.43), an angry profile (23.7%; anger M = 7.50, hope M = 4.05), an ambivalent profile (26.0%; anger M = 6.36, hope M = 6.93) and a disenchanted profile (24.8%; anger M = 3.99, hope M = 3.51).

Table 4
Emotional profiles identified through k-means cluster analysis of anger and hope (k = 4)

Profile	n	%	Anger (M)	Hope (M)	Affective polarisation (M)	Institutional particip. (M)	Non-institutional particip. (M)
Hopeful (high hope, low anger)	146	25.5	3.41	6.43	6.30	6.29	5.26
Angry (high anger, low hope)	136	23.7	7.50	4.05	7.34	4.63	6.67
Ambivalent (high anger and hope)	149	26.0	6.36	6.93	6.75	6.12	6.69
Disenchanted (low anger and hope)	142	24.8	3.99	3.51	5.24	4.60	5.20

Source: own elaboration. One-way analysis of variance on affective polarisation across the four profiles: F(3, 569) = 22.22; p < .001. Tukey's post hoc test indicates that the ambivalent profile differs significantly from neither the hopeful (p = .307) nor the angry profile (p = .113), while all other pairwise comparisons reach statistical significance (p < .01). M = mean score on a 0–10 scale; η² = .105.

The analysis of variance showed significant differences in affective polarisation across the four profiles ($F(3, 569) = 22.22$; $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .105$). Tukey's post hoc test revealed a pattern of particular interest for this study's purposes: the ambivalent profile (polarisation M = 6.75) did not differ statistically significantly from either the hopeful profile (M = 6.30; p = .307) or the angry profile (M = 7.34; p = .113), whereas all other pairwise comparisons reached statistical significance (p < .01), including the difference between the hopeful and angry profiles (p < .001) and between both of these and the disenchanted profile (M = 5.24; p < .001 in both cases). It is also worth noting that the ambivalent profile showed the highest levels of non-institutional participation together with the angry profile (M = 6.69 and M = 6.67, respectively) and levels of institutional participation comparable to those of the hopeful profile (M = 6.12 versus M = 6.29), depicting a citizen profile intensely mobilised across both participation repertoires, rather than merely conflictive or apathetic.

Source: own elaboration. Diamonds represent cluster centroids; dotted lines mark sample means of anger and hope (2026).

5.6. The interaction between fear and ideology on exclusionary belonging

The regression model for exclusionary national belonging attitudes confirmed the interaction hypothesis stated in H3. The interaction term between fear and right-wing identification was positive and significant

(b = 0.241; p = .006), while the main effect of fear alone did not reach statistical significance (b = 0.088; p = .062). As Fig. 6 illustrates, fear is only weakly associated with exclusionary belonging among respondents positioned at the centre or the left of the ideological spectrum, whereas its effect intensifies markedly among those identifying with right-wing positions **(conditional slope of fear = 0.329). Right-wing identification also showed a significant main effect (b = 0.883; p = .045).**

Source: own elaboration (observed means by binned fear level; descriptive illustration of the interaction estimated in the regression model) (2026).

5.7. Affective polarisation and ideology: a horseshoe pattern? An exploratory question

On an exploratory basis, we examined whether affective polarisation varied with ideology following a horseshoe pattern. The analysis of variance showed only a marginally significant effect ($F(4, 568) = 2.232$; $p = .064$; $\eta^2 = .016$). As shown in Fig. 7, affective polarisation was descriptively higher at both ends of the ideological spectrum (extreme left, M = 6.84; extreme right, M = 6.80) than at the centre (M = 6.14), with moderate groups in an intermediate position (moderate left, M = 6.71; moderate right, M = 6.24), but none of the Tukey post hoc comparisons reached statistical significance. This result is consistent with the still-contradictory state of the available evidence on the exact shape of the relationship between ideology and affective polarisation (Kogel and Zinnatullin, 2026; Lubej et al., 2025), and suggests that, if it exists, the horseshoe pattern may be of modest magnitude and require larger representative samples for statistical confirmation.

Source: own elaboration (2026).

5.8. Gender differences

Mean comparisons showed no significant gender differences in the intensity of hope (women, M = 5.26; men, M = 5.25; t = 0.02; p = .983) or anger (women, M = 5.29; men, M = 5.27; t = 0.14; p = .887). However, a significant difference of small magnitude was observed in non-institutional participation (women, M = 5.73; men, M = 6.29; t = -3.23; p = .001; d = -0.28), with men reporting slightly higher levels.

6. Discussion

This study's most novel finding is the identification of a fragile emotional buffer: hope negatively moderates the effect of anger on affective polarisation, but this protective capacity is significantly eroded under intense exposure to emotionally charged political content on social media (b = 0.029; p = .006). This result substantially qualifies the dual emotional pathway model that has dominated the literature, showing that hope and anger do not operate as independent forces that simply add up in opposite directions, but as components of an interdependent emotional system whose net outcome depends on the media environment in which it is experienced. This finding speaks directly to the literature on political ambivalence, which has documented that the coexistence of contradictory attitudes or emotions does not resolve uniformly but depends on the informational and motivational

context (Johnson, 2014; Burger, 2025), and provides novel empirical evidence to the still largely unresolved question of the conditions under which such ambivalence translates into polarisation rather than moderation (Webb, 2026).

