The increase in different forms of political polarization has recently changed numerous countries throughout the world. People's beliefs, preferences, and behaviors have become more divergent, leading to the emergence of diverse but fragmented societies. Importantly, this global surge of political polarization has received a lot of attention from social scientists. Different disciplines have successfully identified the psychological, structural, and institutional correlates of this phenomenon. However, a conceptual framework that would unify these findings has been missing. The current project seeks to verify the integrative model of political polarization that accounts for variables located on the individual-, community-, and country-level of analysis. It proposes that political polarization originates from a range of factors that operate independently and in interaction with each other. The model also suggests novel means of depolarization and the correlates of two previously unexamined phenomena – political conflict fatigue and hostility toward non-voters.

Political polarization has numerous forms and operationalizations. One of its types is ideological polarization – a specific pattern of beliefs, opinions, and values in a given society. It may be understood as opinion radicalization, stronger association between different political beliefs (e.g., social and economic conservatism), or associating political beliefs with initially "apolitical" practices (e.g., food consumption). Another type of political polarization is elite polarization – high levels of ideological distance between parties and high levels of homogeneity within the parties. The last type of political polarization – affective polarization – encompasses the tendency to view out-partisans negatively and co-partisans positively.

Although vast, the political polarization research is not limitation-free. First, the transfer of knowledge between political science, sociology, and social psychology is insufficient, resulting in a fragmented literature. Next, the relationships between different types of polarization have not been fully established. Then, some potential antecedents of political polarization such as malleability beliefs, have not been tested yet. Another deficiency is a relative shortage of designs that would warrant strong causality claims. Finally, some political polarization -related issues, such as political conflict fatigue or hostility toward non-voters, have not received any attention at all. This project aims to account for these deficiencies.

Based on past research and theories from social psychology, political science, and sociology, we propose that political polarization is associated with a) the content and structure of political belief systems; b) perceiving outgroup's attitudes as irrational, emotional, and externally imposed; c) social norms, d) type of identification with one's political group, e) the properties of political systems. Next, we expect that affective polarization will be decreased by a) respectful contact with political opponents, b) beliefs that outgroup perceives the ingroup to be human, d) believing that people and groups may change overtime. Finally, we propose that political conflict fatigue leads to disengagement from politics and that hostility toward non-voters originates from treating political conflict as a matter of right and wrong.

The project consists of four parallel research lines. Line 1 involves a cross-cultural 15-minute online survey aimed at examining the institutional, structural, and psychological correlates of political polarization, political conflict fatigue and hostility toward non-voters (at least 30 democratic countries will be included). The longitudinal correlates of these phenomena are investigated in Line 2 that includes a 3-wave survey of Poles (N_{T1} = 2,222; N_{T2} = 1,333; N_{T3} = 800), in which three 20-minut measurements will be divided by two 6-month intervals. Line 3 consists of seven experiments devised to test for causes of political polarization, check the efficiency of different depolarization methods, and identify the consequences of exposure to a heated political debate. The manipulated variables will involve a) ideological polarization (Study 3.1; N = 432), b) the sense of political significance (Study 3.2; N = 1,296), meta-humanization (Study 3.3; N = 620), d) respectful contact (Study 3.4; N = 400), e) malleability beliefs (Study 3.5; N = 318), f) belief system content and structure similarity (Study 3.6; N = 400) and g) exposure to political conflict (Study 3.7; N = 400). Across all experiments, supporters of the opposition and the ruling party(ies) will account for 50% of the sample each. Line 4 will use repeated cross-sectional data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems to examine the association between country-level changes the democracy quality and different types of political polarization.

The project will result in at least 5 research papers submitted to JCR journals and 5 popular scientific report aimed at general public.