

Overview of the Seminar “Fundamental Socio-Economic and Demographic Shifts in the United States: Effects for Policy”

On May 31, 2024, the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs of the HSE University held a scientific seminar “Fundamental Socio-Economic and Demographic Shifts in the United States: Effects for Policy.” The speakers of the seminar were Igor Istomin, acting head of the Department of Applied International Political Analysis, MGIMO University, Konstantin Sukhoverkhov, RIAC program manager, and Vasil Sakaev, associate professor, Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy. The seminar was moderated by Dmitry Suslov, deputy director of the Centre for Comprehensive European and International Studies of the HSE University. The experts discussed the acute internal political crisis in the United States, the growth of inequality and stagnation of middle class incomes in the country, the impact of demographic and socio-economic factors on US politics and a number of other issues.

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Dmitry Suslov, opening the seminar, noted that since the 1960s, the United States has been facing a serious domestic political crisis. Polarization between conservatives and liberals, as well as Republicans and Democrats, is increasing due to demographic and socio-economic changes. The racial composition is changing. The US is shifting towards a non-white majority, and the traditional American dream is weakening as inequality rises and the middle class stagnates. This has led to a desire for fundamental change, even among young people, who prefer Trump to Biden because they see him as a chance for more radical change. The moderator noted that the status quo does not suit a growing part of American society, and this cannot but affect the domestic and foreign policy of the United States, and then invited the speakers to the discussion.

The first speaker, **Igor Istomin**, noted the relevance of the topic under discussion, emphasizing that it is important not to underestimate the United States as an adversary, despite its domestic problems. The American political system is built on polarization, but this is its peculiarity rather than its weakness. The US remains an influential power with a strong demographic potential, which is quite high due to migration and natural population growth. Political polarization is expressed not only in ideological differences, but also in the “affective divide,” where dislike for opponents is more important than for their ideas. An important factor in the increased competition between Republicans and Democrats is the growing participation of Latin Americans in politics. All these processes, however, do not weaken the US so much as to consider its internal problems as factors significantly weakening the US role in the world. In the speaker’s opinion, the US

foreign policy strategy is aimed at shifting the burden on European allies and increasing their dependence on the United States.

Istomin's speech was followed by a discussion, during which Suslov noted that the US is going through a crisis and transformation, but this will not lead to its collapse or weakening. Polarization in the country is significant but manageable, and support for key foreign policy directions remains. US allies, despite their discontent, are forced to support US initiatives, which is especially noticeable in the issues of assistance to Ukraine and countering China. Istomin added to Suslov's opinion that the consolidation of allies around the US continues despite difficult conditions. The US flexibly uses international structures, creating coalitions for specific tasks. An important part of the US strategy remains concern about the US reputation and containment of China in Taiwan and Asia in general through support for Ukraine. Both experts agree that polarization, social inequality, and global economic challenges are significant but will not lead to system collapse. The US continues to adapt, maintaining leadership through flexibility and consolidation of allies.

Konstantin Sukhoverkhov's report was entitled "Dissatisfaction of the US population with the socio-economic situation in the country and its impact on Washington's foreign policy." Based on statistical data, the expert analyzed the changes in public opinion regarding the US foreign and domestic policy since 2008. During the administration of George W. Bush Jr. active foreign policy remained popular amid the memory of the September 11 terrorist attacks and military operations. Toward the end of his term, however, approval declined due to the unpopular war in Iraq and the financial crisis. Dissatisfaction with foreign policy increased under the Obama administration. Polls showed that Americans wanted more attention to domestic issues. The trend of declining support for a proactive foreign policy increased with each election. The number of Democratic voters calling themselves liberals increased, while the right-wing, including the Tea Party movement, increased criticism over reform and migration. By 2016, society had become more polarized. Republicans and Democrats had different views of how the country had changed over the past 50 years, with Republicans believing that life had gotten worse. The issues of migration and economic stability were key for Republicans, while Democrats emphasized multiculturalism and social movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) and MeToo. Sukhoverkhov concluded his presentation by emphasizing that the American population is increasingly tired of spending on foreign policy, turning its focus to domestic issues. The US political and academic community is now rethinking the country's role in the world, and even among Democrats there is a growing opinion that maintaining US global dominance at any cost is not a priority.