This finding also dialogues with experimental research on affective contagion, according to which the emotions activated at the start of information processing condition the considerations that subsequently inform political judgement (Erisen et al., 2014). If high-intensity digital environments repeatedly expose users to anger-inducing cues, it is plausible that they tilt this initial affective anchoring towards anger, reducing the opportunities for hope to orient subsequent reasoning even among those who experience hope intensely. This interpretation, which should be tested experimentally, would help explain why the buffer is eroded under high exposure without hope itself disappearing.

Placed in comparative perspective, these results are consistent with evidence locating Spain, together with other Southern European democracies, among the European contexts with the highest levels of affective polarisation (Reiljan et al., 2024; Torcal and Comellas, 2022), and with research documenting emotionally driven polarisation within digital communities during recent Latin American elections (Lagares Díez et al., 2023; López-López et al., 2020). The erosion of the emotional buffer under high digital exposure also converges with evidence on ambivalence and polarisation in high-choice digital environments in Australia (Webb, 2026), with work on emotions and political reaction in Turkey (Erisen, 2018) and with research showing how anger connects high perceived group stakes with support for radical collective action in post-conflict settings (Borinca and Spears, 2025). The mechanism identified here is therefore unlikely to be a Spanish particularity and may be especially consequential where institutional trust is weak.

The fact that a simple mediation model proved insufficient to capture the role of social media, whereas a moderated-moderation model did succeed, carries methodological implications that extend beyond the specific case analysed here. Much of the literature on digital polarisation has investigated the role of platforms through mediational designs that presuppose a single causal pathway from emotion to polarisation via media exposure. The results of this study suggest that, at least with respect to the interaction between anger and hope, the role of social media may be better understood as a factor that modulates the strength of a pre-existing emotional interaction, rather than as a mediating link in a linear causal chain.

The cluster analysis provides a complementary and substantively relevant perspective. The identification of an ambivalent profile that constitutes the largest of the four segments identified, and whose affective polarisation cannot be statistically distinguished from that of respondents who feel only anger or only hope, suggests that a considerable share of young citizens does not fit the simple categories of "mobilised by hope" or "radicalised by anger" often used in public debate. From an applied standpoint, this finding has direct implications for the design of media literacy and depolarisation strategies: unlike the predominantly angry profile, whose anger is not counterbalanced by hope, the ambivalent profile may

represent a segment particularly receptive to interventions that reinforce its hopeful facet and reduce its exposure to high-intensity emotional digital environments.

The identification of a mobilised ambivalent segment also invites a reconsideration of the relationship between negative emotions and democratic engagement. Research on intergroup relations has shown that empathy and perceived injustice can channel the emotional reaction to suffering into solidarity-based action (Borinca et al., 2026), and that the regulation of hope and anger is decisive in the trajectory of intergroup conflicts (Halperin, 2014). From this perspective, anger is not intrinsically antidemocratic: its consequences depend on whether it is accompanied by emotions and frames that orient it towards the redress of injustice rather than towards hostility against the political adversary.

The results concerning the classic dual emotional pathway, the interaction between fear and ideology on exclusionary belonging, and the only marginally significant horseshoe pattern of ideological polarisation are, taken together, consistent with previous literature and confirm the relevance of distinguishing between discrete emotions rather than working with a generic dimension of negative affect. The fact that fear predicts exclusionary attitudes significantly more strongly among those identifying with the right than among those positioned at the centre or the left, is consistent with research on moral foundations arguing that the same emotion can activate radically different interpretive frames depending on the ideological orientation of the person experiencing it (Hatemi et al., 2019).

Finally, the absence of gender differences in declared hope and anger, together with a significant difference in non-institutional participation, suggests that gender socialisation processes operate less on the subjective experience of emotion than on its translation into observable behaviour, a distinction that deserves further attention in future research and that is consistent with the nuances provided by Grasso and Smith (2021) and Behrens (2024) regarding the complexity of the link between gender, emotion and participation.

Implications for SDG 10 and SDG 16. The results have implications for the two Sustainable Development Goals that frame this research. Regarding SDG 16, the finding that intense exposure to emotionally charged content erodes one of the emotional resources that protect against affective polarisation suggests that platform governance is not only a matter of content moderation but also a component of the institutional infrastructure of peaceful and inclusive societies (targets 16.7 and 16.10). Public policies aimed at strengthening democratic institutions could therefore include media literacy programmes oriented towards emotional self-regulation in digital environments, transparency requirements for recommendation systems that prioritise high-arousal content, and civic education initiatives that cultivate a hope grounded in collective efficacy rather than in partisan confrontation.

Regarding SDG 10, the gender gap observed in non-institutional participation despite equivalent levels of hope and anger, together with the selective effect of fear on exclusionary belonging among right-wing respondents, indicates that emotions are converted into political action unevenly across social groups and that some emotional configurations reinforce exclusionary conceptions of the political community. Interventions aimed at reducing political inequalities should therefore consider not only the material

resources for participation but also the emotional conditions under which different groups experience and act upon politics (Borinca et al., 2025; Grasso and Smith, 2021).

