# Polarization strategies in social media political discourse

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**Abstract:** This article examines the main strategies of political polarization in social media discourse. The study focuses on the linguistic and communicative mechanisms through which political actors construct opposition between social groups. Particular attention is given to the "us–them" dichotomy, positive self-presentation, negative representation of political opponents, labeling, stereotyping, emotionalization, selective exposure, and algorithmic amplification. The analysis is based on critical discourse theory, social identity theory, and contemporary research on political polarization and social media. The findings indicate that polarization is produced not only by ideological differences but also by the construction of group identities and negative emotional attitudes toward political out-groups. Social media can intensify these processes through repeated exposure, personalized content, and algorithmic distribution. The study concludes that political polarization in digital discourse should be understood as a multidimensional linguistic, social, psychological, and technological phenomenon.

**Keywords:** political discourse, social media, polarization, political communication, "us–them," affective polarization, ideological polarization, social identity, algorithmic amplification.

## Introduction

Social media has fundamentally changed the structure of political communication. Political actors and citizens can directly produce and distribute political content, while users can immediately react to, share, and reinterpret political messages. This environment increases political participation but can also contribute to political polarization. Political polarization has two important dimensions. Ideological polarization refers to increasing differences between political positions, whereas affective polarization concerns negative feelings toward people belonging to opposing political groups.[1]

The second dimension is particularly important in social media because political identities can become closely connected with social identity. A systematic review by Kubin and von Sikorski shows that social and political media can contribute to polarization, particularly when individuals repeatedly encounter politically compatible information.[1] Van Bavel et al. emphasize that polarization on social media is influenced by three interconnected factors: users' political preferences, the content of political messages, and the design of digital platforms and their algorithms.[2]

Therefore, polarization should be studied not simply as disagreement between political positions, but as a process in which political identities, discourse strategies, emotions, and technological mechanisms interact.

## Main Discussion

### The "Us–Them" Strategy

The construction of an "us–them" opposition is one of the central strategies of political polarization. Political discourse divides society into an in-group and an out-group. The in-group is generally represented positively, while the out-group is described negatively. Van Dijk's ideological discourse theory explains this mechanism through the principle of emphasizing positive characteristics of "us" and negative characteristics of "them," while minimizing negative information about the in-group and positive information about the out-group.[3]

In social media, this strategy can be expressed through pronouns, slogans, hashtags, images, and short political statements. Terms such as "the people," "true citizens," or "patriots" may create a positive collective identity, whereas opponents may be represented through negative political or moral labels.

Research on politicians' Twitter discourse confirms that the "us–them" structure is an important mechanism for constructing political identities and ideological boundaries.[4]

**Positive Self-Presentation and Negative Other-Presentation**

Political actors often strengthen polarization by presenting their own group as responsible, honest, patriotic, or legitimate while describing opponents as incompetent, corrupt, dangerous, or dishonest. This strategy is closely related to political legitimization. Masroor et al. demonstrate that politicians use Twitter to construct ideological identities through positive representations of their own political group and negative representations of political opponents.[4]

The effectiveness of this strategy is connected with the short and highly visible nature of social media communication. Complex political arguments can be reduced to simple contrasts between morally positive and negative actors.

**Labeling and Stereotyping**

Labeling reduces a complex political position to a simplified category. Political opponents may be described as "extremists," "radicals," "elitists," or other negatively evaluated categories. Such labels can replace substantive discussion with judgments about the identity of the opponent. Stereotyping extends particular characteristics from individuals to entire social or political groups. Expressions such as "they always" or "they never" transform individual actions into generalized representations. Consequently, political opponents are presented as a homogeneous group rather than as individuals with different positions. From a discourse perspective, labeling and stereotyping are important because repeated linguistic associations can influence how audiences perceive political groups.

**Emotional Polarization**

Political polarization is not exclusively ideological. It also involves emotional attitudes toward political opponents. Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes argue that contemporary political polarization can be understood partly through social identity, in which partisan identification generates positive evaluations of the in-group and negative evaluations of the out-group.[5]

Social media can strengthen this process because political messages frequently use emotionally charged language. Anger, fear, resentment, and moral outrage can increase users' attention and encourage interaction with political content. Van Bavel et al. identify social identity and emotional responses as important mechanisms through which social media can shape polarization.[2] Thus, political disagreement may become a conflict between social groups rather than a disagreement over particular policies.

**Selective Exposure and Echo Chambers**

Users often select political information that corresponds to their existing beliefs. This phenomenon is known as selective exposure. When users repeatedly encounter politically compatible information, their existing opinions may become stronger. The concept of an echo chamber refers to an information environment in which similar political views are repeatedly reinforced while alternative perspectives receive less attention. However, exposure to opposing views does not necessarily reduce polarization. Bail et al. found that exposure to opposing political content on Twitter could increase polarization among some users.[6] This finding demonstrates that political disagreement alone does not guarantee constructive dialogue; the emotional and identity-related context of the message is also important.

**Algorithmic Amplification**

The technological structure of social media is another factor in political polarization. Recommendation and ranking algorithms determine which content receives greater visibility. Consequently, political communication is influenced not only by what users publish but also by how platforms distribute information. Huszár et al. found evidence of systematic algorithmic amplification of political content on Twitter, although the effects varied according to political groups and national contexts.[7] This suggests that algorithms can influence the visibility of political messages and therefore contribute to the communication environment in which polarization develops. However, algorithms should not be considered the sole cause of polarization. Their influence interacts with users' political preferences, social identities, and the emotional characteristics of political content.[2]

## Results

The analysis identifies several interconnected polarization strategies in social media political discourse:

-construction of the “us–them” opposition;
-positive representation of the in-group;
-negative representation of the out-group;
-political labeling and stereotyping;
-emotionalization and moral framing;
-attribution of social problems to particular groups;
-selective exposure to politically compatible information;
-algorithmic amplification and repeated circulation of polarizing content.

These strategies operate simultaneously at linguistic, psychological, social, and technological levels. Therefore, political polarization cannot be explained by ideological disagreement alone.

## Conclusion

Political polarization in social media discourse is a multidimensional process produced through the interaction of political language, group identity, emotional responses, selective information consumption, and platform algorithms. The construction of “us” and “them” represents the central discursive mechanism, while labeling, stereotyping, emotionalization, and negative representation strengthen boundaries between political groups. Scientific research demonstrates that social media can contribute to polarization, but its effects are not uniform. The influence of digital platforms depends on political context, user behavior, message characteristics, and algorithmic systems.[1][2]

Consequently, the study of political polarization requires an interdisciplinary approach combining political discourse analysis, social psychology, political communication, and digital media research. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for developing more constructive forms of political communication in the digital environment.

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