

**An Exploratory Study of Media Consumption and Political Identity in the Post-Soviet
Immigrant Community**

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Abstract

This study examines how individuals connected to pre-2010s immigration from former Soviet republics (FSU) understand their political identities and media habits within overlapping U.S. and post-Soviet information environments. Although Russian-speaking immigrants form a sizable diaspora in the United States, little empirical research has explored how their media use relates to political ideology or polarization. To address this gap, an online survey was distributed through convenience and snowball sampling (N = 23). Participants reported demographic characteristics, social media and mainstream news habits, exposure to Russian state-sponsored media, ideological self-placement, and whether their political views had shifted over the past decade. Open-ended questions offered additional context about family influence, media interpretations, and perceptions of propaganda.

Results showed substantial variation in how respondents engaged with political information. Most participants encountered political content on social media daily yet made sense of it in different ways: some described comparing multiple sources, while others selectively trusted particular outlets or dismissed opposing sources as propaganda. More respondents reported shifting rightward than leftward in the last ten years, and no participant placed themselves at the extreme left of the ideological scale. Qualitative responses revealed individualized political trajectories, including affective distancing from political outgroups, reliance on personal or anecdotal experiences over media, and oppositional reactions to family members' media habits. Answers to the propaganda question were inconsistent, suggesting ambiguity in how the term is understood.

Findings indicate that political identity within this demographic emerges from a mix of media exposure, family information norms, and personal interpretation rather than from any

single media source. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples, incorporate measures of media literacy, and examine how factors such as country of origin, decade of immigration, and religion shape political identity within FSU diaspora communities.

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1. Introduction

Immigrants from the former Soviet Union who arrived in the United States before the mid-2010s make up a distinctive and understudied population (Dubinina & Polinsky, 2013). This group is not formally named in the academic literature—various terms appear, such as "FSU immigrants," "Russian speakers/Russophones," "Slavic immigrants," or "Soviet diaspora"—but none fully capture its complexity (Polinsky & Dubinina, 2013). Though often lumped together, these individuals came from fifteen different republics with different native languages and diverse ethnic histories (Migration Policy Institute, 2017). What they did share was the experience of growing up under late-Soviet or early-post-Soviet conditions and immigrating to the United States before the rise of what can be described as the "peak Putinism" of the mid-2000s. For many, this period carried a mix of nostalgia for a unified multiethnic state, the cultural imprint of Russian-language education, and the uncertainty of living in new republics whose political identities were still forming. Because of these shared historical and cultural conditions, this cohort cannot be easily grouped with more recent arrivals from the same countries, who grew up under very different political and media environments.

Despite the size and visibility of this population in places like New York City, there is surprisingly little empirical research on their political attitudes or media use. Much of what circulates in public discourse are assumptions or anecdotal descriptions: that FSU immigrants are "conservative," that they "fear socialism," or that they "support strongman leaders." None of this captures the actual diversity of political identities within this group, nor does it explain why some appear to have shifted politically over time. My own observations suggest that earlier waves of FSU immigrants tended to be politically disengaged, libertarian-leaning, or simply

indifferent to U.S. politics. In recent years, however, I suspect that this has changed, and that the group is becoming more polarized—especially with a noticeable shift to the political right.

The reasons for this shift are not clear, but two potential mechanisms seem especially relevant. First is intergenerational influence: many parents and grandparents in this community continued consuming Russian-language or state-influenced media long after immigrating, and these media habits may shape how their adult children view politics, news, and global events (Park et al., 2024; Jennings & Stoker, 2009). Second is tied to immigration timing: people who immigrated before the 2000s may have different political attitudes than those who arrived after the consolidation of Russian state media and the rise of Putin-era nationalism (Gubernskaya, 2012). This distinction may also explain why some Ukrainian-born immigrants who left in the 1980s or 1990s express more Russia-sympathetic views than recent Ukrainian arrivals, despite having different national origins.

These questions intersect with a larger body of research on political polarization. Scholars have increasingly focused on affective polarization, ideological sorting, and the role of media environments in shaping political identity and opinion (Lelkes, 2018; Iyengar et al., 2022). Many studies examine how social media, algorithmic news feeds, and partisan outlets influence how strongly people identify with political "sides." Evidence suggests that media use can reinforce preexisting beliefs, intensify emotional reactions, and create information "bubbles" in which users primarily encounter self-confirming information (Spohr, 2017, p. 153). This makes studying media environments especially important for immigrant groups who straddle multiple information systems—American mainstream media, diaspora-specific channels and pages, and Russian-language outlets that vary widely in credibility and political messaging.