7. Conclusions

This study has tested a model that moves beyond the classic dual emotional pathway, showing that hope not only sustains institutional participation on its own, but also acts as a buffer against the polarising effect of anger, a buffer that is significantly eroded under intense exposure to emotionally charged political content on social media ($b = 0.029$; $p = .006$). This finding, supported by a moderated-moderation model and by a complementary cluster analysis identifying an extensive ambivalent citizen profile, offers a partial but empirically grounded answer to a question that has so far remained largely unresolved in the literature on political emotions: under what conditions the coexistence of positive and negative emotions protects against polarisation, and under what conditions it instead fuels it. Taken together, these findings support the need to replace additive models of political emotion with frameworks that recognise the interdependence between oppositely valenced emotions and their sensitivity to the media environment in which they are experienced. From the perspective of the 2030 Agenda, these findings indicate that reducing affective polarisation and promoting inclusive participation (SDG 16 and SDG 10) require attention not only to institutions and resources but also to the emotional ecology in which young citizens encounter politics, an ecology increasingly shaped by digital platforms whose design choices have consequences for democratic coexistence.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations worth noting. First, its cross-sectional nature precludes establishing strict causal relationships, so the direction of the observed associations, and in particular the temporal sequence implicit in the buffer-erosion mechanism, should be confirmed through longitudinal or experimental designs that directly manipulate exposure to emotional political content. Second, the sample, although large and diverse, is limited to the Spanish university population, restricting the generalisability of the results to other age groups or national contexts. Third, the k-means cluster analysis used to identify the emotional profiles is exploratory and descriptive in nature; future research could employ latent profile analysis with formal fit indices to confirm the robustness of the typology proposed here. Fourth, although the study engages with evidence from Latin America, Turkey and post-conflict settings, its empirical analysis is restricted to a single Western European democracy; future comparative research could examine whether the buffer-erosion mechanism operates similarly in contexts with weaker institutional trust, different histories of conflict or more pronounced socioeconomic inequalities, which would be particularly valuable for assessing its relevance to SDG 10 and SDG 16 across the Global North and South. Finally, the use of self-reported measures of social media exposure, while common in the literature, could benefit in the future from combination with observed digital behaviour data.

Declarations

Competing interests.

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Universidad Internacional de La Rioja (UNIR) (reference 110_2026; date of approval: 1 June 2026). All procedures were performed in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments, Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation) and Spanish Organic Law 3/2018. The approval covered all procedures described in this article.

Informed consent.

Informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants before they accessed the questionnaire, between 30 June and 24 July 2026. Participants were informed of the aims of the study, the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation, their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, the use of their anonymised data for scientific purposes and the publication of aggregated results. All participants were adults, and no identifying information is published.

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Author Contribution

Author contributions. Conceptualisation: VRS and VHPG. Methodology: VRS and RVE. Formal analysis: VHPG and ACM. Investigation: RVE and ACM. Data curation: VHPG. Writing - original draft: VRS . Writing - review and editing: RVE and ACM. Supervision: VRS . VHPG additionally served as corresponding author. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Data Availability

Data availability. The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available because the informed consent obtained from participants did not cover public release of individual-level data, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679, but they are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request. An anonymised version of the dataset, the codebook and the analysis scripts are provided to the editors and reviewers as Supplementary Information for the purposes of peer review.

