From Unknown Subculture to Political Mainstream: the American Alt-Right and the Hungarian Right

*Balázs Böcskei

**Szilvi Német

Abstract

The online populist right has been discussed in a significant number of articles and studies, partly because it was supported by Trump's staff and campaign, and vice versa. According to Google Scholar's data, the term "alt-right" appeared in barely more than 400 academic publications back in 2016, but this number grew to over 4000 by 2019. Seeing the persistently intensive discourse, one may believe this political subculture was here for a permanent online hegemony, but the alt-right, unlike the academic discourse going on about it to this day, disappeared overnight in the political sense. Their rise clearly demonstrates the "bad" use of technology and the politicization of cultural war parties, which is interconnected with the growth of the populist right as well. On the other hand, their decline offers significant lessons, too: despite the technological compatibility, political success is highly volatile in the 21st century's public discourse. Since the phenomenon has crossed the ocean in both the cultural and the technological sense, an in-depth knowledge of the alt-right's digital "archaeology" is essential for understanding the thinking and organization of the contemporary governing Hungarian right as well.

Keywords: digital populism, Trump, alt-right, Hungary, gender, video games

Introduction

As a result of the technological changes of the early 1990s, including the widespread use of the Internet and the democratisation of Internet content production, public attention has been constantly turned to online social practices in the hope that they will be able to reverse negative trends such as the steady (sometimes dramatic) decline in participation outside the traditional political sphere; the partially derivative legitimacy deficit of political systems; stagnating or declining electoral participation; and the loss of trust in politicians and institutions. The relatively easily accessible online space was characterized by a promise that the diversity of participants would result in a beneficial opinion pluralism (Woo-Young, 2005) and the removal of the obstacles from the way of communicative democracy. The intensive proliferation of

online forums, conference discussions and chain e-mails indeed allowed for the conclusion that the new media will enable activists to achieve their goals and/or successfully reach out to the politically inactive members of the public. The phenomenon gave rise to an abundant literature (Negroponte, 1995; Grossman, 1995; Browning, 1996; Carpini, 2000) without any empirical basis and a significantly deficient knowledge of user habits. Inspired and driven by a certain academic and political optimism, these studies failed to adequately weigh the nature of politic(al action)s, and few papers were willing to properly consider the undesirable risks involved in this democratization process at the time. Relying on various democracy concepts, the early Internet-optimists kept stressing the advantages of network communication, including direct decision-making (extended or radical participatory democracy) or engagement in shaping the public discourse (deliberative democracy).

The "social capital" (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1995) inevitably became a key concept of these changes and expectations, partly because the devaluation of the traditional institutions' retentive role and opportunities gave prominence to the personal networks of individuals as an infrastructure for information, mobilization, and communication. Communicative competence, which incorporates media usage, media literacy and interpersonal communication, has become a vital part of citizen socialization. The new technologies mediate these networks (Friedland, 1996) by breaking information monopolies and bypassing the traditional gatekeepers (politicians, media workers) of information supply. According to the often-quoted phrase in journalism at the time, the Internet gives voice to those who had none before (Gillmor, 2004), and enables more and more people to exist as a political commentator or a civil journalist as well. (Micro) blogging, which has migrated to the social media sites by now, was welcomed as a new form of political participation (especially if it conveyed the experiences of those living on the edge of society or political expression (Veenstra, 2010)).

On the other hand, the appearance of social media required analysts to revisit and reconsider their theories on the connections between media usage and democracy. Also, there was an ever more pressing need to consider another aspect that connected such factors as the social media-enabled direct networking, the anti-elite rhetoric, and the low access threshold with the increasing traction of populism(s). Although populism is an inherent accompaniment and part of politics, the appearance of its revived version in our contemporary society's hybrid media systems has led to a conceptualization of digital populism, i.e., a unique, technologically bound form of populism. Digital populism theories focus on the question how official politics forms the *anti-establishment* narrative and rhetoric by conveying the average citizens' views in the

guise and via the channel of their own communication, as the populist communication strategy creates a feeling of involvement for people, suggesting that "their voices are heard," or "they can talk back to the regime" (Obsolete Capitalism, 2014). This feeling is further intensified by certain playful but controlled interactions, where the official campaign shares the social media posts of politically unembedded individuals, or uses non-professional aesthetic features as its own. As an increasingly important premise, messages are more likely to become viral and efficient for the masses if they are more direct, outrageous, polarizing, shocking or emotionally charged (Zúñiga et al., 2020).