The purpose of this study is to offer exploratory data to begin filling this gap. Using a short online survey with several open-ended questions, I document respondents' news sources, social media use, trust in mainstream media, perceived parental media habits, and self-described ideology. The goal is to determine whether a rightward shift or broader polarization is occurring within this pre-2010s cohort, to explore whether family media environments play a meaningful role, and to assess whether immigration timing explains political divisions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Population of Immigrants and Children of Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union and Its Republics

The Russian-speaking immigrant population in the United States comprises approximately 1.3 million foreign-born individuals from former Soviet republics and approximately 5 million U.S. residents claiming post-Soviet ancestry (Migration Policy Institute, 2024; Slavic Studies Association, 2023). Using American Community Survey (ACS) data, the foreign-born population from former Soviet republics grew from approximately 404,000 in 1990 to 905,000 by 2000, reaching approximately 1.3 million by 2020 (Migration Policy Institute, 2024). When considering ancestry rather than birthplace, approximately 2.2 million U.S. residents claim a single post-Soviet ethnicity, with approximately 5.0 million identifying with post-Soviet ancestry as part of mixed ethnic backgrounds (Slavic Studies Association, 2023). Russians comprise the largest group at approximately 3.4 million (combining single and part-ancestry respondents), followed by Ukrainians at approximately 1.4 million (Slavic Studies Association, 2023). These foreign-born immigrants represent roughly 2–3% of the total U.S. immigrant population of 47.8 million as of 2023 (Migration Policy Institute, 2024).

Despite comprising approximately 1% of the U.S. population, Russian Americans do not form a cohesive political or cultural bloc, lacking a unified focal point unlike other immigrant communities (Dimke & Meyer-Olimpieva, 2024). This fragmentation reflects distinct immigration waves, with the late-Soviet and early post-Soviet wave (late 1970s to early 1990s) forming the demographic foundation of the contemporary Russian-speaking community (Dimke & Meyer-Olimpieva, 2024).

Understanding media consumption patterns within the Russian-speaking diaspora is essential for communication research on political polarization. Ryzhova's (2022) qualitative study of 42 Russian-speaking migrants in Germany identifies three distinct transnational news repertoires, with critical implications for understanding how this population engages with information across dual media environments (p. 218). Approximately 55% of respondents (23 of 42) engaged in politically-motivated news consumption, further divided into pro-Western and pro-Kremlin subtypes, reflecting deep ideological divisions within the Russian-speaking diaspora (p. 225). Twenty-four percent of respondents (10 of 42) adopted a truth-seeking approach, actively consulting multiple news sources to triangulate accurate information across conflicting narratives (p. 225). The remaining 21% (9 of 42) employed situation-dependent media consumption, adjusting their media choices based on contextual factors and personal circumstances (p. 225).

A critical finding from Ryzhova's (2022) research challenges the assumption that language alone determines media choice within diaspora communities (p. 223). Rather, political beliefs, generational status, and individual migration experiences fundamentally shape how members of the Russian-speaking diaspora navigate transnational information environments (p. 223). The diversity of news repertoires reveals that exposure to media messages—even within

the same language community—varies substantially based on individual political orientations and media consumption strategies (p. 223). For those with strong political commitments, media consumption becomes deliberate reinforcement of existing viewpoints, whether aligned with Western or Russian state narratives (p. 230). Truth-seeking consumers actively engage with complexity across divergent sources, while situation-dependent consumers adjust their media engagement contingently (p. 229-230). These different repertoire strategies likely interact with political polarization differently, suggesting that simple exposure-based models of media effects are insufficient for understanding this population. Communication research on political polarization within the Russian-speaking population must account for the diverse repertoires through which community members actively construct meaning from media, shaped by both historical experiences and contemporary media practices.

2.2 Conflicting Findings on Media and Polarization

Research on the relationship between media use and political polarization shows inconsistent results, with scholars disagreeing about whether social media increases, decreases, or has mixed effects on polarization. Arora et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review of 94 studies on polarization and social media and found that "approximately one-third of studies recognize the dual nature of media effects—that social media can either increase or decrease polarization depending on contingent individual, contextual, and structural factors" (p. 4). This lack of agreement among researchers highlights why more research is needed, particularly on specific groups that have not yet been studied.

