

The intellectual basic organization of politics

(with the analysis of ChatGPT 6th ultra-strong version)
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Netherlands

The most important feature of the transformation of Dutch politics is that the organization of political attention and mobilization is changing faster than the institutional structure of state decision-making. The enduring social communities once organized around the established parties have weakened, while governing still proceeds through coalition negotiations, expert institutions, interest organizations, legal procedures, and administrative bodies. The tension between these two developments itself continually generates political dissatisfaction.

Your hypothesis that direct political reach through cyberspace partly replaces mediation through party organizations applies well to the Netherlands. However, the claim that these channels now operate “largely in their place” needs to be examined function by function: **actors outside the parties have gained importance in attracting attention and shaping political identity; candidate selection, government formation, and the development of implementable government programmes remain strongly tied to institutions.** Recent Dutch data do not substantiate the wholesale displacement of traditional news media either.

This analysis focuses on developments since 2010, incorporating information available up to 9 September 2026. I distinguish the findings of the authors discussed from my own theoretical connections between them.

The current balance of political forces itself cautions against assuming a transformation moving in only one direction. The PVV won the 2023 election, whereas D66 was able to form a government after the 2025 election. The principal changes were:

Party	Seats in 2023	Seats in 2025	Significance for the transformation
PVV	37	26	A major breakthrough followed by a substantial decline
D66	9	26	A rapid return to a position from which it could lead the government
VVD	24	22	Weakened, but still a central coalition actor
GroenLinks–PvdA	25	20	Cooperation through a joint electoral list did not ensure electoral growth
CDA	5	18	An established party organization became competitive again
NSC	20	0	An exceptionally rapid rise and collapse

Party	Seats in 2023	Seats in 2025	Significance for the transformation
BBB	7	4	Consolidating protest-driven success at the national level proved difficult
JA21	1	9	Substantial growth within competition among right-wing parties
FvD	3	7	Growth alongside the PVV's decline

The table shows election results. Subsequent departures mean that current parliamentary group sizes differ: the parliamentary register consulted lists the PVV with 19 seats and the Markuszower group with 7; the former GroenLinks–PvdA parliamentary group is now called Progressief Nederland. [Electoral Council: 2023 results](#), [2025 results](#), [current parliamentary groups](#).

The D66–VVD–CDA coalition of the Jetten government, which took office on 23 February 2026, holds a total of 66 seats in the 150-member lower house. This is particularly revealing: even after successful electoral communication, support from additional parties must be secured for government decisions. Digital success does not translate directly into a governing majority. [The government's inauguration](#).

The historical starting point is the pillarized society: *verzuiling*. In twentieth-century Dutch society, parties, schools, newspapers, broadcasting associations, trade unions, and voluntary associations were linked, with varying degrees of strength, to Catholic, Protestant, socialist, and liberal milieus. A party thus operated as the political representative of a broader social world. Voters' political orientations were shaped by mutually reinforcing family, religious, workplace, and associational relationships.

In his 1968 book *The Politics of Accommodation*, **Arend Lijphart** explained how a socially divided democracy could remain stable. His explanation centred on the relationship between the separation of social groups and cooperation among their leaders: leaders reached compromises and could secure their own constituencies' acceptance of them. Dutch consensus politics therefore rested on agreements between organized differences. [Lijphart's book](#).

Subsequent secularization, individualization, educational expansion, and the widening of a shared media sphere loosened many of these ties. **Hans Daalder** and **Peter van Dam** also cautioned against an excessively rigid image of the pillarized past: the blocs had never been completely closed, and their dissolution did not occur in a single historical turning point. The central chronological point is nevertheless clear: **the loosening of social attachments long preceded Facebook and TikTok**. Platforms entered a society that had already been transformed. [Daalder, 1996](#), [Van Dam, 2014](#).

A deeper consequence is that party leaders can now promise their negotiating partners the lasting support of their own electoral constituencies with less confidence. The earlier system of mediation also organized acceptance of compromise. An audience of followers, by contrast, can readily shift to another politician if it interprets an agreement as a retreat. In my interpretation, **the capacity of Dutch consensus politics to secure social acceptance has weakened more than the negotiating structure through which decisions are made**.

Several intersecting social cleavages operate beneath the party system. The economic left–right distinction is insufficient on its own. Dutch research by **Dick Houtman and Peter Achterberg** shows why economic redistribution must be distinguished from questions of cultural freedom and authority. Someone may support social benefits while also favouring tighter immigration controls; a high-income voter may be culturally liberal but economically market-oriented. These combinations create opportunities for different parties. [Houtman–Achterberg: “Two Lefts and Two Rights,” 2010.](#)

Education is particularly important because it can be associated with differences in language, occupational experience, networks, and confidence in dealing with institutions. **Mark Bovens and Anchrit Wille’s** *Diploma Democracy* examines the political overrepresentation of highly educated people. Inequality in institutional participation can persist even when everyone appears equally able to speak online. **The opportunity to express an opinion and participation in preparing decisions are different resources.** [Bovens–Wille, 2017.](#)

This disparity in representation also has an economic dimension. **Wouter Schakel** examined 291 potential policy changes using public opinion surveys from 1979–2012 and found that subsequent decisions were more responsive to the preferences of higher-income groups. This finding rests on historical data and should therefore not be treated as a direct measurement of conditions in 2026. Nevertheless, it shows that dissatisfaction with representation has institutional foundations predating the digital era. [Schakel: *Unequal policy responsiveness in the Netherlands*, 2019/2021.](#)

Josse de Voogd and René Cuperus’s *Atlas van Afgehaakt Nederland* connects geographical differences with political disengagement, abstention, and support for outsider parties. Here, “afgehaakt” refers to social groups that have partly disengaged from the established political system. Grievances often concern both material conditions and recognition: voters feel that neither their interests nor their way of life is taken seriously. [De Voogd–Cuperus, 2021.](#)

However, the opposition between the Randstad and the countryside should not become an all-purpose explanation. A 2025 study by **Cok Vrooman, Jurjen Iedema, and Jeroen Boelhouwer** at the Netherlands Institute for Social Research, the SCP, found that differences associated with social class and available resources are in many respects more important than differences of residence. Poorer and politically alienated groups also live in major cities, while rural populations are economically and ideologically diverse. [SCP: *Verdeeld over het land*, 2025.](#)

The political significance of this social structure is that dissatisfaction can be expressed in several different languages: opposition to immigration, demands for redistribution, defence of agricultural interests, antiracism, or calls for administrative reform. The intellectual networks behind parties compete precisely over **how to name the problem, whom to hold responsible, and which solutions to make conceivable.**

One foundational layer of the Dutch intellectual landscape is a market-oriented, expert-led conception of the state. According to **Bram Mellink and Merijn Oudenampsen’s** *Neoliberalisme. Een Nederlandse geschiedenis*, its Dutch history cannot be reduced to the adoption of Anglo-American neoliberalism. It developed earlier through domestic networks, economic ideas, senior civil servants, and advisory organizations. The authors particularly emphasize how political choices could be presented as technical necessities. This should be

understood as their historical interpretation; it does not demonstrate that all Dutch experts share the same ideology. [Mellink–Oudenampsen, 2022](#).