Such utilization of the new media may play an active role in dismantling existing democratic practices as well. The populist communication strategy achieves this goal by strengthening group identities while demonizing those outside the group. The digital sphere's decentralized structure and the lack of traditional gatekeepers may help hatemongering movements to gain traction (Rétiová, 2018). As a result, they became a hotbed for racism, nationalism, fanaticism, misogyny, white supremacy and other discriminatory ideologies. A typical case study for these processes is the alt-right, the ideology of which is discussed in the next section.

In the first part of the paper, the political thought and content of the American populist right, the alt-right, is presented. In doing so, we will address the phenomena that catalysed the birth of this (digital) right, and then address the offline and online anxieties from which the alt-right promises liberation through its toxicity. The ideological overview will be followed by a presentation of the alt-right's technological operating model: how it has tailored it to individuals and then politically shaped online spaces. For a better perspective, a separate section will address the alt-right's first symbolic victory, the #Gamergate scandal. This is followed by a presentation of some of the elements of the importation of alt-right political and technological elements into Hungary. Some segments of the right, which has won four consecutive parliamentary elections in Hungary, have integrated alt-right elements in their daily content development without any precedent compared to the continental right. Finally, we conclude with the current state of play of the alt-right's fight for the internet, which is innovating in its right-wingism and technology.

The alt-right as an ideological melting pot

The term "alt-right" was famously used by the media in reference to the online phenomena on the right, including Milo Yiannopoulos (Barkóczi– Böcskei, 2018), 4chan and the neo-Nazi

websites, accompanying the 2016 American presidential election campaign. In contrast, the alt-right itself used the term to signify the new wave of openly white segregationist and white nationalist movements, which embrace, to a varying degree, the topics of race-related IQ, European demographic and civilizational decline, cultural decadence, cultural Marxism, anti-egalitarianism and Islamization. The phrase was first used by Richard Spencer in 2008 in his short-lived webzines (such as Taki's Magazine or AlternativeRight.com). The latter was created to "unravel the illusion of racial equality and call attention to the importance of white racial awareness" (Hartzell 2018, p. 19). As their name suggests, their self-definition was also based on creating an alternative for the centre-right, conservative establishment. Mocking them as "cockservative", they despise the mainstream right for its Christian passivity and conduct that supposedly makes women, the nation and the race vulnerable to non-white, foreign invaders. However, the alt-right comprises several positions that, to a various extent, embrace nationalist, identitarian, libertarian, neo-conservative, paleo-conservative or neo-reactionist elements. So the online right can be better described based on the self-definition of the communities rather than any ideological label (Finlayson, 2021). That's how the terms "alt-right", "alt-lite" or "Intellectual Dark Web" (IDW) were coined to signify particular directions.

At first, "alt-lite" was used as a pejorative reference to those who share the key alt-right views in terms of anti-Islamism and anti-feminism, but reject the idea of a white, racially organized state. Nevertheless, this "diluted", less militant version of the alt-right could still serve as a platform for the former's growth (Ma, 2021). The alt-lite has an abundant number of trolls ready to engage in battle with the liberal "woke" culture.[1] The intellectual position is occupied by the so-called Intellectual Dark Web, a community consisting of "rogue" academics, writers, and political commentators. The members of the IDW are also known to have typically abandoned the liberal conventions defining their profession and they represent views that are "similar to nothing that publicly happens in our culture" (Weiss, 2018).

Strictly ideological boundaries are often blurred by the network-based interconnection of individuals, communities, and websites, with the "collapsed context" (Boyd, 2006) of certain terms making it even more difficult to mark said boundaries. For example, political scientist

[1] "Woke" is a term which is characterized by a whole set of activist, academic and pop culture definitions that could fill an encyclopaedia. To be woke means to be "awaken" (to be constantly aware and alert to social inequalities unfolding in your environment). Wokeness affects all fundamental areas of social justice, from social gender through religion to ableism. (Whiteout, 2018, p. 63.)