One major theory in polarization research is that people prefer information that matches their existing beliefs. Kelm et al. (2023) explain that "people are likely to take advantage of this opportunity, since many people prefer like-minded over opposing information" (p. 2). However,

the research evidence is mixed. Kubin and von Sikorski (2021), cited in Kelm et al. (2023), conclude that "the literature unanimously agrees that exposure to like-minded media increases polarization. However, there is less agreement on the role of counter-attitudinal media in political polarization" (p. 3). Additionally, Garrett (2009) found that people do not always avoid opposing viewpoints uniformly; instead, selective exposure varies depending on the individual (p. 273). This inconsistency suggests that selective exposure alone cannot explain polarization effects in all cases.

2.3 Different Media Types Have Different Effects

Surprisingly, research shows that different types of media—social media versus traditional media—may have opposite effects on polarization. Jones-Jang and Chung (2022) conducted a survey during the COVID-19 pandemic with 1,106 respondents and found that "social media use made people less polarized in both partisan affect and vaccine hesitancy. In contrast, traditional media use made people more polarized in partisan affect" (p. 3370). The researchers concluded that "social media provide diverse viewpoints and incidental learning" (p. 3370), which contradicts the common assumption that social media is primarily responsible for polarization. This finding suggests that the relationship between media type and polarization is more complicated than many people assume.

The temporal nature of polarization also matters. Lee (2016) studied the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong and found that polarizing effects of social media appeared "only during, but not before, the Umbrella Movement" (p. 56). Similarly, Hohmann and Coscia (2025) tracked Twitter conversations during COVID-19 and found that polarization began low, increased rapidly once COVID became a partisan political issue, and then stabilized as users with opposing views increasingly avoided interacting with each other (p. 11). This pattern shows

that polarization is not a constant effect of social media but rather depends on when and how political issues develop.

2.4 The Role of Trust in Media

Recent research suggests that political trust and polarization are separate but related phenomena. Van Remoortere and Vliegenthart (2025) studied the 2023 Dutch elections and found that "access to information on social media is linked to a lower propensity to trust political institutions" (p. 527). However, they also found that lower trust in institutions does not automatically lead to greater polarization—these are distinct dynamics (p. 533). They note that people who depend on social media for news "don't necessarily trust less on average, but their trust is much shakier and can swing more during campaigns" (p. 534), suggesting that the instability of attitudes may be more important than their overall level.

Arora et al. (2022) identify multiple pathways through which social media might influence polarization, including selective exposure, homophily—the tendency to connect with similar others (McPherson et al., 2001, p. 419)—and algorithmic filtering that creates filter bubbles (Spohr, 2017, p. 153). However, they emphasize that these mechanisms operate differently depending on individual characteristics, political context, and the specific political system (p. 9).

Notably, most existing polarization research focuses on well-established democracies like the United States, Netherlands, and Hong Kong, using general population samples. This creates a significant gap: there is limited research on how polarization works among immigrant communities from former authoritarian countries who navigate information environments that span both democratic and authoritarian media systems. This absence of research on specific diaspora populations, particularly Russian-speaking immigrants, justifies the need for targeted investigation of these understudied groups.

2.5 Research Questions

Existing research shows that media and polarization are linked, but the findings are mixed and often context dependent. Some studies suggest that consuming like-minded news can strengthen prior attitudes and increase polarization, while other work finds that social media can also expose people to diverse views and sometimes even reduce affective polarization in specific situations (Arora et al., 2022, pp. 4–5; Jones-Jang & Chung, 2022, p. 3370). Most of this research focuses on general populations in countries like the United States or on issue-specific contexts, such as COVID-19 or the Umbrella Movement, rather than on particular immigrant groups (Lee, 2016, p. 56; Hohmann & Coscia, 2025, p. 11). Scholars also note that media effects likely depend on people’s prior experiences, political environments, and their information networks, but very little empirical work has examined immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who often move between U.S. media and Russian- or Ukrainian-language media, including within families (Arora et al., 2022, pp. 8–9).

Because this group has been largely overlooked, the present study asks three questions: (1) How do participants’ media consumption habits relate to their political ideology? (2) How do family media habits shape or relate to participants’ political identity? and (3) What evidence of political polarization, if any, appears within this demographic? These questions extend existing polarization research to a specific diaspora community that has unique historical experiences with both state-controlled and democratic media systems, addressing a clear gap in the literature.

3. Method

3.1 Participants and Design

A cross-sectional survey design was used. Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling and completed the survey electronically through Google Forms. A total of 23 individuals, all 18 years of age or older, provided informed consent and completed the survey.

Participants represented a broad adult age range. The largest group was 25–34 ($n = 9$), followed by 35–44 ($n = 8$). Two participants were 18–24, and four were 55 or older.

