RUDN Journal of Political Science. ISSN 2313-1438 (Print), ISSN 2313-1446 (Online) **2025 Vol. 27 No. 3 430–443**
Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: ПОЛИТОЛОГИЯ http://journals.rudn.ru/political-science

DOI: 10.22363/2313-1438-2025-27-3-430-443
EDN: JIGGWO

Research article / Научная статья

Social Media as an Alter Ego of Reality: What Does Affective Political Polarization Teach Us?

Denis K. Stukal, Anna N. Shilina, Andrei S. Akhremenko ✉

HSE University, *Moscow, Russian Federation*
✉ aakhremenko@hse.ru

Abstract. Affective political polarization is comprehensively considered in combination of its emotional, behavioral and cognitive aspects. They manifest themselves in the differences between an individual's attitude towards politically like-minded people (the in-group) and opponents (the out-group), including emotions experienced, willingness to cooperate, and a tendency to attribute positive or negative qualities. Particular attention is paid to the problem of differences between the intensity of manifestations of affective political polarization in the online environment compared to traditional forms of communication. Most contemporary researchers predict a higher level of polarization within online interactions. This hypothesis is based on the properties of Internet communication, which make it easier for the user to manage the network of contacts and sources of information and lead to the emergence of "echo chambers" and "filter bubbles". The empirical evidence in favor of this mechanism, however, is rather limited. Indeed, there is very scarce research that would directly compare the levels of affective polarization in the digital and traditional environments. This problem is addressed by the authors based on survey data collected in 2025 among Russian respondents. We measure all key indicators of affective polarization for both online and offline environments, thereby making it possible to compare them directly. We build on previous research and use the attitude towards the country's leadership as a key polarizing dimension. We analyzed data using correlation, regression and principal component analyses. Our results show that affective polarization demonstrates overall high consistency in the physical world and on social media. Regression analysis does not reveal any significant differences in levels or factors of affective polarization in the two environments.

Keywords: polarization, affective polarization, VK, social media

Acknowledgements. The article was prepared within the framework of the Basic Research Program at HSE University.

Conflicts of interest. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

For citation: Stukal, D.K., Shilina, A.N., & Akhremenko, A.S. (2025). Social media as an alter ego of reality: What does affective political polarization teach us? *RUDN Journal of Political Science*, 27(3), 430–443. https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-1438-2025-27-3-430-443

Социальные медиа как альтер эго реальности: о чем говорит аффективная политическая поляризация?

Д.К. Стукал, А.Н. Шилина, А.С. Ахременко ✉

Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики», *Москва, Российская Федерация*

✉ aakhremenko@hse.ru

Аннотация. Аффективная политическая поляризация комплексно рассматривается в сочетании ее эмоциональных, поведенческих и когнитивных аспектов. Все они проявляются в различиях между отношением индивида к политическим единомышленникам (ингруппе) и оппонентам (аутгруппе): в испытываемых эмоциях, готовности к сотрудничеству, склонности приписывать положительные или отрицательные качества. Особое внимание уделено проблеме различий между интенсивностью проявлений аффективной политической поляризации в онлайн-среде по сравнению с традиционными формами коммуникации. Большинство современных исследователей склоняются к гипотезе о более высоком уровне поляризации в рамках онлайн-взаимодействий. Данная гипотеза опирается на свойства интернет-общения, которые облегчают пользователю управление сетью контактов и источников информации и порождают феномены «эхо-камер» и «пузырей фильтров». Последние способствуют психологическому восприятию точки зрения единомышленников как единственно «нормальной» и увеличению эмоциональной дистанции по отношению к политическим оппонентам. При этом эмпирические свидетельства в пользу этого механизма довольно ограничены; крайне мало исследований, которые ставили бы задачу прямого сравнения аффективной поляризации в цифровой и традиционной средах. Эта задача решается авторами на основе опросных данных, собранных в 2025 г. среди российских респондентов. Все ключевые индикаторы аффективной поляризации измеряются для двух ситуаций — онлайн и офлайн, что обеспечивает возможность их непосредственного сопоставления. С опорой на предыдущие исследования в качестве ключевого поляризующего признака рассматривается отношение к руководству страны. Данные проанализированы с помощью корреляционного и регрессионного анализа, а также методом главных компонент. Анализ показывает, что аффективная поляризация демонстрирует в целом высокую согласованность в физическом мире и в социальных сетях. Результаты регрессии не позволяют выявить существенные расхождения в уровнях и факторах, влияющих на аффективную поляризацию, в двух средах.