Alan Finlayson explains with great clarity how ideological traditions and canons cannot survive the "attack of the fluid media" where users keep switching between different nodes and rely on more and more resources to "cobble together" their ideas that resist any strict classification (Finlayson, 2021). Although the political profiles of online right personalities are relatively easy to distinguish, the media nonetheless merge them into a "common discursive universe" for users via the existing intertextuality and the algorithmic recommendations (Finlayson, 2021). Consequently, digital media can reshape both the supply and the demand side of the ideology economy: while the erosion of gatekeeper authority allows more and more actors to enter the idea market on the supply side, consumers are no longer limited by the ideology of the available media; on the contrary, media outlets are typically selected based on the particular consumer's ideological bias (Munger–Philips, 2019).

The technology's inherent characteristics are further reinforced by the common visual and linguistic expression sets, which enabled the alt-right to bridge occasionally conflicting views. This rhetoric and aesthetic style defined itself as opposed to the politically correct language of liberalism, relying on the transgressive qualities of irony, provocation, or vulgarity as well. Benjamin Moffit identifies this unsophisticated display of bad manners as the "populist style", which aims to tear apart the liberal consensus and reveal it as an empty convention (Moffit, 2016). As this often nihilistic and offensive humour interlaced style became mainstream, it was increasingly considered as the only way to make an impression in a competitive online environment. Although the origin of this communication style is often attributed to the various online troll subcultures (e.g. Nagle, 2017), it was not invented in the 21st century. Our current era only brought on the widespread use of subversive tactics rooted in the rich history of art avant-garde and even the farce culture.

Despite the alt-right's significantly reduced political influence in the US after the Charlottesville events (the 2017 Unite the Right march that claimed human casualties) and Trump's presidency (Thompson–Hawley, 2021), conspiracy theory-like narratives attempting to interpret public events (see QAnon and Pizzagate) can still mobilize more and more waves of followers targeting the liberal establishment and the mainstream media (Bleakley, 2021).

#Gamergate: video games and gender asymmetry

The first analysts of the alt-right phenomenon mainly focused on the ideological aspect of the political subculture, even though the online communities and technology use form at least as

important a part of it. The alt-right had its first symbolic victory with the #Gamergate scandal (2014), which was related to the video game industry and the ethics of journalism covering it. The efforts to reform online video games and to promote inclusivity brought to the surface the gamer subculture's rejection and even hatred against women and progressive gender theory, which was welcomed by many young men in the online sphere, subsequently sparking the emotions and media attention laying the foundations for the future alt-right alliances as well as their media strategies.

Marking the origins of the alt-right, the Gamergate affair began with an ugly breakup of two people in a relationship, and it soon grew into a "hashtag-movement" (#Gamergate). The harassment campaign's first victim was Zoe Quinn, an actor of the video game sphere and the creator of a video game called Depression Quest: after their breakup, Quinn's former lover accused her of violating ethical norms and shared their interpersonal messages via an online blog. Quinn had already received threats before, e.g., when she shared her own developed game via the independent Steam Greenlight video game platform in 2013. The hate campaign of which she became a central figure aimed at the de-legitimization and harassment of women and their allies involved in the gamer community. One year later, the actions leading to the Gamergate (defamation and doxing) also suggested that a woman's professional success, i.e., Depression Quest's positive critical reception in this case, was not due to her competence but her intimate relations with others. In response, the famous American actor Adam Baldwin created the #GG hashtag, which was used in combination with @name strings on Twitter to conduct coordinated harassment campaigns primarily against game developers and feminist critics (e.g.: Feminist Frequency founder and operator Anita Sarkeesian). While the open campaign against the individuals rejecting the GG community's values was conducted on Twitter and YouTube, the members' communication and tactical discussions were hosted by Chan-style forums (4chan, 8.chan.co) and Reddit.

In her work on far-right communication tactics, Julia Ebner gives a vivid outline of how the primarily online organized movements use the various new media outlets for campaign purposes (Ebner, 2019). While recruitment and mobilization are typically conducted via online forums and vlogs (Chan, Reddit, YouTube), the next steps of radicalization and coordination are realized through encrypted communication services (Telegram, WhatsApp, Discord). Then the messages are transmitted and promoted to the wider public via social media outlets (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) and/or the comment sections of news sites. The essence of tactical media usage is to operate a multi-level, circular, feedback-based online ecosystem (influence

networks) with certain elements specialized on different groups while using unique, target-specific language, visual imagery, and symbolism.