Respondents reported family origins across multiple former Soviet republics. The most frequently reported origin was Ukraine ($n = 11$). Other reported origins included Russia ($n = 4$), Latvia ($n = 2$), Belarus ($n = 2$), Kazakhstan ($n = 1$), Moldova ($n = 1$), and Uzbekistan ($n = 1$). One participant selected “prefer not to say.”

Most participants—or their parents—immigrated during the 1991–1999 period ($n = 14$). Additional immigration periods included 1970–1979 ($n = 4$), 2000–2009 ($n = 2$), 1980–1990 ($n = 1$), and 2010–2019 ($n = 1$). One participant selected “prefer not to say.”

3.2 Measures

Demographic variables (age, country of origin, and decade of immigration) were measured using single-item questions. Social media engagement was measured through a multiple-selection checklist asking which platforms participants used at least once per week. Two additional multiple-selection questions asked about weekly use of mainstream news sources and whether participants or their families had ever consumed Russian state-sponsored media.

Political ideology was measured with a single-item 1–10 left–right self-placement scale, adapted from the ALLBUS German General Social Survey (Breyer, 2015). Several open-ended questions asked participants to describe any political changes over time, whether media or family members influenced their political views, and how they understood propaganda.

3.3 Procedure

Participants first viewed an information sheet describing the purpose of the study and their rights. After providing consent, they completed demographic questions followed by items on social media use, mainstream news consumption, and exposure to Russian state-sponsored media. They then answered the ideological placement scale and completed several open-ended questions about political attitudes and media habits.

3.4 Analysis

Closed-ended survey data were summarized using basic descriptive statistics. This included counting how many participants selected each option and calculating percentages to show patterns in social media use, news sources, and exposure to state-sponsored media. For the left–right ideology scale, the average score (mean), standard deviation, and the minimum and maximum values were calculated to show the overall distribution.

Responses to the open-ended questions were reviewed by reading through all answers several times and identifying common themes. Similar ideas were grouped together (such as explanations for political shifts, perceptions of media influence, or examples of propaganda). These themes were summarized to help contextualize the quantitative findings. Short quotations were selected to illustrate participant perspectives and appear in the Discussion section.

4. Results

This section presents descriptive findings from the survey, including social media use, exposure to political information, mainstream news consumption, exposure to Russian-language or state-affiliated media, self-placement on a left–right ideological scale, and perceived changes in political views over the past decade. Open-ended responses are excluded from this section.

4.1 Social Media Use

Participants reported using a wide range of platforms at least once per week. As shown in Figure 1, Instagram was the most frequently used platform, followed by YouTube and Facebook. Several participants selected multiple platforms, while three reported no weekly social media use.

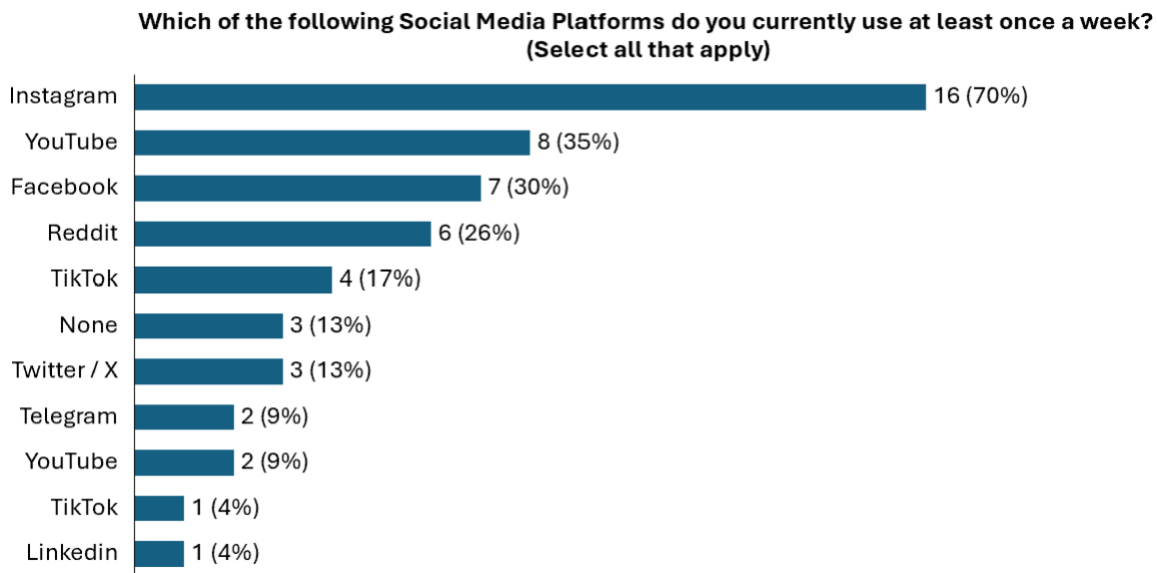


Figure 1: Weekly Social Media Platform Use (Multiple Selections Allowed)