Ключевые слова: поляризация, аффективная поляризация, ВКонтакте, социальные сети

Благодарности. Статья подготовлена в ходе проведения исследования в рамках Программы фундаментальных исследований Национального исследовательского университета «Высшая школа экономики» (НИУ ВШЭ).

Заявление о конфликте интересов. Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Для цитирования: *Стукал Д.К., Шилина А.Н., Ахременко А.С.* Социальные медиа как альтер эго реальности: о чем говорит аффективная политическая поляризация? // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Политология. 2025. Т. 27. № 3. С. 430–443. https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-1438-2025-27-3-430-443

Introduction

Academic research on how social media affects political relations in society is still relatively new — less than thirty years old — yet we can already see two distinct "eras", each with its own defining themes and ideas. The 2000s were characterized by an optimistic view of the Internet as a communication environment that stimulates fruitful civil dialogue, free exchange of opinions and, ultimately, contributes to the development of democratic institutions [Papacharissi 2002; Diamond, Plattner 2012]. In the 2010s, the idea of social media as a polarizing force that contributes to the radicalization of individual political views and the growth of mistrust and prejudice towards opponents has become increasingly evident, and in the current decade it is claiming a dominant position [Kubin, Sikorski 2021; Beam, Hutchens, Hmielowski 2018].

These opposing positions are united — explicitly or implicitly — by the idea of online communication as a kind of "independent reality" lying on a parallel plane in relation to the world of traditional, non-digital interactions. Do people's assessments and reactions within online and offline contexts really differ so significantly? This large and still very general question became the starting point for the research discussed in this article. More specifically, we will focus on affective political polarization — a phenomenon that modern academic literature does not only associate with social media; instead, social media are usually treated as a direct cause and the main "driver" of affective polarization [Sunstein 2018].

Affective polarization is sometimes understood narrowly and "literally" as a views-driven manifestation of negative emotions towards the bearers of other political views. Typically, the empirical toolbox used in this approach includes scales with poles from "like" (or "warm") to "dislike" ("cold") (for example, in the large-scale series of studies within the framework of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, www.cses.org). Here, we adhere to a more comprehensive and broader interpretation of affective polarization that is more characteristic of social and political psychology [Gulevich, Kosimova 2024]. Within this approach, emotional reaction is only one of three key dimensions of affective polarization; the other two are cognitive and behavioral ones. The cognitive dimension involves the tendency to attribute positive traits and properties, such as intelligence or kindness, to people who are politically like-minded, and the opposite to political opponents. The behavioral dimension reflects differences in the willingness to cooperate or compete with other people, as well as the magnitude of social distance between people. All three aspects of affective polarization are manifestations of a more general phenomenon of intergroup differentiation, when individuals identify themselves with an in-group, which

in their perception is contrasted with an out-group[1] [Tajfel, Turner 1979]. This comprehensive view of affective political polarization allows for a more robust and nuanced understanding of the differences in how it manifests itself in online and offline contexts.

Let us briefly reconstruct the logic of treating digital communication as an arguably key factor that contributes to affective political polarization. The main line of argument is related to the effect of the online environment on the balance of an individual's contacts with representatives of the in-group and an out-group in terms of exchanging information. On the one hand, Internet-communication radically reduces the costs of isolation from undesired counterparts. Typically, in the online environment, one could just press a button, which would be impossible in the case of relatives, colleagues, or friends in the physical world. The ease of managing a network of contacts stimulates its construction according to the principle of homophily [McPherson, Smith-Lovin, Cook 2001], when the balance of political positions shifts sharply towards representatives of the in-group. As a result, an "echo chamber" arises, i.e. a phenomenon where communication preserves or even strengthens established ideas in a circle of like-minded people [Barberá et al. 2015]; while communication with supporters of an opposite point of view (crosscutting communication) is reduced to a minimum [Settle 2018]. This contributes to the psychological perception of one's point of view (often, in its radical form) as near-universal and contributes to an increase in emotional distance from political opponents.

