

# Control, Polarize, and Dehumanize the Human Being from the Hidden Power that Acts and Controls Contemporary Political Action

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## Abstract

Today's society is dominated by two political and social phenomena: polarization and tension. The contexts derived from these two concepts hinder collective understanding and erode the foundations of democratic dialogue. In an increasingly fragmented and scientifically devalued environment, public debates are transformed into ideological confrontations in which extremism prevails, and nuances, however small, are rejected. This phenomenon is not accidental but is the result of the complex mechanisms of power, which have the capacity to shape our feelings and attitudes, since they feed on strategies aimed at media manipulation with reductionist discourses and an exacerbated commercialization of social conflicts. This essay explores the dynamics that sustain and amplify these tensions, analyzing how the control of the masses, through the media and political narratives, acts as a lubricant for the structures of power with the aim of strengthening it. We start from the impact produced by these dynamics that are oriented towards the dehumanization of the individual, reducing him to another cog in the machinery of a political system that helps a few and denies it to the majority, which it controls. We also examine ideological reductionism, which is used as a tool to divide and manipulate societies, fostering favorable environments for the development of hatred and confrontation. We also address current phenomena: the role played by biased headlines in the written media and in the spoken media on television, applied to the same task in the so-called "news", whose objective is to build polarized contexts, since the political circus that normalizes hostility between opposing sectors produces a commercialization of the conflict, and, at the same time, turns social division into a lucrative spectacle. In contrast to this dynamic, we also reflect on the role of citizen indifference, which becomes an involuntary accomplice of these structures. Finally, we propose an analysis to be applied to practical

solutions, facing the dilemma between historical continuity and the hope of a change in basic assumptions that would allow for the construction of a more just and fraternal society. With this criterion, we will reflect on current challenges and the possibilities for transformation in a world like the current one, which is marked by polarization and conflict.

### Keywords

Polarization, Social Tension, Dehumanization, Ideological Reductionism, Mass Control, Commercialization of Conflict, Citizen Participation, Politics, Media

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## 1. Mass Control, Lubricant of Power Structures

Mass control is constructed as a tool that has the capacity to guarantee the stability and perpetuation of power structures. From the classical reflections of Plato and Aristotle to modern studies of social psychology, emphasis has been placed on how collective dynamics are shaped to change individual behavior, reducing social diversity to a homogeneous and predictable whole.

Gustave Le-Bon, in his influential work, *Psychology of Crowds*, whose first edition appeared in 1895, accurately described this phenomenon when he stated that, within crowds, the individual loses his singularity and is reduced to a collective entity where emotion predominates over reason (Le-Bon, 2009). For Le-Bon, this process has two peculiarities: 1) it has the capacity to nullify personal virtues; 2) it simplifies decision-making by those in power, as they will thus be able to better manipulate a homogeneous group with a more efficient result and with less effort than when dealing only with autonomous individuals.

In this context, mass control is not only a question of social order, but a mechanism designed to combine hegemonies. Systems of power, from authoritarian regimes to representative democracies, have found in collective manipulation techniques a tool that helps them legitimize their actions. Propaganda, fearmongering, and the appeal to basic emotions, such as patriotism or hatred towards a common enemy, are recurring strategies. Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, warns about how totalitarian regimes exploit this dynamic to suppress critical thinking and encourage unconditional loyalty (Arendt, 1951). However, even in democratic societies, mass manipulation occurs in a more subtle way, using carefully constructed narratives in the media and political speeches.

The “We (Ours)” that appears from mass control becomes a shield to protect power structures, as it dilutes individual responsibilities and justifies collective decisions. Mass psychology explains how these dynamics can lead to irrational behavior, from nationalist fervor to media lynchings. The individual, in his eagerness to belong to a collective, gives up his autonomy to the group, generating fertile ground for political exploitation. For this reason, mass control not only lubricates power structures, but also reinforces them, making them less vulnerable to

questioning and dissent. To this, we add that current democracies have evolved (Junquera Rubio, 2021: pp. 57-74). (Figure 1)



**Figure 1.** I Want You for U.S. Army poster (1917). Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division of the United States. Digital code ppsca.50554. (<https://loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppsca.50554>)