The above analysis and the Gamergate harassment campaign demonstrates that certain platforms, despite differences in organization technology, display platform-specific cultural milieus and values as well. As a result, the applications are connected to unilateral ideological stances in the users' eyes. For example, Tumblr became famous as the hotbed of liberalism and progressive identity politics, whereas the followers of traditional masculinity organized themselves on Reddit, a platform serving geeks and other special interest groups. No wonder a subreddit became a central surface for Gamergate. The moderators of the subreddit made an agreement with another, also anti-feminist subreddit that was specifically created to mock Tumblr culture and target social activism, women's egalitarian movements and fluid gender identities (Massanari, 2016).

Socio-technological networks explicitly promoting the online forms of harassment and bullying are collectively called "toxic technocultures" by communication researcher Adrianne Massanari. Applying the Actor Network Theory (Latour, 2005), we can conclude that non-human technological agents (algorithms, network guidelines or the architecture) are not solely responsible for the appearance of such behaviour, but neither can such behaviour be exclusively attributed to user activities. For example, algorithmic recommendations (which are often referred to as the root of all evil, including online radicalization) would never work without motivated individuals actively seeking out content (Citarella, 2021). So the interplay between the two factors (technological and human) generates the dominant presence of offensive content, which concurrently channels user desires and aversions as well as capitalizes on the opportunities lying in online anonymity (or pseudonymity) and leaderless communities.

For example, the technological agent of Reddit, which was a key platform in Gamergate, was the apparently democratic karma system. It determined the visibility of each post based on its rating (i.e., users rate each comment, thus elevating the higher-rated ones to the top, while dropping lower-rated comments into invisibility). Coupled with the dominant user sensibilities characterized by a certain kind of toxic masculinity, the system and the mostly male user base regularly downvoted problems thematized by women (menstruation, sexual harassment, body image issues), thus making them invisible; whereas fantasies related to female sexuality became the most popular content elements all over the platform. These and other similar platforms and forums (the interests of which were later represented under the alt-right's digital umbrella) were

generally characterized by a high rejection rate of women which, beside the personal issues, often grew into a feeling of doom and gloom over the feminisation of the culture as a whole. As explained by Anne Kelly, the stakes of the fight were to restore the white male identity after the crisis caused by 9/11, which inevitably contributed to the devaluation of the characteristics typically associated with women. Some extreme opinions went as far as to blame the allegedly passive, receptive, masochistic, i.e., overly feminine America for the tragedy, and urged for an immediate remasculation (Kelly, 2017). The trend was enhanced by the distress characterizing the growing millennial generation that had an unprecedented access to digital media while demonstrating a higher interest in social justice and commitment to leftist values than their parents. This generation was often "described" by certain terms devised and popularized in the public discourse by the alt-right; i.e., "soyboy", "snowflake", "crybully", etc. Associated with femininity, each of these terms were used to express the unviability of this generation in contrast with the strong male ideals of the previous eras. As an often-cited paradox, the alt-right is very much capable of using the most modern methods to promote its anti-modernist ideas. As the next section demonstrates however, their efforts are not unprecedented in the history of far-right movements.

Tactical innovation and technological infrastructure from alt-right to alt-tech

Prior to the alt-right, other white supremacist movements successfully used the internet for mobilization and sharing information.[2] For example, Aryan Nation and the Ku-Klux-Klan were among the first to grab the opportunity lying in e-mail and the Bulletin Board System (BBS) in the United States, to apply "network communication methods in order to bypass the social, physical and legal restrictions suppressing the open expression of racism and anti-Semitism" (Donovan et al. 2019, p. 49). For example, the Aryan Liberty Net and the infamous neo-Nazi Stormfront website have been providing a platform for the dissemination of racist propaganda since 1984, and for the organization and recruitment of followers and the intimidation of targets since 1995 (Berlet, 2008). Their efforts to cut out the media and to bypass censorship and gatekeepers gained a new momentum with the appearance of platform providers (such as YouTube, Facebook, or Twitter) after the turn of the millennium.