4.2 Exposure to Political Content on Social Media

Most participants reported seeing political or news-related content on their social media feeds with some regularity. As shown in Figure 2, the majority selected “Often” or “Very often,” indicating that political information is a common part of their online experience. The question was framed to include incidental viewing of political content.

How often do you see news or information about politics/news on social media (in your feeds, from friends, etc.)?

23 responses

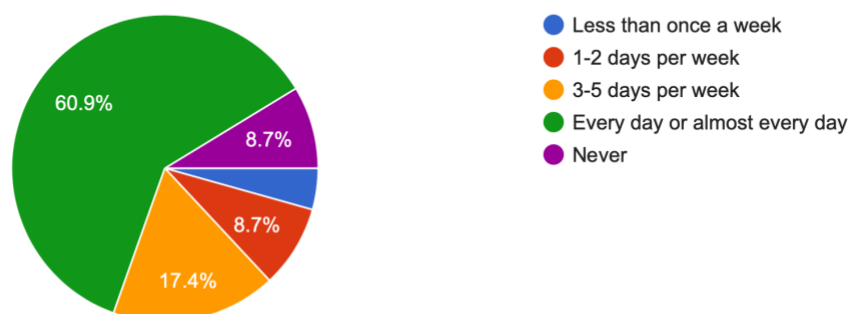


Figure 2: Frequency of Encountering Political Content

4.3 Mainstream News Use

Participants reported a wide range of mainstream news habits, with many relying primarily on digital formats rather than traditional television news. As shown in Figure 3, the most frequently selected category was “Online newspaper websites/apps”, which appeared in 13 total selections, including instances where participants combined it with specific outlets such as Fox News or CNN.

A substantial portion of the sample ($n = 7$) reported that they do not use any mainstream news source at least once a week. Among specific outlets, Fox News was selected by five

participants (including combinations), CNN by three, and MSNBC, BBC, and Local TV News by one participant each.

Table 3 presents the complete frequency of all mainstream news sources selected.

Which mainstream news sources (TV, newspapers, websites) do you use at least once a week?
(Select all that apply.)
23 responses

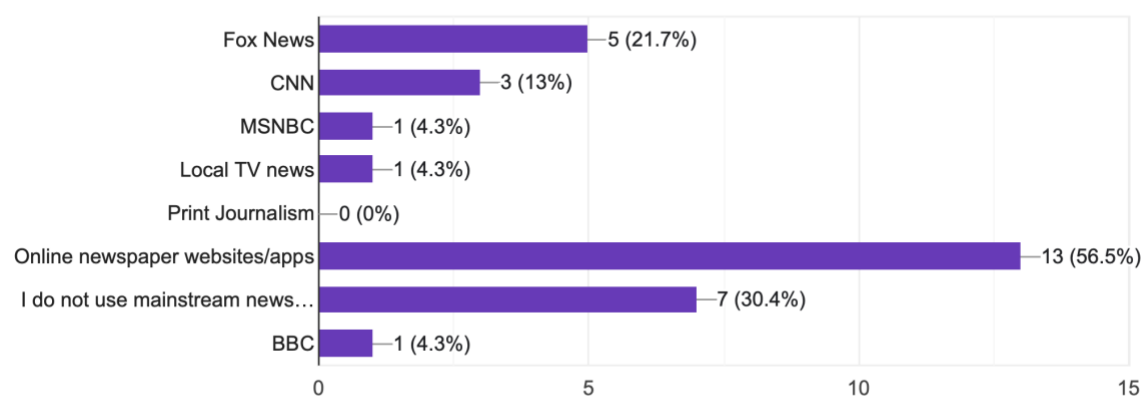


Figure 3: Mainstream News Sources

4.4 Exposure to Russian-Language or Russian-State Media

As shown in Figure 4, responses varied, but a plurality indicated some level of exposure—either personally or through family members—to Russian-language media or Russian state-affiliated outlets.

Have you or your family ever watched, read, or listened to Russian state-sponsored news sources (for example, Russian state TV channels or news websites)?