A similar effect is produced by the mechanism of "filter bubbles". Social media and search engine algorithms are designed to offer users even more content of the same type that they are already inclined to consume. With regard to political content, this effect reaches its peak during electoral campaigns, when users' selective exposure is reinforced [Bode 2016] by the targeted efforts of opposing sides in the context of political advertising [Sood, Iyengar 2016], in which social media algorithms play an increasingly important role today. Thus, the close and mutually reinforcing effects of "echo chambers" and "filter bubbles" contribute to the formation of negative stereotypes about representatives of the opposing political camp in the context of reduced direct interactions with the latter.

The described mechanism is complemented by a lower bar of social norms of online communication [Bail et al. 2018; Rowe 2015]. Manifestations of disrespect towards opponents, including hate speech, contribute to the strengthening of the emotional component of affective polarization and block deliberative mechanisms of rapprochement based on an interested exchange of opinions.

[1] For more details on the theoretical foundations of affective polarization research, primarily the theory of social identity, see [Stukal, Akhremenko, Petrov 2022].

The argumentation above seems quite logical and supported by empirical research. But, as it is often the case in political science, it encounters quite weighty arguments and doubts from those authors who are not at all inclined to dramatize the role of the Internet in the growth of polarization. Their considerations can be summarized as follows.

Firstly, they question the direct link between openness to another's point of view and tolerance for it, which is the cornerstone of the entire structure above. It has been shown that information that contradicts an individual's opinion can strengthen commitment to this opinion and cause a negative reaction towards the person or source that challenges it [Nordbrandt 2022; Wojcieszak, Mutz 2009].

Secondly, the view of the Internet space as broken into isolated homogeneous communities (echo chambers) is considered exaggerated. Some authors show that users could be exposed to alternative points of view much more frequently than it is commonly believed [Eveland, Appiah, Beck 2018; Dubois, Blank 2018], and there are no significant differences here compared to the offline environment [Nordbrandt 2022].

Finally, the empirical evidence that online communication is more affectively polarized than offline communication is very limited. The vast majority of studies focus on only one of these formats, and in recent years, the focus on research on online interactions and social media content has clearly dominated. Researchers look for echo chambers, filter bubbles, manifestations of affective polarization in online communication, and find them. There are practically no studies that would aim to directly compare affective polarization in the digital and traditional environments (with a few exceptions — [Baek, Wojcieszak, Delli Carpini 2012; Nordbrandt 2022]).

In this paper, we aim to fill this gap using survey data collected in 2025 among Russian respondents. We measure all key indicators of affective polarization for both the online and the offline contexts, which allows us to compare them directly.

Developing a study of affective polarization requires identifying the key polarizing dimension that forms in-groups and out-groups. Almost all studies of the political landscape of the Russian society in the 21st century — in its electoral, value, and behavioral dimensions — point to the attitude towards the government as the main cleavage, and to its supporters and opponents as the most important polar groups [Lapkin, Pantin 2009; Korgunyuk 2012]. We corroborated this result in our previous study of hate speech in the Russian-language online space [Stukal, Akhremenko, Petrov 2022] and found that groups associated with the government or opposition are the key objects of hate speech. Following this approach now, we build our research design around the idea of analyzing respondents' attitudes to the country's leadership, on the one hand, and their affective, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to the opponents and supporters of the government.

Russian studies of affective polarization are very scarce. A. Lebedev and O. Gordyakova [2023] use the method of latent associations to measure citizens' reactions to such political events as the ongoing Special Military Operation and partial military mobilization. They conclude that value polarization in Russia has not yet transformed into affective polarization, but such a danger exists. O. Gulevich and S. Kosimova [2024] use online survey data to demonstrate that Russian identity increases political polarization between people who support and do not support what is happening in the country. E. Kruchinskaia [2025] shows an increase in affective polarization, measured through a quantitative analysis of hate speech in online messages during mass protests.

Although highly important, none of these studies focus on the differences between online and offline manifestations of political polarization; in this, the Russian tradition is completely in line with the global one. We hope that the results presented in our work will not only shed new light on these differences, but will also make our understanding of the current state of the Russian society and its conflict potential more profound.