The resulting political problem concerns the visibility of alternatives. If voters perceive different governments invoking competitiveness, fiscal discipline, and feasibility in similar terms, they may readily conclude that elections make no substantive difference. Digital opposition can build on this perception with the claim that “everyone belongs to the same system.” That conclusion may be exaggerated, but understanding its social appeal requires recognizing the experience behind it.

The turn towards criticism of immigration has its own intellectual history. Oudenampsen’s other important book, *The Rise of the Dutch New Right*, explores the intellectual antecedents of the transformation associated with Bolkestein, Fortuyn, Hirsi Ali, and Wilders. A distinctive Dutch feature was that the defence of national identity could be linked to the defence of women’s emancipation and gay rights. Values previously identified as progressive could thus become part of the drawing of cultural boundaries against immigration and Islam. [Oudenampsen, 2020](#).

This explains why it is misleading to interpret the Dutch right exclusively in terms of traditional religious and moral conservatism. Part of its political message explicitly claims to defend an emancipated Dutch way of life. Different right-wing currents nevertheless draw different conclusions from this: protecting liberal rights, seeking national cultural homogeneity, and restricting religion are not the same programme.

Specific intellectual and personal connections can also be documented. Oudenampsen examines connections involving the Edmund Burke Stichting, the TeldersStichting, Joshua Livestro, Paul Cliteur, and Bart Jan Spruyt. Such connections demonstrate the organizational mediation of ideas, but they do not turn everyone involved into a unified political camp cooperating permanently. [“De opmars van het nederconservatisme,” 2018](#).

Paul Scheffer occupies a distinct position. His 2000 essay *Het multiculturele drama* connected problems of integration, educational and labour-market disadvantage, and the receiving society’s understanding of itself. This criticism also emerged within the social-democratic sphere; Scheffer should therefore not simply be treated as Wilders’s ideologist. **René Cuperus** likewise approached the distance between cosmopolitan elites and voters concerned about losing their social rootedness from within social democracy. [Scheffer’s original article](#), Cuperus: *De wereldburger bestaat niet*, 2009.

Christian social thought remains a distinct alternative. The CDA’s four principles are public justice, shared responsibility, solidarity, and responsible stewardship of the world entrusted to us: *rentmeesterschap*. In this conception, families, associations, schools, and professional communities have responsibilities of their own; the state’s task is to support their functioning and provide a just framework. Ecological responsibility can thus be combined with protecting traditions and the interests of the next generation. [The CDA’s presentation of its principles](#).

The ChristenUnie’s research institute provides a concrete account of how the party’s statement of principles was developed: through consultation with members, leaders, theologians, and figures in Christian public life. This remains an operating channel for translating ideas rooted in a worldview into an organizational framework. The party’s current conception of democracy emphasizes minority freedoms and internal party democracy, and even advocates requiring

parties to have members. The Christian milieu thus places the value of enduring social intermediaries alongside the direct relationship between leader and audience. [Development of the statement of principles](#), [the ChristenUnie's position](#).

The progressive intellectual sphere is at least as diverse. D66's social liberalism emphasizes the social conditions of individual autonomy and institutional reform. Social-democratic thinking emphasizes work, redistribution, and social security. Green thinking introduces the ecological limits of the economy and intergenerational justice. Considerable cooperation is possible among these currents, but serious conflicts remain over the extent of state intervention, the role of markets, and the distribution of the costs of transformation.

Antiracist and decolonial thinking proceeds from another starting point. **Philomena Essed** examines the interconnection between everyday and institutional racism; **Gloria Wekker** analyzes the tension between the Dutch self-image of tolerance and the legacy of the colonial past. **Jan Willem Duyvendak** investigates the political conditions of feeling at home within a nation, while **Willem Schinkel** asks how the category of "integration" itself can place people outside a society of which they are already part. These are different theories, rather than variants of a single shared programme. [Essed, 1991](#), [Wekker, 2016](#), [Duyvendak, 2011](#), [Schinkel, 2018](#).

The Black Archives provides a concrete example of the social transmission of these ideas: collections, events, and online dissemination connect scholarly work to civil society's public sphere. A documented collection is specifically associated with Essed. The connection here is an observable institutional practice, rather than a presumed system directing all progressive parties. [The Black Archives: the Essed collection](#).

De Correspondent, together with the socioeconomic commentary of **Rutger Bregman** and **Jesse Frederik**, represents another channel. Books, newsletters, online articles, and audio content create an audience that follows public issues over time without joining a party. Frederik's book on the benefits scandal illustrates the continuing place of detailed institutional analysis in the digital public sphere. [Frederik: Zo hadden we het niet bedoeld, 2021](#).

Marleen Stikker and Waag represent a distinct intellectual current concerned with digital public goods. Here, ownership, openness, and accountability of the communications infrastructure itself become political questions. The *Public Stack* programme explores how to build a digital environment offering an alternative to dependence on commercial platforms. [Waag: Public Stack](#).

Party research institutes remain important connecting institutions. The following are formal relationships, rather than merely ideological affinities:

Political actor	Intellectual or research institution
VVD	TeldersStichting
D66	Hans van Mierlo Stichting
CDA	Wetenschappelijk Instituut voor het CDA
Progressief Nederland	Wetenschappelijk Instituut voor Solidariteit, successor to the WBS and the GroenLinks research institute
ChristenUnie	The party's research institute
SGP	Guido de Brès-Stichting

Political actor	Intellectual or research institution
SP	The Socialist Party's research institute
Partij voor de Dieren	Nicolaas G. Pierson Foundation

These institutes organize ideological debate, training, publications, and policy development. The TeldersStichting, for example, uses a digital library, social media, a journal, and events as an interconnected system of dissemination. This illustrates the transformation of parties' intellectual work. [Parliamentary directory of institutes](#), [TeldersStichting](#), [Van Mierlo Stichting](#), [WBS–WIS](#).

The scale of the digital turn must be measured using the appropriate data. The media research chapter of the NKO report on the 2025 election was written by **Rachid Azrout, Emma van der Goot, and Mark Boukes**, and its section on influencers by **Susan Vermeer and Sophie Boerman**. Their findings were:

Following the 2025 campaign	Approximate share of respondents
Through public-service television, at least weekly	71%
Through news websites, at least weekly	56%
Through social media, at least weekly	39%
Never intentionally watched political influencer content	80%

The first three categories overlap: the same person could use several channels. The research demonstrates both the continuing importance of public-service media and the different habits of younger people. These are measures of use, not persuasion; they do not, by themselves, tell us how many votes any channel changed. [Veelstemmig, NKO 2025, published in 2026, pp. 52–63](#).

Meanwhile, according to the 2026 Digital News Report, the proportion of adults obtaining news exclusively through social media rose from 2% to 7% between 2018 and 2026, while the proportion of 18–34-year-olds using social media as their main news source increased from 20% to 33%. This is a significant change, but it does not imply that a majority of the entire adult population has moved wholly to social media. [NOS: young people's media use, 16 June 2026, DutchNews: the proportion relying exclusively on social media for news](#).

Moreover, “online” encompasses several different arrangements. Reading the NOS website, listening to a journalist's podcast, watching a party video, and following an independent influencer's commentary are all digital activities, but they operate under different editorial and accountability structures. The digitization of a channel does not necessarily mean that its content producer has been replaced.

Traditional media are shaped by ownership concentration as well as platforms. According to the Reuters Institute's 2025 country report, DPG Media and Mediahuis owned more than 90% of Dutch daily newspapers; NU.nl also belonged to DPG. Meanwhile, NOS remained a major provider of television and radio news, with a substantial online presence. [Reuters Institute: Netherlands, 2025](#).