23 responses

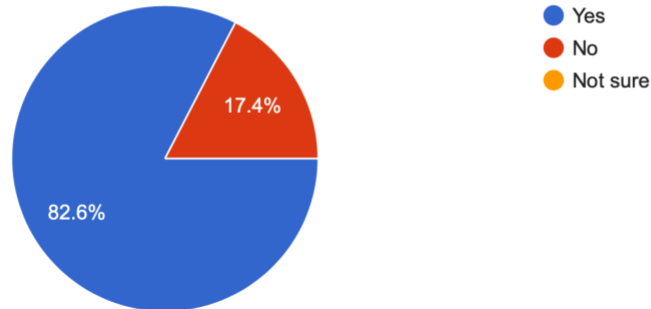


Figure 4: Exposure to Russian-Language or State Media

4.5 Political Ideology (Left–Right Placement)

Participants rated their political ideology on a scale from 1 (“left”) to 10 (“right”). As displayed in Figure 5, responses spanned nearly the full scale, with a mean score of 5.78 (SD = 2.45). The distribution indicates a wide ideological spread within the sample.

In politics, people sometimes talk about “left” and “right.” Where would you place yourself on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means “left” and 10 means “right”?

23 responses

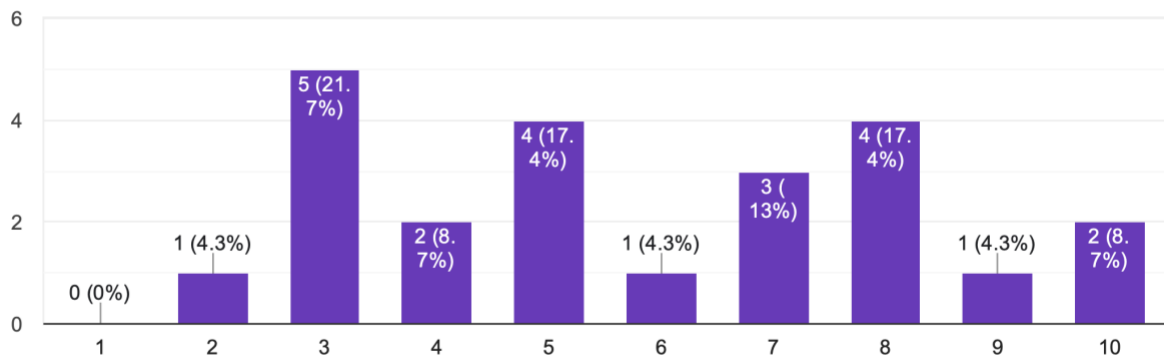


Figure 5: Ideology Scale Descriptive Statistics

N = 23

M = 5.78

SD = 2.45

Min = 2

Max = 10

4.6 Quantitative Changes in Political Views Over Time

Participants were asked whether their political views had changed in the last ten years. As shown in Figure 6, responses were distributed across several categories. Fifteen participants reported becoming either “somewhat” or “much more” leaning in one direction (left or right), while five reported little change, and one was unsure.

Do you think your political views have changed in the last 10 years?

23 responses

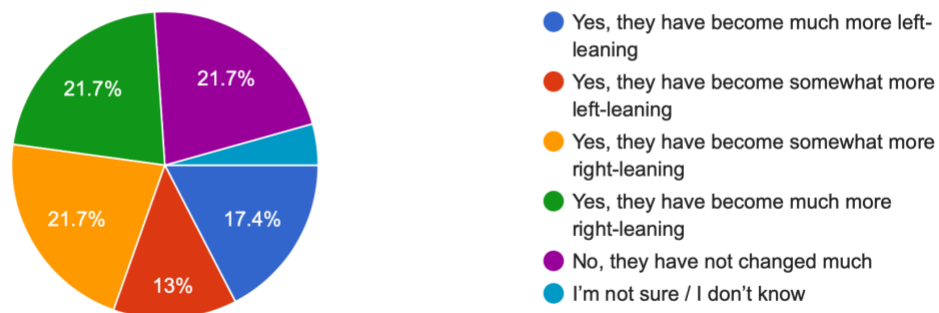


Figure 6: Change of Political Views

4.7 Qualitative Descriptions of Political Change

A total of 17 participants provided written responses describing how their political views have changed over the last ten years (or since becoming politically aware). Responses varied widely. Several participants described movement in their political orientation, while others

described changes in the types of political issues they prioritize or shifts in their level of engagement.