Data and research methods

The empirical part of our study is based on the data collected by the authors during an online opinion poll that was conducted using the Anketolog online panel among adult respondents living in Russia (N = 200). The survey questionnaire included several semantic blocks. Firstly, this is the basic socio-demographic information about the respondents (gender, age, education, income, type of settlement, frequency of using social media and messengers). Secondly, the questionnaire included a block of questions about the respondents' interest in politics and their political preferences (interest in politics, frequency of discussing politics in personal communication and on social media, the degree of support for the country's leadership, self-identification as a supporter of the country's leadership and the opposition). Finally, the questionnaire contained a large block of questions measuring various aspects of affective polarization in personal communication and online.

As noted above, when measuring affective polarization, we follow the approach previously proposed in social and political psychology and distinguish between three main components of affective polarization, including emotional, cognitive, and behavioral ones [Gulevich, Kosimova 2024]. At the same time, we make a methodological contribution by explicitly identifying and comparing the online and offline manifestations of affective polarization. To accomplish this, we designed the questionnaire with mirrored versions of questions — one set focusing on affective

polarization in personal interactions, and the other dealing with its manifestations in social media. These parallel questions covered all three components of affective polarization: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral.

The emotional component of affective polarization was measured using the following thermometer question: "How would you rate your attitude toward people who (support / DO NOT support) the country's leadership (In social media posts / in conversations during personal meetings)?" Possible answers ranged from 1 ("the attitude is very cold, negative") to 7 ("the attitude is very warm, positive"). The differences in the respondent's answers about the attitudes toward the supporters and opponents of the national leadership served as a measure of affective polarization either in the physical world or online.

To measure the cognitive component of affective polarization, respondents were asked to characterize those who support or do not support the country's leadership in conversations during a personal meeting or in social media posts using a set of polar pairs of features: smart — not smart, open to new ideas — narrow-minded, kind — evil, honest — dishonest, selfless — egoistic. The difference in the assessments of those who support and do not support the leadership served as a measure of the cognitive component of affective polarization.

Finally, the behavioral component was measured using a set of questions about how comfortable the respondent would feel in face-to-face or online communication with a person who supported or did not support the country's leadership if that person were a friend or a colleague of the respondent. As with other components of affective polarization, the measure of polarization in this case is the difference in responses about those who support and those who do not support the country's leadership.

In total, 16 numerical measures were obtained for the different aspects of affective polarization (see Table 1).

Table 1

Number of the questionnaire items for measuring the aspects of affective polarization

Polarization components	Offline polarization, numbers of questions	Online polarization, numbers of questions
Emotional	1	1
Cognitive	5	5
Behavioural	2	2

Source: compiled by D.K. Stukal, A.N. Shilina, A.S. Akhremenko, data collected in the research.

Table 1 shows that multiple values were obtained for the cognitive and behavioral components of the offline and online types of affective polarization. For the purpose of further analysis, we averaged these values. Thus, for each

respondent, we obtained the average value of both the cognitive and behavioral components of affective polarization in the online and the offline contexts. The use of simple averages is justified by the results of the principal component analysis: in the case of the cognitive component of online polarization, the first component explains 79 % of the total variance, and the coefficients for different responses are close to each other, taking on values from 0.434 to 0.455; in the case of offline polarization, the first principal component for the cognitive aspect explains 84 % of the total variance, and the coefficients vary from 0.433 to 0.456; in the case of a behavioral aspect measured by two quantities, the principal component analysis results are identical to averaging for purely algebraic reasons [Rencher, Christensen 2012].

Social media as an alter ego of physical reality

Before addressing the core focus of our study — how affective political polarization compares in offline and online spaces — we should first examine a broader question: To what extent is affective polarization as a three-component construct empirically coherent? Specifically, how consistently do the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions align in practice?

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients. As follows from the table, all affective polarization components — both in the physical world and online — demonstrate either a moderate or strong relationship. The relationship between the emotional and behavioral components is especially pronounced, while the cognitive component demonstrates a moderate relationship with other aspects of affective polarization. Note that this pattern is evident both in social media and in personal communication.