In 2025, the ACM conditionally approved DPG's acquisition of RTL Nederland, requiring specific safeguards for the independence of news services. Economic concentration and editorial control therefore need to be examined separately. Common ownership does not itself demonstrate a shared political position, but it affects resources, market bargaining power, and the long-term conditions of news production. [ACM, 2025](#).

In my interpretation, the Dutch public sphere exhibits **concentration at two levels alongside fragmentation of content**: large media companies control substantial resources for producing news, and global platforms control distribution infrastructure, while numerous small content creators compete for attention. A multiplicity of voices can therefore coexist with a small number of powerful infrastructure owners.

Direct political reach depends on new intermediaries. José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal's *The Platform Society* provides a foundational theoretical framework. Platforms turn user behaviour into data, monetize it, and select what becomes visible. Bypassing party headquarters and editorial offices therefore does not produce communication without intermediaries: corporate systems establish new conditions of visibility. [Van Dijck–Poell–De Waal, 2018](#).

Ico Maly applies this perspective to populism. In his account of “algorithmic populism,” politicians do not create the impression that they speak for the people on their own. Activists, commenters, people sharing content, journalists, and algorithmic recommendations jointly produce a message's social presence. A leader's statement must therefore be examined together with the processes of reception and redistribution. [Maly, 2018](#).

Three implications are particularly important for Dutch politics. First, a small but active audience can initiate a national debate. Second, leaders receive continuous feedback from reactions, which may influence their subsequent messages. Third, the visible abundance of shares can create an impression of a social majority without confirmation from opinion polls or elections.

Dutch research by **Thijmen Jeroense, Jorrit Luimers, Kristof Jacobs, and Niels Spierings** provides empirical support for this distinction. People with populist and postmaterialist orientations were not more active in every form of political media use, but they responded to political content more frequently. Activity in comment sections therefore cannot be treated as a proportionally representative sample of social opinion. Jeroense and colleagues, 2022.

A political division of labour can develop between platforms. Comparing posts by Dutch, Austrian, and Swedish politicians, **Kristof Jacobs, Linn Sandberg, and Niels Spierings** found different uses of Twitter and Facebook. In populist communication, public attacks on the media were prominent on Twitter, while emotional mobilization featured on Facebook. This was a historical, comparative study; its findings cannot be transferred unchanged to today's X or to every party. [“Twitter and Facebook: Populists' double-barreled gun?”, 2020](#).

The following mechanism is nevertheless particularly important in the Dutch case: a politician's online statement becomes a news story, and a clip from the news programme is then shared online again. A digital actor can thus reach voters who do not follow them. **High television reach and substantial platform influence over the political agenda can coexist.**

The 2025 overview by **Rens Vliegthart, Sanne Kruikemeier, and Loes Aaldering** highlights personalization, interactivity, connections between channels, targeting, conflict, and humour among Dutch political communication strategies. Personalization, for example, connects an abstract programme to a recognizable human character; humour can establish shared interpretations and group boundaries. Parties with different worldviews can use these techniques. [The Role of \(New\) Media in the Dutch Political Landscape, 2025](#).

The alternative right-wing media sphere forms an intermediary network of its own. In the environment surrounding GeenStijl, PowNed, and various political video channels, confrontational, ironic, or exposé-style framing of political events has played an important role. In his study of Dutch political debate on YouTube, **Marc Tuters** identified an alternative video environment connected to FvD: extracts from parliamentary speeches, confrontational titles, and attacks on the credibility of traditional media. The research describes network relationships during a particular period; it does not demonstrate unified central control or radicalization affecting every viewer. [Tuters, 2020](#).

The crucial point is the changing function of a parliamentary event: a speech can immediately become raw material for a video aimed at a new audience. MPs speak simultaneously to other MPs, the press, and a distant audience of followers. My inference is that this can encourage publicly shareable confrontations to take precedence over less spectacular committee or policy work. The actual balance would need to be measured for individual representatives and issues.

The 2015–2016 GeenPeil campaign provides an early example of a media audience becoming a direct institutional initiative. The campaign associated with GeenStijl collected hundreds of thousands of signatures for a referendum on Dutch approval of the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement. In the April 2016 advisory referendum, turnout was 32.28%, and 61% of valid votes opposed the approval legislation. This illustrates an institutional consequence of online mobilization, but the 61% refers to those casting valid votes, not the entire electorate. [NOS: signature collection, 2015](#), [Electoral Council: final result, 2016](#).

The analytical lesson is that the operator of a communications space can itself become an initiator. Its audience then moves from readership to signing petitions, participating in campaigns, and voting. This nevertheless still requires organizers, verifiable procedures, and a legally available institutional opportunity.

The pandemic intensified the conflict between expert authority and distrust of institutions. The 2024 report *Playing with Fire*, by **Jeroen Bakker, Beatrice de Graaf, and colleagues**, examined more than 45 million public Twitter and Telegram messages and approximately 1,500 parliamentary sitting records, focusing on 2021–2022. It identified interaction between parliamentary statements and online discourse; certain threatening expressions circulated between the two spaces. The research also discusses FvD’s mobilization around pandemic restrictions and anti-institutional milieus outside political parties. [Utrecht University: Playing with Fire, 2024](#).

The important conclusion is that parliament itself functions here as an active node of online politics. However, the threatening communication examined does not justify categorizing all criticism of pandemic policy, protesters, or opposition voters in the same way. Legitimate policy criticism, generalized distrust, and violent threats are distinct phenomena.

Digital politics has not produced a single model of party organization. Léonie de Jonge and Gerrit Voerman’s 2025 comparison of LPF, PVV, and FvD identifies institutional learning. The PVV’s strong personal leadership control partly responds to earlier experiences of party-building marked by conflict. FvD combined this with a broader membership and financial base, while limiting members’ influence. Social media can therefore support both a leadership organization without a conventional membership and a large, centralized membership movement. [De Jonge–Voerman, 2025](#).

People cannot join the PVV in the conventional way, but this does not make it organization-free: a network of representatives, staff, candidates, and supporters operates around it. FvD, by contrast, reported more than 70,000 members at the beginning of 2026; the DNPP notes that the party also supplied an auditor’s statement. Membership numbers and members’ decision-making rights are separate questions. [DNPP: 2026 membership figures and methodological notes](#), [NOS on the DNPP figures](#).

The Dutch organizational variants can be distinguished as follows:

Organizational form	Example	Principal resource	Typical limitation
Party centralized around a leader	PVV	Recognizable leader, consistent message, media resonance	Limited internal scrutiny and recruitment base
Centralized membership community	FvD	Members, membership fees, its own content and events	Discrepancy between membership and actual influence
Interest-representation party emerging from protest	BBB	A social issue, professional and regional networks	Translating sectoral demands into a national programme
Traditional party adapting to digital communication	D66, VVD, CDA	Organization, expertise, recognized leaders, new campaign methods	Reconciling different audiences and internal interests
New party rapidly built around personal credibility	NSC at its launch	Trust in a leader and a promise of reform	Institutionalizing suddenly acquired support

The table is an analytical typology: individual parties can combine features of several forms. The gains made by D66 and CDA in 2025 demonstrate particularly clearly that established organizations can return. NSC’s decline does not, by itself, prove that social media have harmful effects; it indicates how uncertain the rapid conversion of personal credibility into a party organization can be.