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Figures

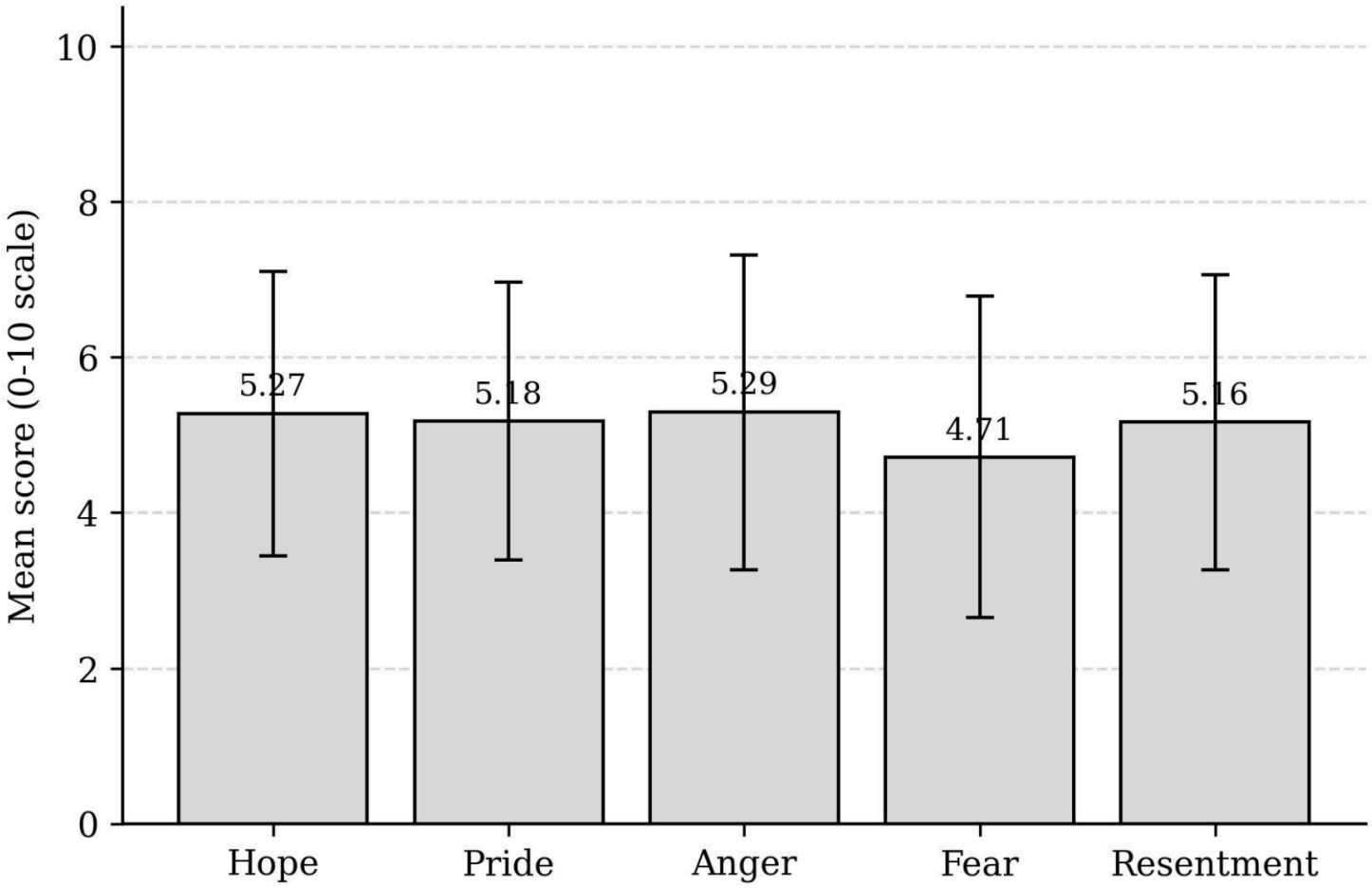


Figure 1

Mean scores of discrete political emotions. Bars show the mean intensity of hope, pride, anger, fear and resentment on a 0-10 scale (N = 573). Source: own elaboration based on survey data (2026).

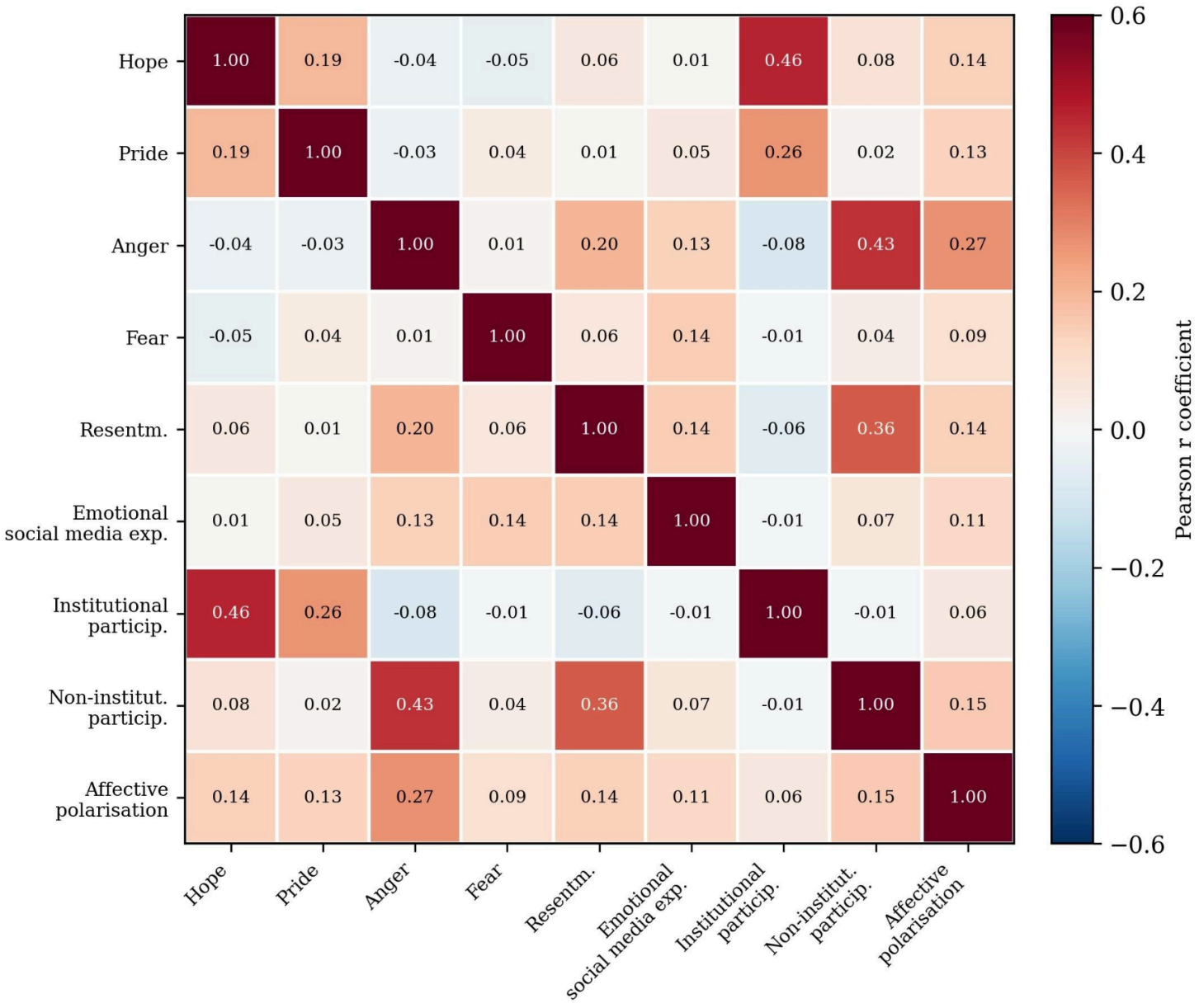


Figure 2

Correlations among political emotions, social media exposure and outcome variables. Cells show Pearson correlation coefficients (N = 573). Source: own elaboration (2026).