Table 2

Correlation coefficients between the components of affective polarization, Pearson correlation coefficients between the components of the online and offline types of affective polarization

Correlation of components	Emo.off .	Cog.off .	Beh.off .	Emo.onl .	Cog.onl .	Beh.onl .
Emo.off.	1	0.53	0.70	0.89	0.49	0.64
Cog.off.	0.53	1	0.55	0.52	0.63	0.51
Beh.off .	0.70	0.55	1	0.71	0.46	0.80
Emo.onl .	0.89	0.52	0.71	1	0.50	0.65
Cog.onl .	0.49	0.63	0.46	0.50	1	0.46
Beh.onl .	0.64	0.51	0.80	0.65	0.46	1

Note: the numbers in the cells of the table are Pearson correlation coefficients between the components of the online and offline types of affective polarization.
Source: compiled by D.K. Stukal, A.N. Shilina, A.S. Akhremenko, data collected in the research.

These correlation coefficients, however, are not high enough for combining affective polarization measures into a single index. In particular, when moving from the three aggregated indicators discussed above to a single index using the principal component method, the first component accounts for only 73 % and 69 % of the total variance (In the case of offline and online polarization, respectively), which can hardly be considered a significant compression of information. In other words, the component-wise measurement of affective polarization turns out to be empirically justified. It is noteworthy that both the patterns of correlations between the components and, as a consequence, the results of applying the principal component analysis indicate a structural similarity of affective polarization online and offline. Is this similarity strong enough to equate online and offline polarization? Next, we answer this question by comparing the relationships between the affective polarization components and its factors in physical and Internet reality.

To solve this problem, we estimate a series of multiple regressions with six components of affective polarization as the dependent variables (three for offline and three for online polarization), and the explanatory variables include the level of support for the country's leadership, the level of interest in politics, and the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (gender, age, level of education and income). Since we assume that respondents with a more pronounced position towards the country's leadership may be characterized by a higher level of affective polarization than respondents with a moderate position, the regression model includes the squared level of support for the country's leadership. Thus, we used ordinary least squares to estimate the following regression model:

$$\hat{y}_i = b_0 + b_1 support_i + b_2 support_i^2 + b_1 interest_i + \sum_j a_j x_i^{(j)},$$

where i is the respondent index; $\hat{y}_i$ is the predicted value of the dependent variable (affective polarization component) for the i-th respondent; b_0,…, b_3, are estimated regression coefficients for the key explanatory variables; support and support^2 are the level of support for the country's leadership and its square; interest is the respondent's interest in politics; $x_i^{(j)}$ is the value of the j-th control variable for the i-th respondent (the socio-demographic variables act as controls); a_i is the estimated regression coefficient for the j-th control variable.

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

Regression results for offline affective polarization components

Explanatory variables	Dependent variables		
	Emotional component	Behavioural component	Cognitive component
Leadership support	–0.827 (0.022)	–0.975 (0.009)	–0.694 (0.029)
Leadership support squared	0.134 (<0.001)	0.159 (<0.001)	0.121 (<0.001)
Interest in politics	0.200 (0.015)	0.182 (0.030)	0.075 (0.299)
Socio-demographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of observations	200	200	200
R^2	0.233	0.267	0.242

Note. The table reports OLS regression coefficients. P-values in parentheses were computed using conventional standard errors. Statistical inference results remain substantively unchanged when using heteroskedasticity-consistent HC2 standard errors.
Source: compiled by D.K. Stukal, A.N. Shilina, A.S. Akhremenko, data collected in the research.

When comparing coefficient estimates in different columns of Tables 3 and 4, one can see that the initial hypothesis that the level of affective polarization is quadratically related to political position is confirmed. Indeed, respondents at the extremes of the scale (i.e. those who most strongly support or do not support the country's leadership) demonstrate a significantly higher level of affective polarization than respondents with a moderate position. This pattern is evident for all components of affective polarization, both online and offline.

Table 4

Regression results for online affective polarization components

Explanatory variables	Dependent variables		
	Emotional component		Emotional component
Leadership support	–0.794 (0.035)	–1.062 (0.004)	–1.407 (<0.001)
Leadership support squared	0.130 (0.002)	0.159 (<0.001)	0.188 (<0.001)
Interest in politics	0.177 (0.038)	0.139 (0.099)	0.164 (0.02 2)
Socio-demographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of observations	200	200	200
R^2	0.207	0.225	0.2 70

Note. The table reports OLS regression coefficients. P-values in parentheses were computed using conventional standard errors. Statistical inference results remain substantively unchanged when using heteroskedasticity-consistent HC2 standard errors.
Source: compiled by D.K. Stukal, A.N. Shilina, A.S. Akhremenko, data collected in the research.