[2] Of course, there is a plethora of progressive examples to cite here (see Dessewffy–Nagy, 2016 for Hungary) but, for the reasons discussed in that book's introduction, we do not specifically focus on the American alt-right movement here.

In any given era, the degree of the far-right's dependence on alternative and/or innovative communication technologies is in line with its exclusion from the mainstream: looking at a Hungarian example, the Jobbik party's post-2006 social media strategy is often described as "avant-garde" (Karl, 2019). Driven by a need to innovate, the "early adopter" attitude is typically associated with social movements. When it comes to extremist groups however, online media surfaces become more than just communication tools. As a result of the convergence, they often function as facilitators of keeping together and mobilizing communities.

Deplatforming and Alt-tech

As far as the United States is concerned, the Unite the Right march of 2017 became another significant turning point in the relations of tech giants and political extremists. The fact that the event was coordinated and organized solely in the digital sphere threw a light on the social media corporations' negligence in terms of complying with their own "community guidelines". After the tragedy, Google, Twitter, Facebook, Cloudflare, GoDaddy, Airbnb, Uber, Paypal, Discord and Patreon concurrently suspended the publicly known white supremacist accounts and their users (Donovan, 2018).

Exclusion from the common dialogue has severe consequences for radical actors. Yet, their ban from the mainstream social networking sites may offer them certain narrative advantages, as they can idealize their efforts as a struggle against the "restrictive, exclusionary media", thus presenting themselves as the victims. (In such cases, many declarations are made about "unfairly silenced victims" or the "martyrs of the struggle for the freedom of speech", positioning these individuals or groups as people who, just like terrorism victims, deserve the community's sympathy expressed by the term "JeSuis".) Furthermore, deplatforming may be interpreted as a serious violation of market rules for those who live on attention and clicks: lacking supporting infrastructure, they are unable to convey their messages to their followers, which therefore threatens their subsistence. For example, the alt-right's favourite psychologist, the Canadian Jordan Peterson collected a million dollars per year in crowd-funding donations via Patreon in his heyday.

Silencing attempts, which the affected parties interpret as censorship, may occasionally lead to the construction of "parallel ports" (Donovan et al., 2019). As a collective term, alternative technology (alt-tech) is used to identify the social network sites created by social movements striving for recognition and experiencing obstacles in their efforts. Cloning the format and

design of the most popular mainstream platforms, these sites promise an unrestricted application of the freedom of speech in order to attract users. As noted by Joan Donovan, an acclaimed researcher of the area, the infrastructural paradigm shift typically occurs when the movement's survival is at stake (Donovan, 2018). We can draw a similar conclusion if we consider former US president Donald Trump's announcement in October 2021 (and the crowd funding campaign going on ever since), to create his own social media site under the name of "Truth". The American alt-tech examples show the meeting point of three major movements: the warriors of the freedom of speech, open technology, and the alt-right—all three findingallies in each other (Donovan et al., 2019).

Hungary saw the creation of a similar alternative technological solution in December 2020. Surviving only for a few months, "Hungarian Facebook" Hundub was based on the adaptation of such overseas services as Gab and Parler, which were founded in 2016 and 2018, respectively. The failure of this attempt, i.e., the exodus from the popular social media platforms, has led to the Megafon project of pro-government influencers, which, instead of creating a parallel infrastructure, strives to "amplify conservative voices" in the social media outlets already used by the Hungarian population, although their dominance in the legacy media already allows them to widely disseminate their messages.

As shown above, deplatforming may not necessarily be successful if the bans lead to a variance from the easy-to-monitor, quasi "institutionalized" road, resulting in a kind of disruptive innovation. The bans may also entail another important consequence, which was highlighted by Joshua Citarella's (2021) ethnography research: the removal of large groups does not eliminate the demand for radical politics, it just fragmentizes the follower base into smaller factions that are harder and harder to identify. Of course, this could not have happened without the digital participatory media setting a low access threshold and creating the conditions for nearly anyone to enter the marketplace of ideas and peddle their ideology (Finlayson 2021). Subscriptions and peer-to-peer transactions allow even independent actors to operate as grassroots entities or "digital evangelists", since they can generate the necessary income for their subsistence (Schradie, 2019). In this market, the most successful "entrepreneurs" are the ones who disseminate populist ideologies that are hostile to such concepts as globalism, multiculturalism, the cultural and economic integration of minorities, feminism, and gender identity, or use these topics as a starting point (Finlayson, 2021).