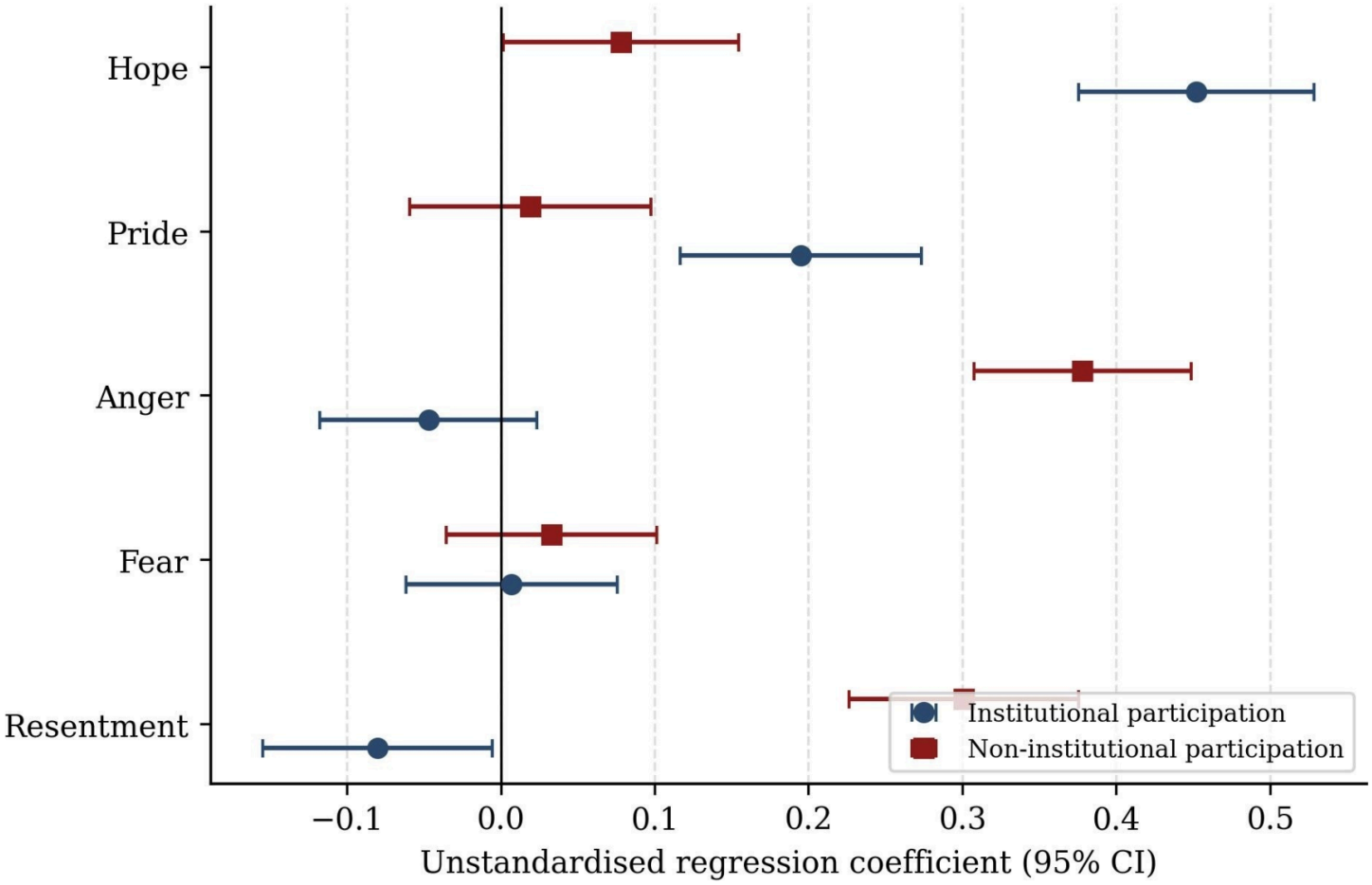


Figure 3

Effects of discrete emotions on institutional and non-institutional participation. Points show unstandardised regression coefficients from hierarchical regression Model 3 and error bars show 95% confidence intervals (N = 573). Source: own elaboration (2026).