The models reveal remarkably similar coefficients for corresponding variables across both emotional and behavioral components of polarization, whether observed online or offline. However, the cognitive component stands out as an exception, exhibiting a distinct pattern of relationships with explanatory factors. Notably, while interest in politics shows no significant association with offline cognitive polarization, it emerges as a strong predictor (with substantially larger effect sizes) in the online context. We also observe marked differences in coefficient magnitudes for leadership support specifically within the cognitive dimension.

Summarizing the obtained results, one can see that affective polarization demonstrates generally high consistency in the physical world and in social media. The results of the regression analysis do not reveal significant differences in the levels and factors influencing affective polarization in the two environments. The cognitive component is an exception; however, even in this case, the differences are not fundamental: respondents on the edges of the political spectrum are still more polarized than moderate ones.

Conclusion

Our study showed, firstly, that the split in attitudes towards the government in Russia has the power to polarize respondents in all three affective dimensions: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. ON the one hand, this is not surprising: after the 1990s, when the key division was ideological (left-conservative — right-liberal), the current government increasingly concentrated the focus of political relations on itself. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that at the beginning of 2025 — after three years of a Special Military Operation and the associated shift of the political focus on the international agenda — this split is very noticeable even in a small sample.

The main and, from our point of view, the most interesting result of the study is the absence of truly significant differences between the manifestations of affective polarization in online and offline communication environments. Was it unexpected? To us, probably not. In previous works devoted to the comparison of protest dynamics on the Internet and in the "physical" world (see, for example, [Akhremenko, Brodovskaya 2021]), we drew attention to the serious exaggeration of the "fundamentally new quality" of the digital environment compared to the traditional one. The tendency to see the Internet as a "different reality" operating according to its own laws seems deeply empirically substantiated exactly until the moment when researchers focus *only* on this reality. When the analysis becomes truly

comparative and involves the traditional communication network, the differences largely fade. Despite all its features, the digital environment remains an environment in which people act with their attitudes and ideas.

While our findings demonstrate striking parallels between online and offline manifestations of affective polarization in the Russian context, we have to be cautious with generalizations. The limited survey data from Russia alone cannot conclusively establish whether these patterns hold across different political systems and cultural contexts.

Existing research consistently shows that information and communication technologies affect political processes in ways heavily mediated by contextual factors. To properly assess the universality of these polarization mechanisms, we need additional studies — particularly experimental designs — that systematically compare how individuals perceive political allies and opponents across both digital and physical interaction environments.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 16.03.2025
Revised / Доработана после рецензирования: 13.04.2025
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 15.05.2025

References

Akhremenko, A.S. & Brodovskaya, E.V. (2021). Impact of New Information and Communication Technologies on Civic and Political Activism: «Tension Lines» of the Discussion Field. *Monitoring of Public Opinion: Economic and Social Changes, 6*. (In Russian). https://doi.org/10.14515/monitoring.2021.6.2111 EDN: EPFRSY

Baek, Y.M., Wojcieszak, M. & Delli Carpini, M.X. (2012). Online versus face-to-face deliberation: Who? Why? What? With what effects? *New Media and Society*, 14, 363–383. http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811413191

Bail, C.A., Argyle, L.P., Brown, T.W., Bumpus, J.P., Chen, H., Hunzaker, M.B.F., et al. (2018). Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115, 9216–9221. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1804840115

Barberá, P., Jost, J.T., Nagler, J., Tucker, J.A. & Bonneau, R. (2015). Tweeting from left to right: Is online political communication more than an echo chamber? *Psychological Science*, 26(10), 1531–1542. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615594620

Beam, M.A., Hutchens, M.J. & Hmielowski, J.D. (2018). Facebook news and (de) polarization: Reinforcing spirals in the 2016 election. *Information, Communication, & Society*, 21(7), 940–958. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1444783

Bode, L. (2016). Pruning the news feed: Unfriending and unfollowing political content on social media. *Research & Politics, 3*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168016661873