## 2. Dehumanization of the Individual in the Network of Power

In the framework of power, the individual is not only subjected to mass control, but his humanity is eroded and transformed into a utilitarian function at the service of a broader system. This dehumanization does not occur explicitly, but through subtle mechanisms that fragment identity and reduce the subject to a functional category. Michel Foucault, in his work *Surveiller et Punir. Naissance de la prison*, addresses how modern institutions, prisons, schools, or factories, not only organize bodies, but also shape minds, turning individuals into disciplined cogs within a social machinery (Foucault, 2003). This transformation implies a progressive loss of identity, as structures impose defined roles, which prioritize efficiency and control over personal uniqueness (Junquera Rubio, 2023).

Dehumanization works under the logic of standardization. In the search for stability and order, power structures minimize individual differences and privilege obedience over creativity or critical thinking. The German philosopher of Korean origin, Byung-Chul Han, in his work *The Society of Fatigue*, points out that the contemporary individual has ceased to be an autonomous subject and has become a “self-entrepreneur,” trapped in a system that alienates him through self-exploitation (Han, 2010). This paradox reinforces power, since the individual, although free, imposes on himself the same rules that help the system, thus losing his ability to resist or transform his reality. (Figure 2)



**Figure 2.** Individualism in the consumer society. Anonymous people wandering around Times Square (Pixabay, Lenzatic).

(<https://pixabay.com/es/photos/nueva-york-times-square-america-5276112>)

The psychological impact of this dehumanization is profound. By being reduced to a category: consumer, voter, worker, etc., the individual faces a loss of existential purpose that disconnects him from his authentic sense of belonging. Alienation, as described by Karl Marx in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, which were published posthumously in 1932, not only affects the worker in his relationship with the product of his work, but the human being in his capacity to recognize himself as a full and autonomous being (Marx, 1932). In this alienation, personal emotions and aspirations are replaced by the priorities of the system, generating a feeling of emptiness that, paradoxically, contributes to the perpetuation of the power structure; that is, a dehumanized individual does not question, does not rebel, simply acts as expected of him.

Dehumanization is, therefore, not a side effect of power, but one of its most effective tools. By stripping the individual of his or her ability to think, the system ensures its dominance, transforming people into more exploitable resources. The recovery of humanity, understood as the vindication of singularity and autonomy, is thus presented as an act of resistance against a power that looks to nullify what makes us authentically human.

### 3. The Role of the Media as Catalysts and Amplifiers

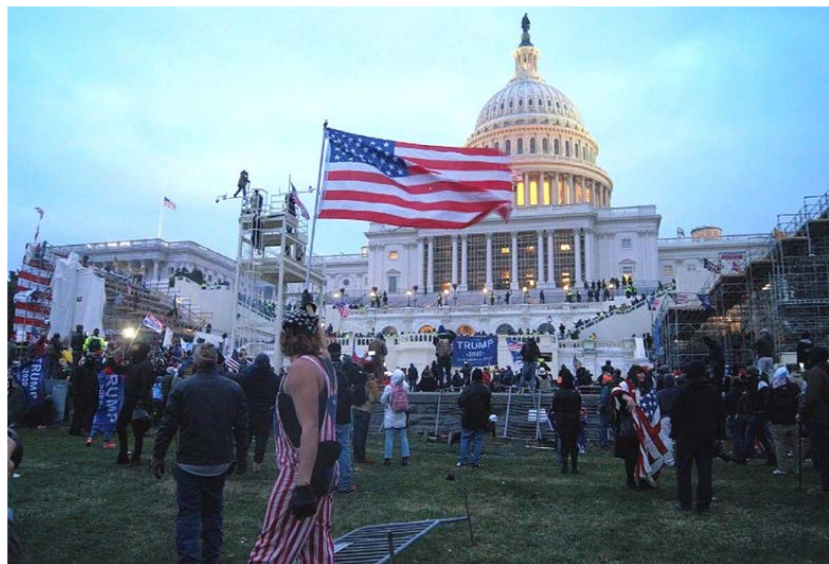
The media have assumed a vital role as catalysts and amplifiers in the dynamics of social control, shaping collective beliefs and reinforcing power structures. In Michel Foucault's theoretical framework, the media are not mere transmitters of information, but control devices that perpetuate new forms of discipline and supervision (Foucault, 2003). Through them, hegemonic discourses are legitimized that strengthen power dynamics, transforming the individual into a passive recipient

of prefabricated messages. In this logic, the media function as instruments to construct homogeneous narratives, turning the “herd” into a docile and moldable mass.