4.8 Influence of Media Habits

Nineteen participants responded to the open-ended question about how their media habits have influenced their political views. Responses referenced a variety of media behaviors, including differences in consumption across platforms, changes in overall exposure to news, and general reflections on how media use relates to political awareness.

4.9 Influence of Family Media Habits

Seventeen participants provided comments about how their family's media habits influenced their own political identity or political views. Responses described a range of experiences, including alignment or contrast with family media patterns, generational differences, and varying degrees of influence.

4.10 Examples of Propaganda

Sixteen participants responded to the optional prompt asking for an example of propaganda in the media. Responses included a wide variety of examples, with no single topic dominating across participants.

5. Discussion

This study offers initial insight into how individuals connected to pre-2010s immigration from former Soviet republics (FSU) understand their political identities within overlapping U.S. and post-Soviet media environments. Although Russian-speaking immigrants represent a substantial diaspora in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, 2024; Slavic Studies Association, 2023), researchers note that this population does not form a cohesive political or

cultural bloc and exhibits considerable diversity shaped by distinct migration waves and generational experiences (Dimke & Meyer-Olimpieva, 2024). The findings of this exploratory study reinforce that observation by demonstrating variation in media repertoires, differing perceptions of family influence, and a wide ideological distribution. These results extend existing media-effects and polarization scholarship into a population that has received limited direct empirical attention in communication research.

Participants reported diverse media habits, with most using multiple social media platforms and encountering political content frequently. Their open-ended explanations reflected individualized interpretations of this exposure. One participant wrote that “seeing politics every day online made me double-check information instead of taking it at face value” (Participant 12). This type of evaluative engagement aligns with Ryzhova’s (2022) identification of a “truth-seeking” repertoire among Russian-speaking migrants, who often triangulate information across conflicting sources rather than relying on a single news outlet (pp. 225, 229–230). Such findings complement broader arguments that media effects are contingent and dependent on individual dispositions rather than uniformly polarizing (Arora et al., 2022, p. 4; Garrett, 2009, p. 273).

At the same time, the data also included participants demonstrating strong partisan orientations. No respondents placed themselves at the extreme-left end of the ideology scale, while two selected the extreme-right endpoint. Additionally, more participants reported shifting rightward than leftward over the past decade. These patterns recall research showing that polarization can develop asymmetrically depending on demographic or contextual factors (Hohmann & Coscia, 2025, p. 11). One participant expressed this shift directly: “I used to be more neutral, but the last few years made me much more right-leaning” (Participant 14).

The responses of Participant 6 illustrate how media exposure, political identity, and affect may interact in especially clear and intense ways. This participant rated themselves as a “10” on the ideological scale, used Fox News exclusively among mainstream outlets, and reported seeing political content on social media “every day or almost every day.” They also answered “yes” to exposure to Russian state-sponsored media and described themselves as having become “much more right-leaning” over the past decade. Their explanation emphasized strong emotional distancing from the political left: “I’m not trying to be mean but it was true democracy the right and the left can talk about things, but now the far left is just so far into their head and have so many mental health issues that I don’t want anything to do with them” (Participant 6). This language reflects the affective dimension of polarization described in the literature (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021, as cited in Kelm et al., 2023, p. 3). When asked whether media influenced their political identity, they responded: “I voted for Trump three times so no,” demonstrating the pattern noted by Kelm et al. (2023) that individuals often deny media influence even when their media diets closely align with their political trajectories (p. 2). Their identification of “CNN and Gaza genocide” and claims about ideological conflict further illustrate how geopolitical narratives intersect with partisan identity.

A second case, Participant 9, highlights a different pathway toward ideological consolidation but reflects a similar pattern of denying media influence. This participant, a Ukrainian immigrant who arrived in the 1970s, used only Telegram among social platforms yet reported encountering political content “every day.” They consumed Fox News and online newspapers, answered “yes” to Russian state-media exposure, and placed themselves at “8” on the ideological spectrum. Like Participant 6, they described becoming “much more right-leaning,” attributing this shift primarily to direct experience: “Moved because of influx of illegal

aliens who don't assimilate. Experienced it personally.” When asked whether media habits influenced their political views, they responded: “Not much. I use common sense and my personal experience.” Despite relying on ideologically distinct but politically charged media sources, they framed their political shift as rooted entirely in personal observation. This mirrors the refusal to acknowledge media influence described in selective-exposure research (Kelm et al., 2023, p. 2). Unlike Participant 6, however, Participant 9 acknowledged some familial influence— “Made it lean to the right”—which aligns with findings that family-based media norms shape diaspora political orientations (Ryzhova, 2022, p. 223). Their labeling of “most print media... and cable like CNN” as propaganda reflects selective distrust tied to unstable forms of political trust (Van Remoortere & Vliegthart, 2025, p. 534).