The experts' discussion after the second presentation revolved around the issue of reindustrialization in the United States as a means of combating socio-economic polarization and inequality. Suslov mentioned that both Democrats and Republicans support reindustrialization through policies aimed at restoring the country's production potential, with the growth of the military-industrial sector being an important tool. Sukhoverkhov opined that reindustrialization is definitely happening, but in specific areas such as microchip manufacturing and high technology. These industries will not

create many jobs and will not affect inequality. The shrinking middle class is mainly due to global economic factors. The speaker emphasized that protectionism is necessary to preserve the US economy, citing the example of the Japanese auto industry that crushed the US and European auto industry in the 1970s, and questioned whether the growth of the military-industrial sector is a panacea.

The final report of the seminar was presented by **Vasil Sakaev** and was devoted to the influence of demographic processes on political events and polarization in the United States. The expert noted that demographic changes have a long-term effect on political processes, although current polarization is supported by various social and political events, such as the BLM movement and the storming of the Capitol. The report focuses on data from the 24th US Census (2020), which reveals key trends: increasing racial and ethnic diversity, a shrinking white population, and an aging society. It is noted that the growing number of retirees and demographic pressures will require significant social and economic reforms. The young population is predominantly represented by minorities, but migration does not compensate for the aging process. In addition, the rapporteur noted the growth of multiracial categories and minority representatives in the census, which reflects new social trends and cultural preferences.

Sakaev presented a quantitative forecast of changes in the composition of the US electorate. The share of Whites without higher education, which is now 46% of the total number of voters, will decrease to 37% by 2036. This group, which tends to support Republicans and often ignores elections, plays an important role if it mobilizes. At the same time, the share of Hispanics and Latinos is growing and could account for as much as 20% of the electorate by 2036, although their influence is now limited to concentrations in certain states. The share of voters over age 65 is also expected to grow and the number of young people is expected to decline. Whites remain the largest but heterogeneous group, and their influence will diminish by 2036. African Americans make up about 13% of voters and traditionally support Democrats, but support for Republicans is growing among young people. Hispanic voters are ethnically diverse and their preferences are also changing, with support for Republicans increasing among them. Younger people (Millennials and Zoomers) support Democrats more than previous generations, but the question remains whether they will retain their views as they age. Overall, Republicans are looking to retain support of Whites, but need to attract minorities and a third force. Democrats need to strengthen their position among ethnic minorities and educated white youth, but risk losing support from other groups. The paradox, according to the speaker, is that under the influence of demographic trends, Republicans will need to formulate social demands, while Democrats will need to lean toward a conservative agenda, which contradicts their traditional ideologies.

Based on the results of Sakaev's presentation, the seminar participants discussed several issues. First, whether the two-party balance in the US will be maintained despite the changes, or whether the system may disintegrate and a third force may emerge. Second, whether the geographic distribution of parties will change, given the growing number of Hispanic voters in the South. Also raised was the issue of Californians migrating to Texas: whether they retain Democratic views or switch to

the Republican side. Sakaev noted that no party will have a guaranteed victory;¹ the balance is delicate. Demographic trends may strengthen the Democrats' position, but there are factors that make predictions difficult, such as the rise in support for Republicans among Hispanics and Blacks. The emergence of a third force is possible, but historically such parties are short-lived in the United States. A change in electoral geography is inevitable: southern states may become more pro-Democratic, and cities will play a key role in this.

The following AI technologies were used in the preparation of this material: ChatGPT, NeuralWriter, YandexGPT.

¹ The event took place before the presidential election. – *Editor's note.*