The nitrogen crisis is one of the clearest Dutch examples of the connection between social interests, law, and digital mobilization. The Council of State’s decision of 29 May 2019 held that the PAS programme could no longer be used as a basis for permits in the contested manner. Activities causing harmful effects could not be authorized in advance by invoking uncertain future improvements in nature conservation. EU nature conservation rules provided the legal basis for the conflict. Council of State: the PAS decision.

For some farmers, this was far more than a technical environmental issue: their farms, family assets, and the livelihoods of the next generation faced uncertainty. Online videos and social

networks joined protest movements, professional connections, and tractor demonstrations. BBB built national political representation out of this conflict. **Camille van Hees, Louise van Schaik, and Pieter Zwaan** examined in detail how these protests developed into political mobilization. [Clingendael: A Prologue for Europe?, 2024](#).

My reconstruction of the movement's dynamics is as follows: sectoral regulation can become an experience of threatened livelihoods, then a feeling that a rural way of life is denied recognition, and subsequently a broader anti-government position. Digital communication rapidly connects these levels. Nevertheless, individual farmers' interests may differ, and professional interest organizations, the protest movement, and BBB should not be treated as a single organization.

Interviews with twelve farmers by **Marc Esteve-del-Valle and Fotini Anna Sarchosakis** also explored YouTube's role. Participants used the platform to understand regulations, obtain professional information, reinforce their views, and seek other perspectives. This is an important qualification: digital spaces can support both learning and the narrowing of perspectives. The small qualitative study identifies mechanisms; it does not measure their nationwide magnitude. ["The Algorithmic Gatekeeper," 2025](#).

The childcare benefits scandal reveals the underlying processes of political organization from another direction. Cooperation among affected families, legal representatives, parliamentarians, and professional journalists helped expose the *toeslagenaffaire*. The work of Pieter Omtzigt, Renske Leijten, Pieter Klein, and Jan Kleinnijenhuis demonstrates that sustained professional effort within established institutions can still uncover issues capable of producing a national political turning point. [De Balie event with participants in the investigation, 2021](#).

The 2020 parliamentary report *Ongekend onrecht* exposed interconnected failures of legislation, administration, and legal protection. The lesson therefore extends beyond the mistakes of individual officials: rigid rules, anti-fraud incentives, and inadequate opportunities for correction can jointly produce serious injustice. [The parliamentary report](#).

Criticism of this way of operating also emerged within the expert community. The WRR report *Weten is nog geen doen*, associated with **Mark Bovens, Anne-Greet Keizer, and Will Tiemeijer**, emphasizes that knowing a rule differs from having the practical capacity to follow it. In a crisis, citizens may have less capacity to manage deadlines, paperwork, and complex requirements. Assessing *doenvermogen*—the practical capacity to act—subsequently became one of the quality requirements for preparing regulations. [WRR, 2017, official application framework](#).

This directly answers how underlying intellectual developments affect the functioning of the state: a research concept becomes an institutional assessment criterion. Here, the route to change consists of research, administrative consideration, and a new requirement for scrutiny. Digital public communication can help make the problem widely known, but it does not replace this work.

The routes to state decisions continue to involve several layers of mediation. The following are particularly important in the Dutch system:

Institution or mechanism	Political significance
Coalition agreement	Transforms different electoral manifestos into a common government package
Lower and upper houses of parliament	Can require different majorities and further negotiation
CPB	Provides a common language for negotiation through economic and fiscal calculations
SER	Organizes consultation among employers, employees, and experts
WRR and other advisory bodies	Examine long-term problems and develop new policy concepts
Public administration and implementing agencies	Carry out the legal, financial, and organizational implementation of promises
Courts and EU law	Enforce the legal limits of decisions and obligations to protect rights
Provinces and municipalities	Act independently in conflicts over spatial planning, permits, and implementation

The CPB's calculations are not decisions authorizing party manifestos, and participation is voluntary. Their significance lies in influencing the fiscal and economic consequences with which promises enter negotiations. The SER operates as a forum for consultation among organized interests; the WRR can also criticize the current government's ideas. [CPB: Keuzes in Kaart 2025–2028](#), [institutional description of the SER](#), [WRR](#).

Research by **David Willumsen and Simon Otjes** also quantifies the transformation produced by coalition negotiations. Approximately two-thirds of the fiscal measures in five Dutch coalition agreements had not previously enjoyed support in party manifestos amounting to a parliamentary majority; around 30% of proposals supported by a majority on the basis of those manifestos were omitted. This demonstrates the importance of package deals. It does not mean that legislation is passed without a parliamentary majority, nor does it concern directly measured voter opinion. [“Coalition government, frustrated majorities, and minority rule,” 2024/2025](#).

Judicial mediation provides a separate route for bypassing parties. In the Urgenda case, the Supreme Court of the Netherlands upheld in 2019 the obligation for the state to reduce emissions by at least 25% by the end of 2020 compared with 1990. A civil society organization thus initiated binding state action without winning an election, but through legal norms and procedures. [Supreme Court: Urgenda](#).

The distinctive feature of Dutch constitutional law must be retained here: Article 120 prohibits judicial review of the constitutionality of Acts of Parliament, while directly applicable international norms and EU law open other avenues of review. This differs from a constitutional court structure of the Hungarian type. The 2026 coalition programme proposes introducing constitutional review; a commitment in a programme is not the same as an implemented reform. [Official explanation of the Constitution](#), [2026 coalition programme](#).

Platform power has meanwhile become a question of state organization in its own right. A 2026 study by **Taylor Annabell and Catalina Goanta** shows how platforms' own rules

partly determine the boundaries between political advertising, influencer partnerships, and voluntary political support. Meta's and Google's restrictions on political advertising in the EU have reshaped campaigns' options. The authors also discuss Jetten's influencer connections and the VVD's use of TikTok, but do not quantify their electoral effects. [Annabell-Goanta, 2026](#).

Dutch research by **Xiaotong Chu** points to the gradual effects of targeted political advertising through repetition; actual party campaigns typically used broad target groups. This does not imply that voters can be manipulated at will through technology. The interaction between advertising effects, platform rankings, and existing political predispositions is decisive. [University account of Chu's research, 2025](#).

The possibility of manipulation must nevertheless be treated as a real research problem. AI Forensics and its partners documented coordinated activity and international amplification networks during the 2025 campaign. Establishing their presence and the circulation of their content, however, is not the same as establishing the number of votes they changed. [AI Forensics: investigation of the 2025 Dutch election](#).

Scrollend naar de stembus, by **Luuk Ex, Quirine van Eeden, Wouter Nieuwenhuizen, and Mariëtte van Huijstee**, also examines the state's relationship with platforms. Restricted access to data is one obstacle to scrutiny by researchers. The Dutch state must therefore simultaneously protect freedom in the public sphere, investigate manipulation, and manage dependence on foreign private infrastructure. [Rathenau Instituut, 2026](#).