Hungarian alt-right copycats

Angela Nagle's 'Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars From 4Chan And Tumblr To Trump And The Alt-Right' became a go-to publication for understanding the online subculture discussed here. The book's premise is that the alt-right ideology could not have found its way to the mainstream and to the new generations without a certain kind of "online compression". The seekers of alternative ways would not have been given a youthful momentum without the world of video games (as discussed above) and the meme aesthetics that repackaged political opinions into a humour- and image-based culture. The relatively independent trends of the different subcultures, from the believers of the human biodiversity theory to the enthusiasts of new masculinity, found each other and melted into one in the form of a cultural trend opposing political correctness.

As we mentioned above, the alt-right's manifesto declares the cultural supremacy of "natural conservatism", which primarily aims to protect and preserve traditional "American values". For that to happen, they believe they need to repossess the institutions considered as the safeguards of cultural and social norms, such as the academia, the media and the entertainment industry; all of which have been taken by the liberals from the conservative republican government. This idea is not completely alien to Hungary either (Békés, 2020), but it is different from the American situation inasmuch that it is implemented as a constant practice of capturing and establishing institutions in Hungary (Kristóf, 2021). In a market-driven country like the United States, such political attempts are obviously less successful. In Hungary however, the post-Communist state played an active role in culture financing (Kristóf 2021, p.14), so this intention finds its way more easily, especially if the government is fundamentally interested in a culture-driven state.

It should be stressed that the populist right in Hungary cannot be considered a specifically American model. Although we will only refer to the similarities below, in reality the Hungarian right-wing comprises a number of tendencies. It includes the Hungarian traditional conservative tradition, a bourgeois patronage mindset, continental conservatism, and the alt-right overseas discussed. What makes us turn to the latter is the specificity of this truly distant influence in Hungary. We see the reason for this not only in the similarity of political thinking, but also in the possibility that the technological adaptations described above. In this case, however, the technology does not just mean the importation of a neutral tool, but ideological connections with the right-wing ethos experienced in the US.

The troll style associated with online culture became just as popular in the "real world", but while its emergence in the US was typically seen in the skirmishes over college education issues in connection with "safe spaces"[3] and "trigger warnings", these campus debates are almost completely absent in Hungary. In 2021, the participants of the summer festival (MCC Feszt) organized by Mathias Corvinus Collegium (a recruitment base of right-of-centre youth) may have experienced the late blossom of this phenomenon in Hungary, if they attended the lectures of TV hosts Dennis Prager or Tucker Carlson. The event fit into a series of visits by American alt-right media celebrities invited to Hungary. Steve Bannon and the above-mentioned Milo Yiannopoulos have already toured Hungary on the invitation of pro-government institutions. The series of events have been extended by the visit of Justin Shubow, Trump's anti-modernist architectural critic in November 2021.

The typical debates of the alt-right, for example, the issue of "cancel culture"[4] is adopted by the explicitly rightist content developers, even though the phenomenon is not really embedded in Hungary. Created to reach out to the young, Pesti TV's programmes clearly illustrate how the American examples are adopted, albeit with an extremely low viewership. Pesti TV was launched as a television extension of the right-wing portal pestisracok.hu. The individual programmes followed the themes of the alt-right. The programmes focused on LGBTQ issues, with special programmes dedicated to trends in trans identities, for example. While the presenters stressed that, for example, removing statues of racist and colonial figures or the Black Lives Matter movement had no relevance to Central Europe, there were a number of programmes that critically addressed these issues and American liberal identity politics. The latter, according to their guests, "threaten Hungarian reality and Hungarian identity". The names of many of the programmes reflect the American connections: The Right Brothers, The Fair Right (the latter two were also originally English), Melting snowflakes, Cheesy liberals, Who

[3] The "safe space" concept originated from the women's emancipation movements of the late 20th century and was adopted by the initiative to reform American higher education institutions. The idea envisions the university as a safe space that is free of any inconvenient or offensive ideology, terminology or themes (Lukianoff–Haidt, 2015). To this day, the concept is met with significant disapproval. Its critics warn that such a confrontation-free environment infantilizes students by locking them in a bubble, so they will be traumatized when they face the "real world".