Diamond, L. & Plattner, M.F. (2012). *Liberation technology: social media and the struggle for democracy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dubois, E. & Blank, G. (2018). The echo chamber is overstated: The moderating effect of political interest and diverse media. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21, 729–745. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428656

Eveland, W.P., Appiah, O. & Beck, P.A. (2018). Americans are more exposed to difference than we think: Capturing hidden exposure to political and racial difference. *Social Networks*, 52, 192–200. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2017.08.002

Gulevich, O.A. & Kosimova, S.S. (2024). The relationship between Russian identity and political polarization: The role of secure national identification and national narcissism. *Social Psychology and Society*, 15(4), 123–139. (In Russian). https://doi.org/10.17759/sps.2024150409 EDN: ZXNPSO

Korgunyuk, Yu.G. (2012) Structure of electoral cleavages in the 2011–2012 electoral cycle and possible scenarios for the development of the situation. *Politeia*, (3), 84–99. (In Russian). https://doi.org/10.30570/2078-5089-2012-66-3-84-99 EDN: SLCEJZ

Kruchinskaia, E.V. (2025). Hate speech as an indicator of affective political polarization during mobilization: From measurement to forecasting. *Political science (RU)*, (1), 156–180. (In Russian). http://www.doi.org/10.31249/poln/2025.01.07 EDN: KQHSEK

Kubin, E. & Sikorski, Ch. (2021). The role of (social) media in political polarization: A systematic review. *Annals of the International Communication Association, 45*(3), 188–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2021.1976070

Lapkin, V.V. & Pantin, V.I. (2009). Russia and Ukraine: Factors of socio-political polarization in a comparative perspective. *Polis. Political Studies*, (2), 96–107. (In Russian). EDN: KYGVEJ

Lebedev, A.N., Gordyakova, O.V. (2023). Value-Affective Polarization of Large Social Groups in Conditions of Information Uncertainty. *Social Psychology and Society*, *14*(4), 38–54. (In Russian). https://doi.org/10.17759/sps.2023140403

McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L. & Cook, J. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *27*, 415–444. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.415 EDN: HEYQYJ

Nordbrandt, M. (2022). Affective polarization in crosscutting communication networks: Offline and online evidence from Spain. *Frontiers in Political Science*, *4*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2022.921188 EDN: TPMALD

Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The virtual sphere: The Internet as a public sphere. *New Media and Society*, 4(1), 9–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614440222226244

Pariser, E. (2011). *The filter bubble: What the Internet is hiding from you*. Penguin UK.

Rencher, A. & Christensen, W. (2012). *Methods of Multivariate Analysis*. 3rd ed. John Wiley and Sons.

Rowe, I. (2015). Civility 2.0: A comparative analysis of incivility in online political discussion. *Information, Communication & Society*, *18*, 121–138. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.940365

Settle, J. (2018). *Frenemies: How social media polarizes America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sood, G. & Iyengar, S. (2016). Coming to dislike your opponents: The polarizing impact of political campaigns. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2840225

Stukal, D.K., Akhremenko, A.S., & Petrov, A.P. (2022). Affective political polarization and hate speech: Made for each other? *RUDN Journal of Political Science*, *24*(3), 480–498. (In Russian). https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-1438-2022-24-3-480-498 EDN: VLTQRN

Sunstein, C.R. (2018). *Republic: Divided democracy in the age of social media*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J.C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In Austin, W.G. & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–37). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Wojcieszak, M.E., & Mutz, D.C. (2009). Online groups and political discourse: Do online discussion spaces facilitate exposure to political disagreement? *Journal of Communication*, *59*(1), 40–56. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.01403.x

About the authors:

Denis K. Stukal — Ph.D in Political Science, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, HSE University, (e-mail: dstukal@hse.ru) (ORCID: 0000-0001-6240-5714).

Anna N. Shilina — Ph.D student, School of Politics and Governance, HSE University, (e-mail: ashilina@hse.ru) (ORCID: 0000-0002-6667-0686).

Andrei S. Akhremenko — Doctor of Political Science, Professor, Leading Research fellow, Politics & Psychology Research Laboratory, HSE University, (e-mail: aakhremenko@hse.ru) (ORCID: 0000-0001-8002-7307)