These connections allow us to reconstruct five levels of the underlying processes of political organization. This is my own analytical framework, connecting the research discussed above:

Level	What is being organized?	What counts as success?
Social experience	Interests, grievances, ways of life, demands for status	Shared recognition of a problem
Intellectual interpretation	Concepts, explanations of responsibility, solutions	An accepted interpretation of the problem
Public dissemination	News, videos, debates, communities of followers	Attention and credibility
Political organization	Parties, movements, membership, representatives	Votes, seats, and bargaining power
State decision-making	Coalition programme, legislation, budget, implementation	Achieved and sustainable change

There is no automatic conversion between these levels. High visibility does not guarantee an electoral majority; many seats do not guarantee inclusion in a coalition; a government programme does not guarantee implementation. The relationship also operates in reverse: state failure generates new grievances, new interpretations, and new opportunities for mobilization.

The central tension in the Dutch system can be understood through its different political timescales. Platforms can turn an issue into a national concern within hours. A new party can gain considerable support in a short time. Yet legislation, government formation, permitting, and institutional reform require lengthy consultation. Audiences expect quick answers, while

the decision-making system requires attention to other actors' interests, rights, and organizational capacities.

The fall of the Schoof government on 3 June 2025 was one concrete expression of this tension: the PVV's departure removed the cabinet's political foundation. The event does not, by itself, prove a "digital cause," but it shows how maintaining consistency before one's own constituency can diverge from a commitment to governing jointly. [The prime minister's official statement](#).

As early as 2009, **Maarten Hajer's** *Authoritative Governance* examined the construction of political authority in a mediatized environment. Beyond holding office, leaders must publicly appear credible and capable of action. The Dutch **Council for Public Administration, the Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur**, explicitly discussed the distance between vertical political institutions and horizontal relationships among citizens, and the transition from party democracy to audience democracy, in its 2010 report. These are among the most direct early Dutch antecedents of the question concerning the transformation of political mediation. [Hajer, 2009](#), [ROB: Vertrouwen op democratie, 2010](#).

Rapid electoral movement should therefore not be interpreted as unlimited ideological malleability. According to researchers studying the 2025 election, a substantial proportion of party switching occurred between related political currents: voters are mobile, but their choices are not random. Even when a party declines, the demands it expressed may survive within another party. [University of Amsterdam account of the NKO findings, 2026](#).

Further investigation of these underlying processes should therefore track three different outcomes: which idea becomes a widely used interpretation of a problem; which organization gains electoral support from it; and what ultimately becomes incorporated into the functioning of the state. A political current can lose seats while its competitors adopt its concepts. Another can win the public debate while its programme stalls during coalition negotiations or implementation.

The most important readings on this research topic answer different questions. The following selection highlights the works among the cited sources that can most fruitfully be connected:

Author and work	Contribution to understanding the underlying processes of Dutch political organization
Arend Lijphart: <i>The Politics of Accommodation</i> (1968)	Organized social blocs and elite compromise
Maarten Hajer: <i>Authoritative Governance</i> (2009)	Public communication, authority, and the state's capacity to act
Mark Bovens–Anchrit Wille: <i>Diploma Democracy</i> (2017)	Education and unequal institutional participation
Merijn Oudenampsen: <i>The Rise of the Dutch New Right</i> (2020)	The intellectual preparation of the rightward turn
Bram Mellink–Merijn Oudenampsen: <i>Neoliberalisme</i> (2022)	The diffusion of economic ideas through administrative and expert networks

Author and work	Contribution to understanding the underlying processes of Dutch political organization
José van Dijck–Thomas Poell–Martijn de Waal: <i>The Platform Society</i> (2018)	The ownership and institutional structure of digital mediation
Ico Maly: works on algorithmic populism (2018, 2022)	Mobilization jointly produced by politicians, audiences, and algorithms
Josse de Voogd–René Cuperus: <i>Atlas van Afgehaakt Nederland</i> (2021)	Disengagement, social differences, and electoral geography
Wouter Schakel: <i>Unequal policy responsiveness in the Netherlands</i> (2019/2021)	Unequal relationships between social resources and state decisions
Léonie de Jonge–Gerrit Voerman: comparison of LPF, PVV, and FvD (2025)	Leadership control, membership, and organizational learning
David Willumsen–Simon Otjes: study of coalition majorities (2024/2025)	The transformation of electoral manifestos during government formation
Twan Huijsmans–Eelco Harteveld–Tom van der Meer–Floris Vermeulen, eds.: <i>Veelstemmig</i> (2026)	Empirical examination of the 2025 election, media use, and voter behaviour

For a comprehensive overview, *The Oxford Handbook of Dutch Politics* (2025), edited by **Sarah de Lange, Tom Louwerse, Paul 't Hart, and Carolien van Ham**, is particularly useful. Their introductory study interprets changing social and party-political relationships alongside enduring consensus-oriented institutions, providing an appropriate framework for placing research on digital politics within the context of state institutions. [The editors' overview article](#).

Belgium

Belgium's political transformation is best understood as the interaction of digital mass communication with a state still organized through powerful parties, social institutions, and negotiated agreements between linguistic communities. Social media has substantially changed who can attract attention, define conflicts, and mobilize supporters. Its effects on candidate selection, coalition formation, collective bargaining, and administrative decision-making are more uneven.

Your starting hypothesis therefore captures an important development, but Belgium requires a distinction between **bypassing parties as channels of communication** and **bypassing them as organizations controlling access to state power**. The first has advanced considerably; the second remains much more limited.

The specifically Belgian complication is that this transformation occurs within largely separate Dutch- and French-language political arenas, alongside multilingual Brussels and the smaller German-speaking community. Digitalization has entered an already fragmented political system, while some older institutions continue to connect the country across linguistic boundaries.

The following analysis incorporates developments verified through September 2026. I distinguish established research findings from the broader interpretation I draw from them.

The historical starting point is a society organized through ideological institutions. Belgian parties originally stood within extensive social networks commonly described as *pillars*: Christian, socialist, and, less comprehensively, liberal. These included trade unions, mutual health-insurance organizations, schools, cooperatives, cultural associations, youth movements, and other institutions.

These networks were not simply extensions of party headquarters. Social organizations frequently preceded, created, or strongly influenced their associated parties. From the 1960s onward, individual affiliations became less exclusive, and organizations became more pluralist. Yet the decline of encompassing ideological loyalties did not eliminate the institutions themselves. A crucial asymmetry emerged: the traditional parties divided along linguistic lines between 1968 and 1978, whereas unions and mutualities did not undergo an equivalent national division. [CRISP's account of pillarization](#)

This history matters because political allegiance once rested on repeated social experiences. A person encountered a political worldview through schooling, work, insurance, leisure, newspapers, and association membership. Parties received loyalties that had been cultivated throughout everyday life.

Digital political communication changes that relationship. Someone can now retain the practical services of an older institution while acquiring political interpretations elsewhere. Membership of a Christian trade union, for example, need not determine support for a Christian-democratic party. Institutional attachment and electoral identification can move in different directions.

That separation produces an important feature of contemporary Belgium: **organizations can remain socially powerful while becoming less capable of delivering votes to their historical political allies.**

Luc Huyse supplied the foundational sociological interpretation in *Passiviteit, pacificatie en verzuiling in de Belgische politiek*—*Passivity, Pacification and Pillarization in Belgian Politics*—published in 1970. He examined how organized social divisions, relatively passive constituencies, and negotiations between elites could coexist within a stable democracy. His account helps explain why Belgian political stability historically depended on institutionalized compromise rather than agreement throughout the population. [Huyse's original text](#)

An extension of Huyse's analysis helps identify the digital transformation: leaders now negotiate under conditions in which supporters can observe, criticize, and mobilize against concessions continuously. The capacity to negotiate remains institutionally concentrated, while the capacity to challenge negotiations has become more dispersed.