[4] Cancelling is an expression of a value judgement by which "you withhold your attention from a person or product the values or actions of which/whom (or lack thereof) are so offensive that you no longer wish to devote any time, money or presence to them/it". Although cancelling is an online-specific practice, black-listing or boycotting functioned on a similar principle in the physical world (Clark, 2020.)

ate the missionary?. A recurring feature of the programmes was the equation of the Hungarian left-liberal opposition with the "New Marxists" already familiar in America. Another Pesti TV's example is key influencer Zsolt Jeszenszky's "Political Hobbyist" show, which is the Hungarian adaptation of Steven Crowder's "Louder with Crowder".

There are several other programmes in which rightist media outlets strive to familiarize the Hungarian public with the terminology and culture adopted from the alt-right. Even though these issues (such as trans identity or gender reassignment surgery) were little known in Hungary until 2018, they have gained wider visibility and have become embedded in the political thinking of right-wing voters thanks to effectively coordinated framing efforts and a centralized and networked right-wing media space. A further similarity is the repositioning of the "brand" of the Hungarian people, complemented by fears of conspiracy (assuming the influence of George Soros in any criticism of the government), and the nationalist and collectivist construction of identity, which also includes the rejection of discursive respect for social sensibilities (negating politically correct discourse), or the glorification of the walls and fences that physically separate the worlds of "us" and "them" in the migration debate. The similarity of Hungarian right-wing populism to the American case is thus not only technological but also discursive: it is not only new in what is said, but how it is said.

Hungary is one of the countries with the highest internet penetration in Europe (87% of the population uses the internet), with significant network coverage, and opinion leaders from the populist right-wing party Fidesz, which has been in power for 12 years, have taken over social media with unprecedented spending in the 2022 election campaign. And in their themes and rhetoric, they naturally used cultural and political codes with a strong emotional surplus, which typically revolved around the identity politics themes discussed (e.g. feminism, migration, LGBTQ and the connection of all these to Hungarian identity - or the rejection of the latter possible connection).

New left-new right – online war for the internet

It is safe to say that the leftist cyber-utopian idea of the leaderless social media replacing the old hierarchical mechanisms of policy making was significantly derailed during implementation. In fact, it set out on a completely different track when the online populist right started to re-frame the question of "What should we debate?" by bringing up new topics about the regulation and reinterpretation of technology. This process was not without its precedents,

but the critical left has so far failed to find a political actor or coalition with the adequate weight to break the existing speech and user hegemony. The cultural liberalism of the past decades, which made a clear distinction between high and low culture and identified the latter with bad taste and unsophistication, has lost its normative power. The consequent vacuum was filled by the populist right, which promoted the "morale" of violating social conventions, rewriting norms and re-negotiating the existing consensus as the movement's categorical imperative. According to Angela Nagle, the new online right, instead of challenging the 1960s policy so deeply condemned by conservatives, acts as the one that will finally bring it to fruition, thus detaching it from the left's egalitarianism and right's Christian morality (Nagle, 2017).

Adjusting its tactics to the challenges of the digital era, it strategically reaches back to a certain kind of Gramscian approach, which considers "metapolitics", i.e., the social diffusion of ideas and cultural values, as the origin of deep, long-term political transformations (Mondon–Winter, 2020). It is characterized by a conviction that

> "the most important route to political power was not elections or violent street combat, but in thoroughly changing the dominant zeitgeist and people's acceptable ideas and worldviews. The cultural terrain, whether the Internet, print press, television, radio, film, theatre, painting, literature or education, was seen as the most potent tool for shaping a social consensus, achieving ideological hegemony, determining acceptable "taken for granted" notions and ultimately controlling society itself" (Bar-On 2016, p. 35).

Having successfully adopted the approach of the former new left, the online right exercised its influence not only through formal politics but via nearly the entire media and culture as well. Bypassing the mainstream media, they built up their alternative outlets and their own internet culture from scratch. It is now a commonplace that Trump's election victory was the epitome of this building process: the combined efforts of all mainstream news agencies and conservative channels were not enough to affect the outcome of the election.