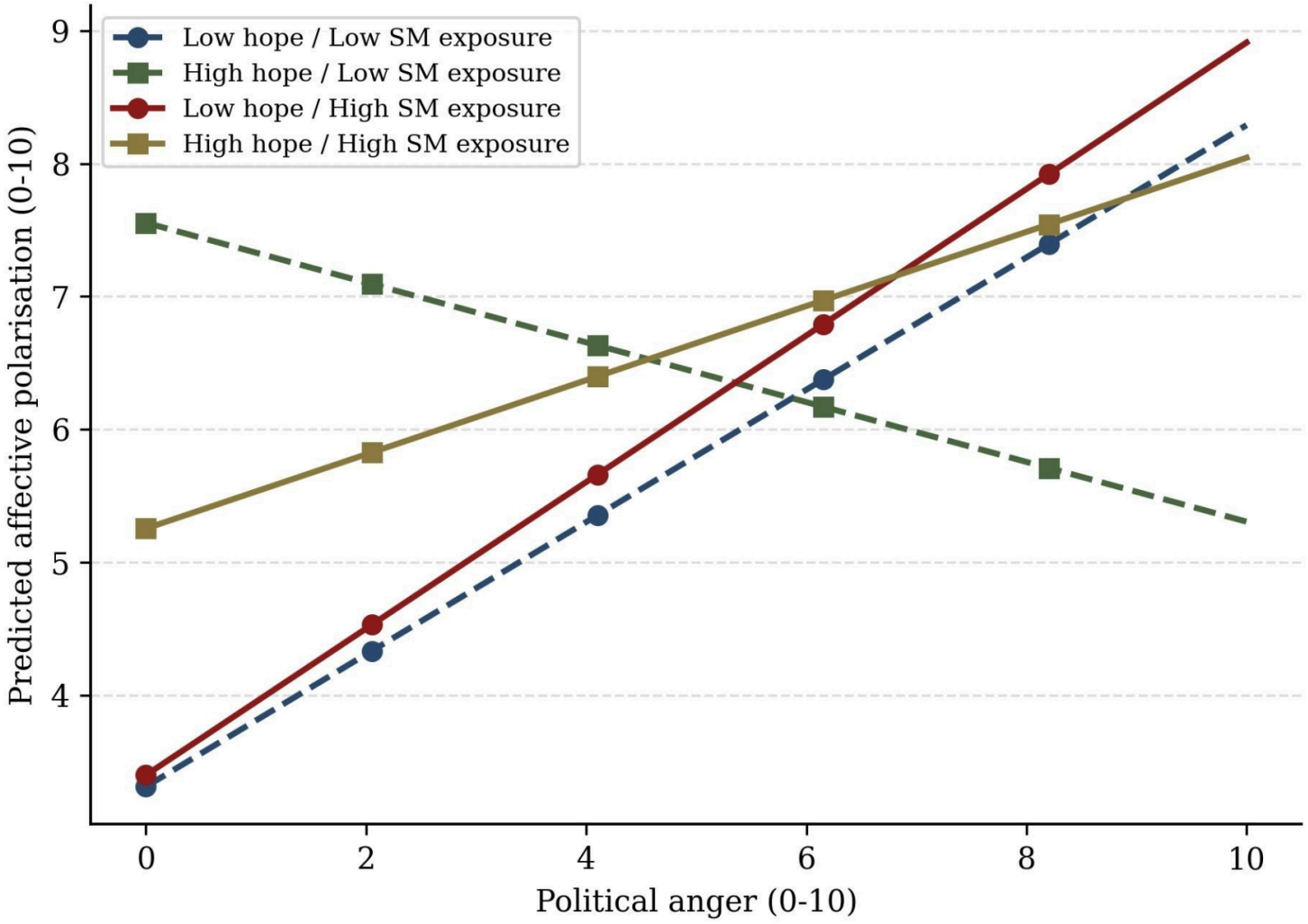


Figure 4

Hope's buffering capacity is eroded under high digital exposure. Lines show predicted affective polarisation (0-10) as a function of political anger for combinations of low and high hope and low and high social media exposure (M ± 1 SD), derived from the triple-interaction regression model (N = 573). Source: own elaboration (2026).