On the other hand, the concept of anomie developed by Durkheim (1897) becomes especially relevant to understanding the impact of the media on the contemporary social fabric. The alienation that results from not feeling part of a community takes on a new nuance when the media, instead of building bridges for social cohesion, worsens fragmentation by prioritizing sensationalism and polarizing messages. The breakdown of the social order that Durkheim associated with changes in the division of labor finds in the media a platform that amplifies these tensions, generating a social ecosystem where disconnection and isolation deepen.

The press, and more recently, digital media, are used as mechanisms that not only inform, but structure reality itself. They select which topics are relevant, decide which voices are amplified, and which silences are imposed. This process, which theorist Noam Chomsky called “manufacturing consent” in his eponymous work, ensures that the masses accept without question the narratives that suit the elites (Chomsky, 1988). In this sense, the media not only function as intermediaries between power and society but become architects of a reality that strengthens divisions and reinforces the dynamics of control.

The psychological and social impact of this media role is twofold. On the one hand, individuals bombarded by contradictory and simplified messages experience a state of bewilderment that feeds the anomie described by Durkheim. On the other hand, constant exposure to narratives of fear, hatred, or collective euphoria feeds extreme emotions that deactivate critical thinking, generating a citizenry that is more reactive than reflective. Thus, the media become an amplifier of the dynamics of social control, legitimizing power while deepening the fragmentation of the community fabric.



**Figure 3.** Storming of the Capitol (January 2021).

([https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:2021\\_storming\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_Capitol\\_09.jpg](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:2021_storming_of_the_United_States_Capitol_09.jpg))

In this scenario, the media are not only a tool of power, but a space where the battle for social cohesion or dissolution is waged. The written press can be a channel for building communities, but when it acts as a catalyst for anomie and misinformation, it reinforces the isolation of the individual and perpetuates his dehumanization. (Figure 3)

#### 4. Ideological Reductionism

Ideological reductionism is one of the most effective strategies for simplifying the complexities of reality and ensuring control of the masses. Julius Caesar, in the first century BC, ensured with his famous maxim *Divide et impera*<sup>1</sup>, the fragmentation of society into opposing factions. The context of dividing and separating not only weakens the ability for individuals, and social resistance but also helps its manipulation.

Today, this strategy has found fertile ground in political communication, where narratives are built from rigid dichotomies that end nuances and force people to adopt unwavering positions. Being part of a faction means, in many cases, accepting a monolithic vision of the problems without questioning their foundations or possible internal contradictions.

In this context, ideological reductionism becomes a tool for political loyalty. Belonging to a group requires absolute adherence to a set of dogmas that, although they may be debatable, are presented as irrefutable truths. This can be seen in contemporary debates of high emotional tension, such as the conflict between Israel and Palestine, where narratives tend to erase historical, political, and human complexities to impose a single legitimate version. The same occurs in polarized discussions on issues such as climate change, feminism, sport, etc.: the individual must choose between “yes” or “no”, between “good” or “bad”, with no room for dialogue or critical reflection.

The philosopher George Lakoff, in his work *Don't Think of an Elephant*, underlines how the metaphors and conceptual frameworks we use to interpret reality are designed to reinforce certain ideologies (Lakoff, 2004). These frameworks, carefully constructed by leaders and the media, shape not only how we understand problems, but also how we react emotionally to them. Language thus becomes a powerful weapon to reinforce ideological reductionism: emotionally charged terms such as “pro-life” or “anti-athlete” encapsulate complex positions in labels that are easy to digest but difficult to challenge.