Belgian federalism also organizes the production of political identities. The country's territorial and linguistic arrangements do more than distribute administrative responsibilities. They influence whom politicians address, which opponents they confront, and whose grievances they must accommodate.

Three distinctions are essential:

- **Regions** organize territorial government: Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels-Capital.
- **Communities** organize important language-related responsibilities, including education and culture.
- **Party competition and political journalism** operate predominantly within language-specific arenas.

The resulting system combines territorial autonomy with arrangements for accommodation at the federal level. The recent third edition of *The Politics of Belgium: Governing a Divided Society*, by Kris Deschouwer, Didier Caluwaerts, Petra Meier, Min Reuchamps, Dave Sinardet, and Emilie van Haute, provides an updated account of these interacting institutions. [Publication record and description, 2026](#)

The underlying political mechanism is particularly consequential. A party can campaign primarily before one linguistic electorate while negotiating policies that affect the entire federation. It therefore has incentives to demonstrate firmness within its own political arena, although effective government requires accommodation with parties accountable elsewhere.

Digital communication can intensify this difficulty. A concession made during federal negotiations can be isolated, circulated, and condemned within a party's principal audience without the accompanying explanation reaching the other language community. Conversely, a

provocative statement intended for domestic supporters can rapidly become evidence of hostility in the other community.

This is one reason **Dave Sinardet’s research on political communication and the Belgian public sphere** is especially relevant to your question. His work examines the relationship between linguistic segmentation, media representation, and federal democracy. The central problem is how people can deliberate about a common government when political attention is organized through substantially different communicative environments. [Sinardet’s research profile](#)

However, separate political arenas should not be mistaken for two internally homogeneous populations. A study by Christoph Niessen and colleagues, published in 2022 and examining surveys from 2007–2019, found that increasing left–right divergence between Flemish and Walloon candidates was not equivalently reproduced among voters. Voters were generally more centrist, and differences within regions were substantial. These findings concern that historical period, but they undermine the assumption that party positions transparently express two entirely different collective mentalities. [Niessen and colleagues, “Partitocracy and the future of Belgium”](#)

The analytical implication is that Belgian political divisions are partly **organized and reproduced through institutions and political competition**, rather than simply reflecting fixed cultural differences.

The present distribution of government power demonstrates the continuing importance of negotiation. Bart De Wever became prime minister on 3 February 2025, leading the Arizona coalition of N-VA, MR, Les Engagés, Vooruit, and CD&V. A Flemish nationalist leader thus reached the centre of federal government through agreement with parties representing different ideological and linguistic constituencies. [Reuters on the government’s installation](#); [current official composition](#)

The regional picture illustrates how differently political strength is converted into executive authority:

Political arena	Verified government configuration	Significance for the underlying political process
Federal Belgium	De Wever’s N-VA–MR–Les Engagés–Vooruit–CD&V coalition	Nationalist, liberal, centrist, and social-democratic forces must construct a common governing programme.
Flanders	Matthias Diependaele’s N-VA–Vooruit–CD&V government, sworn in September 2024	Competition over Flemish leadership coexists with government through ideological compromise.
Wallonia	Adrien Dolimont’s MR–Les Engagés government	The older socialist predominance no longer determines regional executive power.
Brussels-Capital	Boris Dillies of MR became minister-president in February 2026, heading a broad coalition	Government requires accommodation across linguistic, ideological, and metropolitan interests.

The regional configurations are documented by the [Flemish government](#), the [Walloon government](#), and [Belga's report on the Brussels government](#).

Brussels offers a particularly revealing example of party leadership power. Belga reported that Dillières learned of his selection through a telephone call from MR president Georges-Louis Bouchez on the morning of his appointment. Whatever the surrounding negotiations, this episode shows how decisive appointments can still depend on concentrated authority within parties.

The deeper point is that three forms of political power must be distinguished: attracting an audience, winning representation, and becoming an acceptable governing partner. Their relationship is neither automatic nor proportional.

The intellectual background consists of several competing projects for reorganizing society and the state. These projects overlap with parties, but their production extends into universities, study centres, associations, publishing, journalism, and activist networks.

The most consequential divide concerns the social basis of solidarity: should political obligation rest principally on national community, individual responsibility, organized labour, ecological interdependence, or a renewed federal citizenship?

The principal currents can be mapped as follows.

Intellectual current	Central questions and arguments	Important carriers
Flemish nationalist and conservative	Can effective democracy and solidarity be sustained without a strong shared national identity? Should powers follow the Flemish political community?	N-VA, parts of the wider Flemish movement, nationalist public intellectuals and commentary
Radical nationalist right	Who belongs to the political community, and who should receive priority in protection, welfare, and representation?	Vlaams Belang and associated or adjacent activist environments
Liberal and managerial reform	How can employment, entrepreneurship, public finances, and administrative effectiveness be improved?	MR, liberal politicians, business organizations, policy institutes
Social-democratic and organized-labour traditions	How should social insurance, redistribution, collective bargaining, and public services be preserved or reformed?	PS, Vooruit, unions, mutualities, socialist research institutions
Marxist and radical left	How do ownership, profits, class power, and market dependence shape apparently technical policy choices?	PTB–PVDA, its activists and research work
Ecological and democratic-renewal currents	How should ecological limits, social justice, participation, and long-term decision-making reshape politics?	Groen, Ecolo, ecological associations, Oikos, Etopia, deliberative-democracy initiatives

Intellectual current	Central questions and arguments	Important carriers
Federal and multilingual reform	Which institutions could create incentives for political cooperation across linguistic boundaries?	Pavia, Re-Bel, and participating scholars

This table identifies broad orientations, not unified organizations or fixed chains of command.

Within the nationalist-conservative current, **Bart De Wever is himself an intellectual political actor**. His books *Over identiteit* (2019) and *Over Woke* (2023) show that identity, cultural continuity, and disputes about universalism are part of an explicit political interpretation, rather than merely campaign slogans. These themes provide a framework within which integration, education, migration, and state organization can be connected. Bibliographic information on De Wever's writings

His political significance lies partly in combining this intellectual role with party leadership, extensive media experience, and executive credibility. That combination helps explain why his position cannot be understood merely through an account's follower count.

Mark Elchardus is another important figure because his work connects the sociology of public opinion with arguments about community and democracy. *De dramademocratie* (2002) examined the growing political significance of mediated representation; *Reset: Over identiteit, gemeenschap en democratie* (2021) made identity and community central to democratic renewal. His trajectory also demonstrates that arguments supporting stronger national solidarity can emerge from intellectual environments historically connected to socialism. [Elchardus's works and intellectual background](#)

The relationship between N-VA and Vlaams Belang should nevertheless remain analytically differentiated. They compete over parts of the nationalist electorate, but differ in governing participation, political positioning, and coalition acceptability. Treating them as interchangeable obscures precisely the conversion of ideas and electoral support into state power that needs explanation.

The liberal current has a more explicit institutional connection between research and party communication. The **Centre Jean Gol** describes itself as a centre for liberal thought and directly states that it supports MR in communicating accessible political proposals. Its work spans employment, taxation, energy, security, education, and other policy fields. [Centre Jean Gol's institutional description](#)

This makes visible a process frequently hidden by attention to personalities: policy arguments are developed and selected institutionally before they become interventions by a prominent leader. Bouchez's public communication should therefore be studied together with the organizational production of liberal arguments.