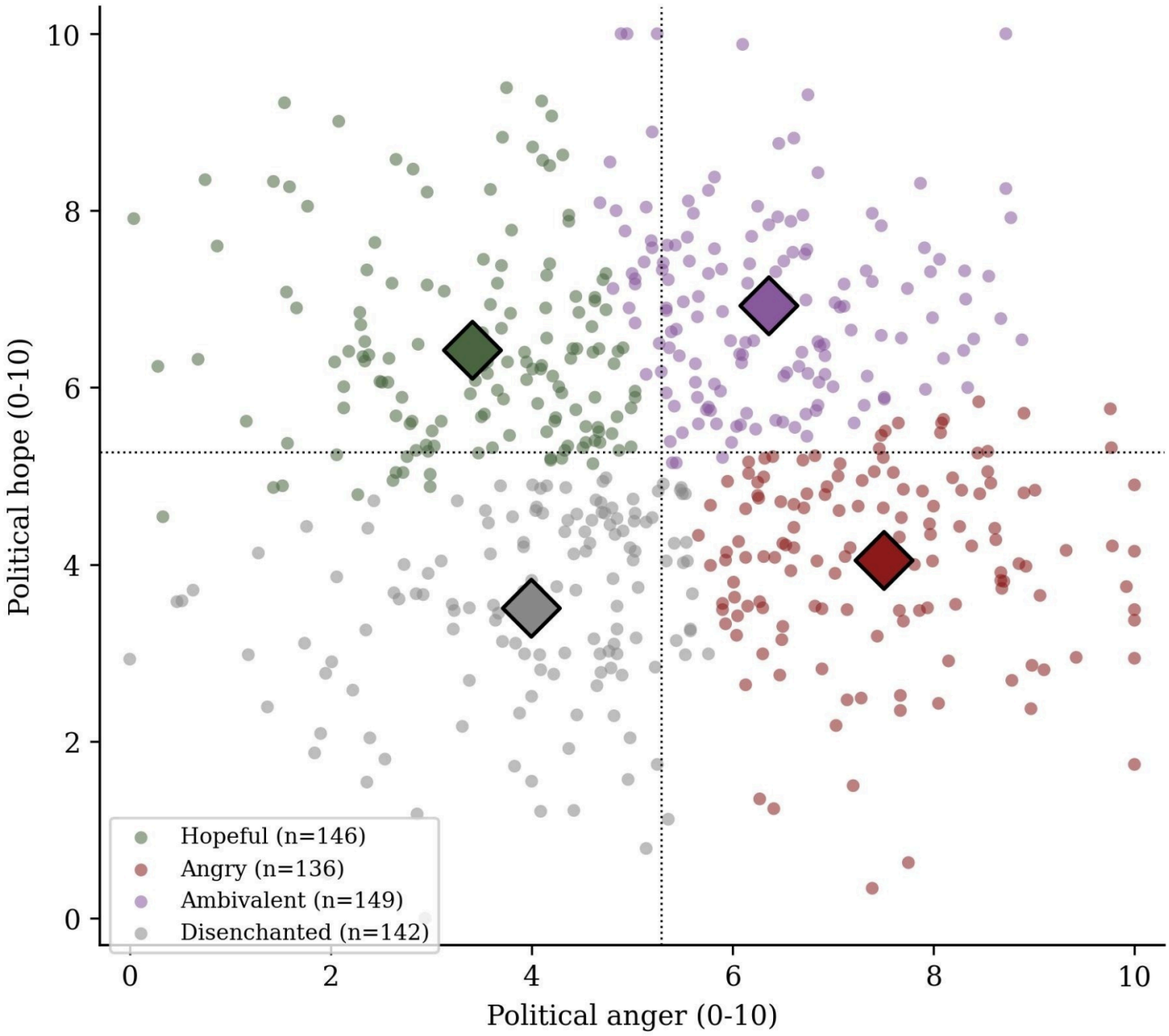


Figure 5

Emotional profiles identified through k-means cluster analysis (k = 4). Each point represents a respondent positioned by political anger (horizontal axis) and political hope (vertical axis); diamonds represent cluster centroids and dotted lines mark the sample means of anger and hope (N = 573). Source: own elaboration (2026).