The main danger of this dynamic lies in its ability to perpetuate social polarization. When people are forced to choose between extreme situations, the possibility of building consensus or finding a middle ground is weakened. Furthermore, ideological reductionism fosters dogmatic thinking that inhibits the ability to question not only adversaries, but also inconsistencies within one's own group. In this way, public debate is transformed into a symbolic battlefield where the important thing is not to solve problems, but to strengthen loyalties and defeat the ideological enemy.

Ideological reductionism is a form of control that disables the critical capacity

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<sup>1</sup>*Divide et impera* is attributed to Julius Caesar, but as a Roman leader he never pronounced it, nor does it appear in any of his writings.

of the masses by offering simple answers to complex questions. In a society divided into irreconcilable factions, power finds its best ally, since in a scenario in which citizens, worried and distracted by internal struggles, stop questioning the structures that govern them.

## 5. Biased Headlines, Shaping Opinions

Biased headlines are one of the most effective tools of media manipulation, since they hide complete narratives in a few words, generating an immediate impact on public feeling. This practice is neither innocent nor random; it responds to specific interests that look to combine ideological dogmas and maintain an audience faithful to certain positions. In this sense, the press acts as an executive arm of political discourses, setting up a symbiotic relationship with political parties and ideological movements. By shaping public opinion through biased headlines, the media not only inform, but also create a parallel reality in which each side finds arguments to reinforce its worldview.

The alliance between media groups and political forces is manifested in the deliberate choice of topics to highlight and in the language used to present the facts. For example, terms such as “illegal” or “refugee” can drastically shape the feeling of the same reality, depending on the intention of what is published in a newspaper. This phenomenon, which linguist [Lakoff \(2004\)](#) describes as “framing,” allows headlines to guide audiences toward predetermined interpretations, even before the content is delved into. Thus, the press does not limit itself to narrating facts but constructs ideological meanings that reinforce social divisions.

The goal of this dynamic is to generate tension, an emotional state that benefits both the media and political parties. On the one hand, the sensationalism of headlines tends to polarize the audience, attracting the most radical sectors and ensuring their loyalty to certain programs or newspapers. On the other hand, this tension feeds the narratives of the parties, which find discontent and confrontation a fertile ground to mobilize their bases. This perverse feedback turns the press into a factory of indignation, where the goal is not to clarify the facts, but to manipulate emotions to support the ideological status quo.

The propagation of biased headlines has profound consequences for the social fabric. Polarization, worsened by the media, makes it difficult to build a public space where ideas can be debated in a constructive manner. In addition, it encourages a passive consumption of information, where audiences accept without questioning the premises implicit in the headlines, thus contributing to the consolidation of dogmas and prejudices. This media strategy not only shapes opinions but also undermines the ability of societies to confront complex problems with a critical spirit and inclusive solutions.

## 6. The Political Circus, a Perfect Breeding Ground for Social Hate

The contemporary political circus has degenerated into a spectacle where confrontation and disqualification have become the main discursive tools. Beyond the

“canned truths” that simplify social, economic, or ideological problems, the tone of the speeches and the attitudes of political leaders feed a climate of polarization and social resentment. Far from seeking consensus or proposing real solutions, many politicians opt for strategies of personal attack and theatricality, which not only distort public debate, but also foster hatred among citizens who sympathize with one side or the other.

Parliament, the Senate, or official forums, which should be spaces for constructive deliberation, have become scenarios where veiled insults, constant interruptions, and histrionic gestures predominate. This dynamic not only degrades the quality of political debate but also legitimizes intolerant attitudes among party bases. When they see their leaders confront each other in a disrespectful manner, followers replicate this behavior in their social environments, extending the tension beyond institutional boundaries. The phenomenon is amplified in informal spaces such as social networks or television debates, where immediacy and the search for notoriety turn any exchange into a media-pitched battle.

The construction of irreconcilable enmities is a deliberate tactic that reinforces political tribalism. By constantly disqualifying the adversary, leaders not only ensure the unconditional loyalty of their followers but also channel their frustration toward an external enemy. Political scientist Mouffe (2005), in her theory of “political antagonism”, highlights how conflict is inherent to democracy, but warns that when it overflows and loses the limits of mutual respect, society runs the risk of fracturing into irreconcilable factions. This worsened antagonism, instead of enriching democratic debate, reduces it to a confrontation of irreducible positions that block any possibility of dialogue or progress.