Itinera occupies a different position. It convenes expertise around entrepreneurship, governance, economic reform, and public policy, while presenting itself as independent of parties. Its significance lies in providing interpretations and proposals that can circulate across business, academic, media, and political environments. Its institutional independence should not be confused with the absence of a recognizable policy orientation. [Itinera's published institutional account](#)

On the social-democratic side, the **Institut Émile Vandervelde** is explicitly the PS's research centre. Its remit includes economic, social, administrative, legal, and political questions. It contributes to the preparation of positions before those positions appear as parliamentary conflict or public messaging. [Institut Émile Vandervelde](#)

The wider left is more plural than its party map suggests. **Denktank Minerva**, for example, publishes research on wages, taxation, labour-market institutions, migration, and inequality. Its work illustrates how an intellectual network can contest the categories through which governments describe problems: whether a budget deficit is primarily a spending problem, whether labour-market reform concerns incentives or bargaining power, and whether migration is framed principally as a burden or an economic relationship. [Minerva's research and policy interventions](#)

These are politically consequential conflicts over explanation. Whoever establishes the accepted description of a problem gains an advantage before the debate over remedies begins.

The ecological current also retains organizations devoted to sustained intellectual formation. **Oikos** develops social-ecological arguments through publications, education, and events. **Etopia** combines research, political education, and archives. Etopia expressly distinguishes itself from Ecolo's party research department, the Centre Jacky Morael. That distinction matters: intellectual proximity does not establish organizational subordination. [Oikos](#); [Etopia's description of its activities](#)

Across these currents, digital communication has altered the circulation of ideas more quickly than it has replaced their institutional production. A short video may be the visible endpoint of months of research, strategic discussion, and organizational selection.

The scale of digital news use is substantial, but “online” does not mean “outside journalism.” Ike Picone's Belgian chapter of the *Digital News Report 2026* reports the following use of news sources:

Source category Reported use

Online sources	75%
Television	49%
Social media	41%
Print	18%

These are overlapping survey categories, not shares of a single market. The same person can use several. Online sources include established news organizations, and social media can distribute their reporting. Picone also reports a substantial trust difference: 49% among Dutch-speaking respondents versus 28% among French-speaking respondents. [Reuters Institute, Belgium, 2026](#)

Consequently, the relevant transformation is not simply from newspapers and television to politicians and influencers. It also involves newspapers and broadcasters operating inside platforms, while competing with parties, creators, and ordinary users for visibility.

Research by **Raymond A. Harder, Julie Sevenans, and Peter Van Aelst** provides a useful historical baseline. Their study of the 2014 Belgian campaign found that traditional media

organizations remained especially influential in setting the agenda, including through Twitter. Moving communication onto a platform did not abolish the importance of institutions capable of producing news. This finding should not be projected unchanged onto 2026, but it demonstrates why communication technology and political influence must be measured separately. [“Intermedia Agenda Setting in the Social Media Age,” 2017](#)

A useful conceptual distinction is between three activities:

1. Producing information or interpretations.
2. Distributing them to large audiences.
3. Conferring credibility or political significance on them.

These activities can be performed by different actors. A party creates a claim, supporters circulate it, and a broadcaster’s decision to discuss it makes it a wider political issue. Alternatively, investigative journalism creates the issue, a politician personalizes it, and platforms enlarge its audience.

This reciprocal relationship explains why online and conventional media often reinforce each other.

Belgian parties themselves became major purchasers of digital visibility. AdLens’s 2024 monitoring, reported by *The Brussels Times*, recorded approximately €11.01 million spent on Meta and €1.46 million on Google, excluding VAT, across party and politician levels. The combined figure including VAT was approximately €15.09 million.

The reported Meta spending illustrates different strategies:

Party grouping Approximate Meta spending in 2024

Vlaams Belang	€2.35 million
Vooruit	€1.19 million
PTB–PVDA	€1.07 million
N-VA	€0.96 million

Vooruit directed 63% of its budget toward individual candidates and leaders. N-VA spent less than in 2023 despite remaining the largest party in the federal election. These figures establish investment and personalization; they do not establish votes caused by advertising. [AdLens findings reported in January 2025](#)

The organizational implication is significant. A leader’s seemingly immediate relationship with supporters may depend on party money, professional production, communications staff, and existing publicity. The appearance of directness can coexist with considerable organization behind the communication.

Digitalization can therefore shift power **within** a party. If leaders can reach supporters without relying as heavily on branch meetings or intermediary officials, internal deliberative bodies may become less influential. Yet the party’s central communications operation may become stronger.

Vlaams Belang provides particularly strong evidence for that combination. Judith Sijstermans's study, *The Vlaams Belang: A Mass Party of the 21st Century* (2021), found that the party combined investment in local branches and a vertically organized structure with extensive Facebook communication to informal supporters. Its decision-making remained highly centralized, and wider participation in communication did not produce extensive internal democracy. [Sijstermans's study](#)

This is directly relevant to your hypothesis. A party can reduce the distinction between members and sympathizers in the circulation of messages while preserving a sharp distinction between leaders and supporters in decision-making.

It also suggests why membership decline, where it occurs, cannot alone establish organizational decline. An organization might have fewer formal participants but greater communicative reach. Conversely, very extensive reach might conceal weak local recruitment or limited ability to sustain a campaign.

The appropriate question is which functions are expanding or contracting: recruitment, financing, discussion, ideological formation, mobilization, candidate selection, or policy production.

Extra-party activism has nevertheless acquired new opportunities to influence the intellectual environment. Ico Maly's research on **Schild & Vrienden** supplies a concrete example. His 2019 study examined how a Flemish far-right activist movement combined physical interventions, video production, coordinated online interaction, and subsequent conventional-media attention.

Maly calls this *algorithmic activism*: participants use practical knowledge of platform distribution to increase the circulation of their material. He connects it with *metapolitics*, the effort to alter accepted ideas and cultural assumptions before obtaining governmental authority. The research identifies mechanisms of visibility and normalization; it does not calculate their electoral effects. [Maly, "New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden"](#)

This helps explain a form of influence that parliamentary analysis easily misses. A small movement can affect the vocabulary of a much larger political debate without becoming a major electoral organization.

For example, activists may attempt to make an established policy appear illegitimate, portray an institution as hostile to ordinary citizens, or redefine a previously marginal position as a reasonable response to crisis. Parties then decide whether to adopt, modify, or reject the resulting arguments.

The causal sequence remains contingent. Publicity can produce opposition and reputational damage as well as support. Visibility alone is therefore an inadequate measure of political success.

The contrast between Flanders and French-speaking Belgium shows that platforms do not erase inherited political opportunity structures. Léonie de Jonge's *The Curious Case of Belgium: Why is There no Right-Wing Populism in Wallonia?*, published online in 2020 and in print in 2021, is central here.

Her explanation emphasizes the supply of credible political organizations and the conduct of established parties and media. Flemish radical-right actors could draw on nationalist networks, while stronger political and media exclusion constrained their counterparts in Wallonia. Differences in potential public demand alone did not sufficiently explain the divergent outcomes. [De Jonge's article](#)

This does not establish permanent Walloon immunity from radical-right politics. It establishes that similar communication technologies operate within different systems of recruitment, legitimacy, competition, and exclusion.