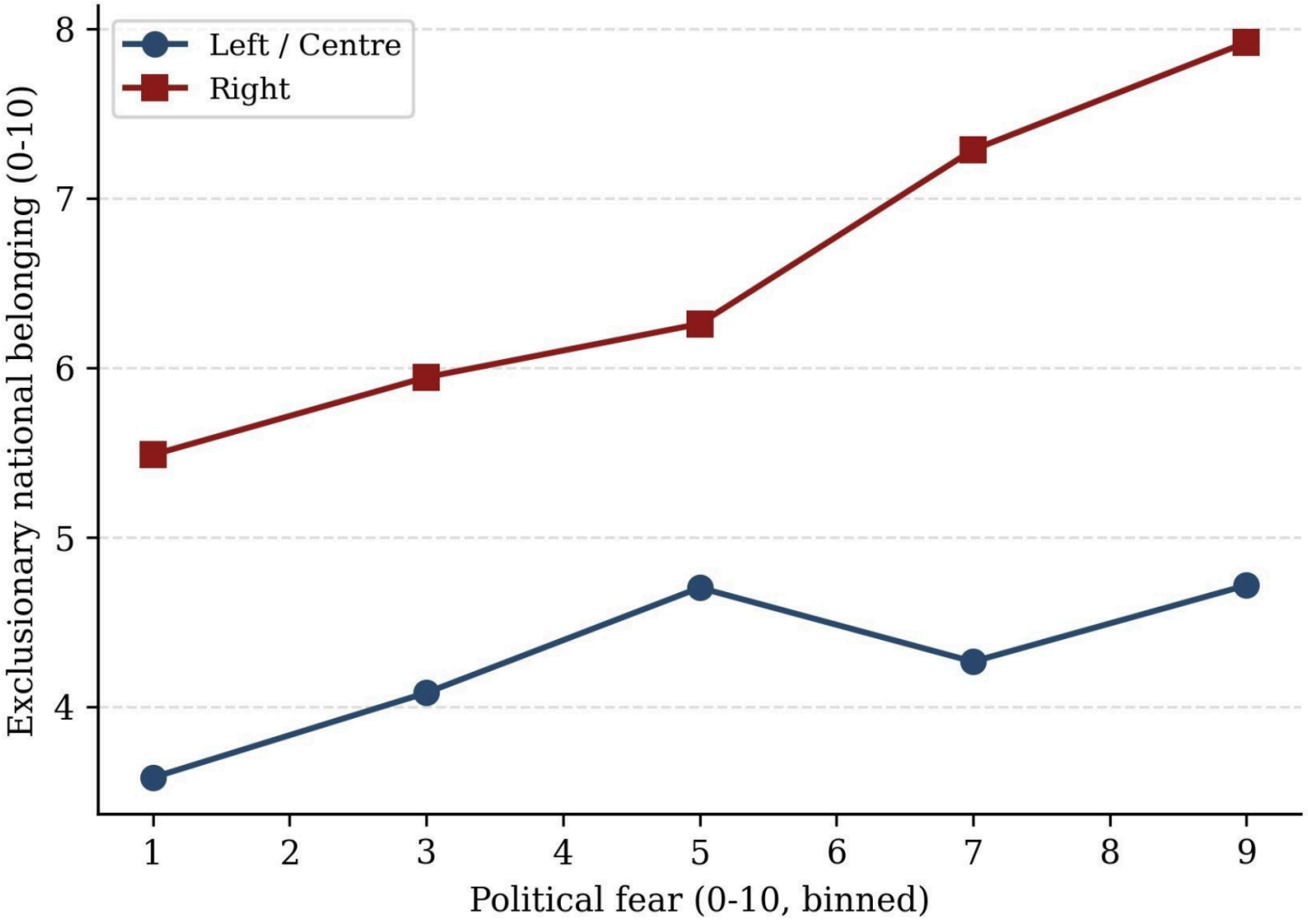


Figure 6

Interaction between political fear and ideology on exclusionary national belonging. Lines show mean exclusionary belonging (0-10) across binned levels of political fear for left/centre and right-wing respondents (N = 573). Source: own elaboration (observed means by binned fear level; descriptive illustration of the interaction estimated in the regression model) (2026).

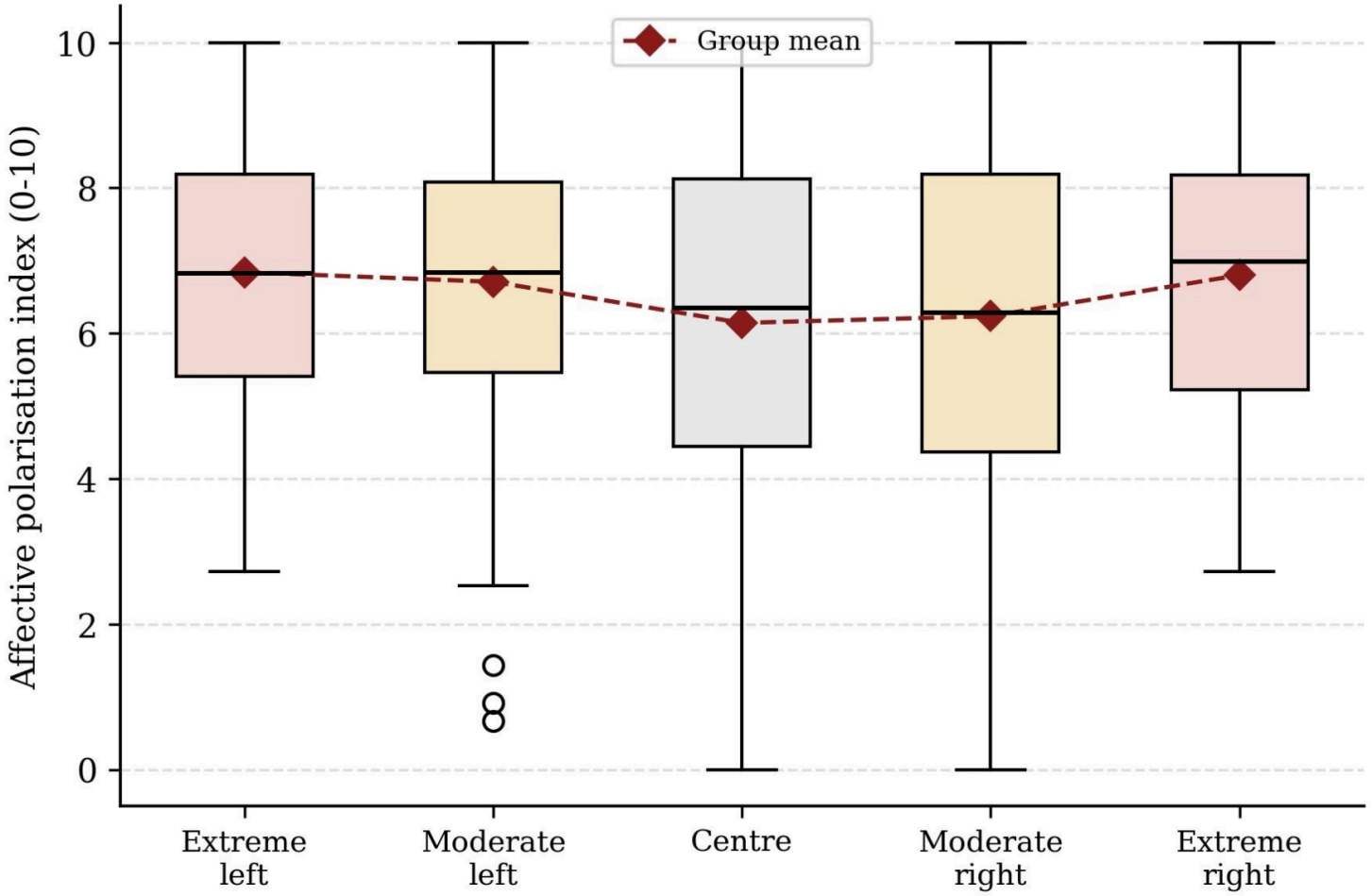


Figure 7

Affective polarisation by ideological group. Boxplots show the distribution of the affective polarisation index (0-10) in five ideological groups; diamonds joined by a dashed line indicate group means (N = 573). The overall difference is only marginally significant ($F(4, 568) = 2.232$; $p = .064$). Source: own elaboration (2026).