The political circus not only polarizes but also trivializes social problems. By focusing on the spectacular nature of the confrontation, leaders divert attention from structural issues that affect citizens. This theater of confrontation generates a false illusion of political activity, where aggressive exchanges replace proposals for effective solutions. Meanwhile, real problems, such as economic inequalities or the environmental crisis, are relegated to the background, eclipsed by the maelstrom of superficial polemics.

The political circus is not an accident or an inevitable consequence, but a deliberate strategy to combine power through social division. By inciting hatred and perpetuating confrontation, leaders turn citizens into passive spectators of a degrading spectacle, which reinforces resentment and weakens community ties. Overcoming this model requires a change in the quality of political discourse and greater responsibility from the actors involved.

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## 7. Commodification of Political Conflict

The commodification of political conflict is one of the most perverse dynamics of contemporary democracies. In an environment where debates cease to be a space for deliberation and are transformed into a spectacle, political conflict becomes a marketable product that helps a range of actors, from political parties to media corporations and digital platforms. This process not only fuels the political circus already discussed, but perpetuates it as a profitable industry that capitalizes on social divisions and collective discontent.

Today, political conflicts are presented as dramatized narratives designed to capture the attention of audiences. The media, aware of the power of sensationalism, amplify these tensions through alarmist headlines, polarizing coverage, and incendiary debates that maximize the reach and profitability of their content. Political scientist [Street \(2012\)](#) pointed out that contemporary politics is intertwined with the logic of entertainment, where what matters is not the substance of the message, but its ability to generate audience and engagement. In this scenario, digital platforms play a crucial role by monetizing conflict through algorithms that privilege the most divisive content, since this guarantees greater interaction.

For their part, political parties are not immune to this market logic. Far from looking to resolve tensions, many leaders use them as a tool to mobilize their bases, build loyalty among followers, and attract resources. In the context of permanent campaigns, politicians turn each controversial issue into an opportunity to combine their image and discredit their adversary, even if this means worsening conflicts that could be resolved through dialogue. This approach responds to what Chantal Mouffe describes as “the politics of antagonism,” where constant confrontation is prioritized over cooperation and consensus.

The commercialization of political conflict not only affects institutional dynamics but also has a profound impact on society. By transforming debates into lucrative spectacles, the original meaning of conflict as a driver of social change is distorted. Instead of being a tool to name and resolve collective problems, conflict comes to an end, perpetuated by those who obtain economic or symbolic benefits from its existence. Meanwhile, true citizen demands are relegated, eclipsed by the media vortex and the noise of artificial confrontations.

This commercialization also generates a vicious circle: the more polarized society is, the greater the profitability of conflict, which encourages the actors involved to intensify divisions. Ultimately, this erodes the quality of democracy, as institutions, media, and parties become complicit in a logic that prioritizes profit over collective well-being. Breaking this cycle requires not only a change in the ethics of those who take part in the political game, but also a more conscious and critical citizenry, capable of questioning the dynamics that turn conflict into a commodity.

## 8. Indifference as an Ally of the System

Social indifference stands as a silent but powerful ally of power structures. In a system where the dynamics of polarization, commercialization of conflict, and

control of the masses combine to support the status quo, the apathy of large sectors of the population becomes a mechanism that eases the perpetuation of these dynamics. More than simple disinterest, this indifference is the result of complex factors that include emotional exhaustion, distrust of institutions, and the feeling of helplessness in the face of structural problems.

One of the fundamental reasons for this apathy is learned helplessness, a concept developed by psychologist Seligman (1975), which describes how, when faced with repeated exposure to situations perceived as unchangeable, individuals tend to resign themselves and abandon any effort to change them. In the political and social context, the feeling that “nothing changes” or that relevant decisions are beyond the reach of the average citizen generates a withdrawal from the public sphere. This phenomenon, in turn, reinforces power dynamics, since a demobilized citizenry does not pose a real threat to the elites that control the system.