In contrast to these rightward shifts, Participant 10 reported becoming “much more left-leaning” over the past decade and attributed this shift to observing the effects of partisan and state-aligned media on their family. They wrote: “I’ve gotten a front row seat to how brainwashed people can be by Fox News and the Russian propaganda machine” (Participant 10). This reflects an oppositional response to family media habits, consistent with research showing that diaspora media exposure can generate divergence as well as alignment (Ryzhova, 2022, p. 223). Their experience also illustrates Arora et al.’s (2022) argument that media effects vary widely across individuals and may push some audiences away from, rather than toward, the content they encounter (p. 4).

Family media environments across the rest of the sample demonstrated similar variability. Some participants described early exposure to Russian-language or state-aligned media as influential, while others noted actively distancing themselves from their family’s media behaviours. These differences reinforce Ryzhova’s (2022) argument that diaspora media

practices are shaped by political beliefs, generational experiences, and migration histories rather than by language alone (p. 223). They also support Arora et al.'s (2022) conclusion that media effects depend on individual characteristics and contextual conditions (p. 4).

Taken together, these findings indicate several broader implications. The uneven ideological distribution—especially the absence of far-left placements—combined with reports of rightward ideological movement suggests that polarization may be emerging asymmetrically within this demographic. The presence of truth-seeking, mixed-repertoire, oppositional, and partisan media behaviours parallels patterns documented in diaspora research (Ryzhova, 2022, pp. 218, 225), suggesting that repertoire-based frameworks may be particularly useful in understanding political identity development among Russian-speaking immigrant communities. These results also support the view that polarization within immigrant groups cannot be understood solely in terms of U.S. partisan dynamics; instead, it emerges at the intersection of U.S. political pressures, transnational media flows, and family-based information norms.

From a practical standpoint, these findings underscore the need for media literacy initiatives that account for bilingual and bicultural information environments. They also highlight the importance of studying immigrant communities whose political identities may be shaped by simultaneous exposure to democratic and authoritarian media systems—an area the literature identifies as understudied (Arora et al., 2022, pp. 8–9; Dimke & Meyer-Olimpieva, 2024).

6. Conclusion

This project offers a small first look at how people connected to pre-2010s immigration from former Soviet republics think about their political identities and how their media habits relate to those identities. Even within a limited group, the responses showed a wide range of

experiences—some participants leaned heavily on U.S. partisan media, some avoided it, some were influenced by family habits, and some pushed back against them. Overall, the results suggest that there is no single pattern of political identity in this community. Instead, people make sense of politics through a mix of social media use, mainstream news exposure, family dynamics, and their own interpretations of current events.

There are several important limitations. The sample size was very small, and because I used convenience and snowball sampling, the group is not representative of this population as a whole. My expectation of a rightward trend was based on my own observations, and because the survey was mainly distributed to people I know (and to their circles), the answers reflect that social environment rather than any broader FSU immigrant pattern. In the future, I would collect data over a longer period of time and use more varied recruitment methods to reach a more diverse and random sample.

Some survey questions also need refinement. The propaganda question produced too many vague answers—mostly definitions rather than examples—which shows that I should have provided a definition or clearer instructions. At the same time, the inconsistency suggests that many people have strong feelings about propaganda without a shared understanding of what it actually means. Another limitation is that, although I asked about social media platforms, I did not account for how people use them. Someone who posts daily and someone who only scrolls passively may have very different political experiences, even if they use the same apps. A similar issue came up in the mainstream media section: no one reported using print journalism, and a few even expressed disdain for it, yet several used online newspaper apps. This shows the need for clearer media literacy measures—not just what sources people use, but how they evaluate and interpret the information they encounter.

There are several avenues for future research. I would like to explore how country of origin and decade of immigration shape media habits and political beliefs, since most of my respondents were from Ukraine and may not reflect other FSU backgrounds. Religion may also be an important factor, especially given that a large portion of FSU immigrants are Jewish and may have specific political attitudes toward Israel, which is currently a major polarizing issue. These additional demographic factors could help build a more complete picture of how political identities evolve in this community.

Despite its limitations, this study highlights the complexity and variety within a group that is often treated as politically uniform. With expanded sampling and more precise survey tools, future research can build on these early findings and contribute to a better understanding of how immigrant communities navigate overlapping media systems and form political beliefs over time.

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