Nagle also notes how the emergence of the new public forums already began with the declining demand for mainstream newspapers and television channels as early as during the Obama administration, which may have played a part in the phenomenon. She counts such characteristically liberal sites as Upworthy, Buzzfeed, Everyday Feminism, Jezebel or Salon as high-traffic online sites that amalgamate sentimental sensitivity with identity politics formerly considered as a part of radical constructivism. Even though the alt-right universally lumps these

platforms together with the Guardian, the BBC, and CNN as "leftist" outlets, these portals relentlessly smear the economically, and not culturally left-leaning political forces. With regard to platforms leaning towards the edge of the left, The Young Turks, Jacobin Magazine, the British Novara Media or Current Affairs have outstanding viewership, but their numbers are dwarfed by the complex media empire developed by the alternative right. This layered and structured entity comprised diverse actors from nameless video comment producers through Twitter celebrities to Breitbart Daily News. The latter was an unprecedented success story as it managed to put its entire editorial staff into key positions under the Trump administration. Without any support from the legacy media or the institutions and organizations of the political establishment, relying solely on online media content, they drove politics to a fully intensified state that Nagle considers as the epitome of hollowed-out politics: the culture wars.

After charting the movements of the alternative right, Nagle discusses the progressives as well. Based on the social media sphere from where the leftist identity politics emerged, she uses the term "Tumblr-liberalism" to signify the new culture and activism that embraced such themes as gender fluidity, mental illness, physical disability, race, cultural identity, intersectionality or safe spaces. According to Nagle, the constant building process on Tumblr and in the online fan cultures was instrumental in the liberal establishment's adoption of the terminology for the 2016 presidential election campaign: Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton, in a manner not typical of her before, was talking about privileged groups and mutual duality of oppressive systems. Privilege guilt was also associated with the pathos formulae of suffering and victimhood: belonging to the majority (white/cis/hetero/male) requires self-flagellation. On the other side, refusal to own your privilege may be punished by public humiliation as a way of diffusing tensions. Nagle believes the phenomenon may be driven by a demand for creating a certain kind of artificial scarcity: in the online environment where information is potentially infinite, virtue becomes the currency that builds or destroys careers (as a counter-effect to the anonymous "underworld" where the rightist troll culture emerged from). "Virtue signalling" emerged mainly from Tumblr, where the platform's celebrities soon recognized the positive effects of virtue signalling in terms of expanding their follower base as well as in reaching out to them through other channels than the legacy media. However, the overwhelming moral disputes on social media soon turned into an overproduction crisis. Consequently, the real perpetrators of sexist, racist and homophobic acts were soon replaced by other targets, which led to "cleansing" within the movement's own base.

Summary

This paper aims to provide a case study of the alt-right movement that could not have grown so strong without the democratization of technology and the internet. However, our focus is not on who uses certain tools but on how those tools are used. We attempted to demonstrate how online micro-outlets become macro-factors, how the platforms originally created to reduce the noise of confrontation become campaign tools and how video game culture and socialization affects politics.

According to the scientific consensus however, the discussed phenomena do not always pose qualitatively novel threats to democracy; the new technologies or social media features may only exacerbate the problems inherent in democratic processes. Considered a fundamental human right in the United States and the countries of the democratic world, freedom of speech, and any restriction to it, has become a basic issue of the digital society, in terms of whether it violates the collective or personal well-being, dignity and feeling of security of individuals and certain societal groups.

So when it comes to technology, an exclusively positive utopian position may be just as disadvantageous as a pessimistic one. Instead of facilitating exclusion, the application of a tool, a form of data usage, a cultural code or contextual reinterpretation gives way to pluralism but meeting the normative demand for democracy has become the most significant global challenge.

*Balázs Böcskei, Researcher, Centre for Social Sciences Institute for Political Science Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre of Excellence; ORCID number: 0000-0002-7524-2720, Bocskei.Balazs@tk.hu

**Szilvi Német, Eötvös Loránd University, PhD student, Film, media and cultural theory doctoral program, szilvi.nemet@student.elte.hu

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