In addition, the constant bombardment of polarized and conflicting information has a paralyzing effect. As Byung-Chul Han argues in *The Fatigue Society*, we live in an era marked by an overload of stimuli and demands, which produces widespread exhaustion, which hinders the ability of individuals to actively engage in political and social issues (Han, 2010). Indifference, in this sense, is not only an act of passivity, but also a form of self-defense against an environment that is perceived as hostile and exhausting.

Social pressure to conform to norms and avoid personal conflict leads many to accept existing conditions without questioning them. This dynamic is reinforced by the media and hegemonic narratives, which normalize inequalities and divert attention to trivial issues or superficial controversies.

On the other hand, conformism plays a crucial role in consolidating apathy. Social pressure to conform to norms and avoid personal conflict leads many to accept existing conditions without questioning them. This dynamic is reinforced by the media and hegemonic narratives, which normalize inequalities and divert attention to trivial issues or superficial controversies. Instead of questioning power structures, much of the population chooses to adapt to them, finding indifference a form of emotional and social stability.

Indifference is not, however, a static condition. Political and economic elites are aware of its usefulness and, in many cases, actively promote it. Disinformation, excessive bureaucratization of democratic processes, and the discrediting of social movements are strategies designed to deactivate the transformative potential of citizenship. Thus, apathy is not only a consequence of the system, but also a deliberate goal to neutralize resistance.

Ultimately, social indifference reinforces power dynamics by deactivating the engine of change: the conscious participation of citizens. By allowing the system to be used without significant opposition, even if involuntarily, the indifferent become complicit in its perpetuation. Overcoming this apathy requires not only a collective awakening, but also the construction of genuine spaces for participation that give people back the feeling that their action matters, and that it can transform

reality.

## 9. Utopian Solutions: Is There a Way out of the Vicious Circle?

The current panorama, dominated by mass control, ideological reductionism, and the commercialization of political conflict, seems to condemn the individual to a passivity that perpetuates power structures. However, throughout history, glimmers of hope have appeared in the form of social movements, educational advances, and cultural transformations that have shown that change, although difficult, is not impossible. Although human beings tend towards continuity and find security in obedience to prove leaders, there are strategies to break the vicious circle and move towards a more just and balanced paradigm.

Critical education stands as one of the fundamental tools to counteract these dynamics. Paulo Freire, in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, defended the need for an education that not only informs, but also makes citizens aware of their reality and capable of transforming it (Freire, 1970). Instead of being passive recipients of information, individuals must become active agents capable of questioning imposed narratives and analyzing the world from a critical perspective. This educational approach not only encourages independent thinking but also strengthens the collective ability to resist ideological manipulations.



**Figure 4.** Citizen assemblies of the 11M movement in Madrid (Spain) (Wikiwand).

(<https://www.wikiwand.com/es/articles/15M>)

Another possible path is the promotion of more horizontal and participatory forms of political organization. Direct democracy, driven by digital technologies, has shown enormous potential to empower citizens and reduce the intermediation of traditional elites. Examples such as participatory budgets or citizen deliberation

platforms show that it is possible to build governance models where the voice of the people has a real weight in collective decisions. However, these tools must be implemented carefully to prevent them from becoming instruments of manipulation or exclusion. (Figure 4)

Citizen participation can also receive help from a change in media culture. Instead of passively consuming information, society must foster media literacy that enables the identification of biases, hidden agendas, and manipulative strategies present in the media. This change requires both individual effort and stricter regulation on the transparency and accountability of media actors.

Finally, it is essential to recognize that systemic changes do not arise spontaneously or at once. As Arendt (1951) has pointed out in her analysis of revolutions, these are historical exceptions that require not only favorable material conditions, but also a deep collective desire for transformation. Although history shows that human beings tend to prefer the stability of the known over the uncertainty of change, it also shows that, at critical moments, collective will can overcome inertia and generate authentic social revolutions.

## 10. Conclusion

In short, although current dynamics seem to be part of a vicious circle that is difficult to break, the future is not written. The solution lies not in utopias, but in small, cumulative changes that can open cracks in the power structures. We know that utopias are unattainable. While the path to a new paradigm is long and full of obstacles, history teaches us that change, although improbable, is never impossible.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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