Two forms of exclusion should also be separated. A **political cordon sanitaire** concerns cooperation and coalition formation. A **media cordon** concerns access to journalistic platforms and the conditions under which political actors are presented. Online communication can weaken the second without automatically overturning the first.

This helps explain why extensive visibility and significant electoral support do not guarantee access to government.

In Flanders, the competition between N-VA and Vlaams Belang therefore concerns both substantive positions and political effectiveness. One important dimension is who can credibly claim to produce results through office; another is who can claim greater consistency in defending nationalist demands.

In French-speaking Belgium, the conflict has a different structure. Liberal reform, socialist defence of social institutions, radical-left criticism, ecological politics, and centrist repositioning compete within an arena where a strong Vlaams Belang equivalent has historically been absent.

The MR–Les Engagés government in Wallonia demonstrates that a rightward change in government need not take the same organizational form as the Flemish radical right. Regional outcomes require explanations attentive to their own parties and social histories.

Brussels introduces a further political logic that cannot be reduced to a midpoint between Flanders and Wallonia. Its formal institutions recognize linguistic groups, but its social life is metropolitan and multilingual. Housing, transport, public safety, employment, inequality, and neighbourhood conditions can organize political loyalties alongside linguistic and ideological identities.

Digital communication makes highly localized grievances easier to publicize. Yet the conversion of those grievances into regional decisions still runs through municipalities, language-group arrangements, parties, and coalition bargaining.

Brussels also illustrates the difference between two meanings of “Brussels”: the Belgian city and region, and the international institutional centre. European policy organizations located there may influence expert debates without possessing comparable influence over Belgian mass politics. Geographic proximity should not be mistaken for a unified political network.

The long formation process preceding the February 2026 regional government further demonstrates that communicative abundance does not necessarily produce institutional

agreement. More opportunities to express preferences can coexist with serious difficulty aggregating them into an executive coalition.

PTB–PVDA provides a different challenge to the established system because its organization crosses the principal linguistic divide. Its Dutch and French names belong to a single nationwide party. This gives it a distinctive capacity to articulate social and economic conflict through a shared organizational framework, although the strength and circumstances of its support vary geographically.

Its analytical importance is that class-based political communication can cross a boundary that most major party organizations reproduce. The question becomes whether a common account of wages, prices, taxation, and ownership can generate solidarity across separate media environments.

Its substantial digital advertising expenditure also indicates that modern communications are not confined to the right. However, interpreting the party as an internet phenomenon would overlook its emphasis on sustained activism and collective organization.

The broader comparison is instructive: nationalist and radical-left actors can both use emotionally forceful digital messages, but they organize different collective subjects. One centres national membership; the other centres economic position and class relations. Their similarity as communicators should not obscure that substantive difference.

The strongest surviving intermediaries are those that perform functions audiences cannot readily replace. Belgium’s system of social consultation brings employers, unions, and governments into repeated interaction. This includes bargaining between social partners, advisory work, and tripartite consultation with government. The government retains decision-making autonomy when agreement fails, but organized interests possess institutional access, knowledge, and implementation capacities. [CRISP on economic and social concertation](#)

These organizations derive influence from several sources that are only partly communicative:

- They represent people within workplaces and sectors.
- They possess specialized information about employment and social provision.
- They can organize collective action.
- They participate in established consultative arrangements.
- Their cooperation can affect the implementation of policy.

The nationwide strikes against government reforms in 2025 demonstrate the continuing importance of these capacities. Digital communication assists mobilization, but coordinated workplace action depends on relationships and organization beyond social-media audiences. [Reuters on the March 2025 national strike](#)

At the same time, their role is contested. In a June 2026 interview, **Jean Faniel** argued that governments were increasingly marginalizing social concertation and thereby changing a foundational element of the Belgian model. This is Faniel’s interpretation of the current direction, rather than an uncontested description of every policy process. [Faniel’s analysis, republished by CRISP](#)

His argument identifies a deeper conflict beneath parliamentary controversy. The dispute concerns who should participate in defining policy before parliament votes: executive leaders, party negotiators, organized social interests, experts, or some combination.

A change in this relationship can alter the practical constitution of political power even without a formal constitutional amendment.

The state also depends on less visible institutions that translate broad political positions into workable decisions. Belgium’s official description of federal policy bodies distinguishes politically appointed policy cells from the permanent administration. These cells prepare proposals, coordinate government policy, and work with implementation agencies. [Official account of policy-making bodies](#)

This is a critical stage in the movement from public communication to state action. A demand such as “reduce dependency,” “protect purchasing power,” or “simplify government” does not specify an administrable policy. It must be translated into eligibility rules, budgets, procedures, institutional responsibilities, and enforceable provisions.

The people performing that translation may have little public visibility while exercising considerable influence over outcomes.

For your research purpose, the relevant distinctions can be expressed as follows:

Political function	What digital communication changes	What continues to require organization or institutional authority
Defining public problems	More actors can introduce and circulate interpretations	Sustained research, credibility, access to information
Mobilizing attention	Rapid, large-scale, personalized communication	Durable commitment and repeated participation
Winning representation	New routes to recognition and supporter recruitment	Candidates, lists, electoral coordination
Forming governments	Public pressure shapes bargaining conditions	Negotiation, coalition acceptability, agreement
Developing policy	Public feedback and controversy arrive faster	Expertise, legal drafting, budgets, coordination
Implementing decisions	Communication can promote or undermine acceptance	Administration, service providers, organized cooperation

This is my analytical framework rather than a taxonomy taken from a single author. It explains why the displacement of intermediaries can be substantial in one political function and limited in another.

There is also an intellectual movement seeking to reorganize participation through deliberation and institutional reform. Belgium has produced unusually concrete experiments in this area.

David Van Reybrouck and the **G1000** initiative helped make citizens' assemblies part of the debate about democratic renewal. The German-speaking community established permanent citizen dialogue in 2019, combining a standing citizens' council with assemblies selected by lot. Brussels subsequently institutionalized mixed deliberative committees involving citizens and parliamentarians. These bodies formulate recommendations; they should not be described as replacing elected legislatures. [G1000's documented initiatives](#); [the German-speaking community's citizen-dialogue institution](#)

This current addresses an important problem of digital participation: those who speak most frequently or attract most attention are not necessarily representative of the population.

Deliberative institutions seek to create a different relationship between participation and influence by selecting participants, providing time and information, and linking recommendations to public institutions.

A related but distinct intervention comes from **Philippe Van Parijs, Kris Deschouwer, and the Pavia group**. Their proposal would elect 15 of the Chamber's 150 members through a federal constituency encompassing the whole country. Its purpose is to give politicians incentives to seek support across linguistic boundaries. It remains a reform proposal. [The Pavia proposal](#)

The **Re-Bel initiative** provides a broader forum for examining Belgium's institutional future. It explicitly presents itself as a setting for competing proposals rather than an organization committed to one comprehensive programme. [Re-Bel's institutional description](#)

These examples show intellectual work entering politics through institutional design: changing the procedures that generate political incentives, rather than simply providing arguments for existing competitors.

The period after October 2025 must be distinguished from the preceding expansion of paid platform campaigning. Meta stopped delivering political, electoral, and social-issue advertising in the EU on 6 October 2025. Google also stopped EU political advertising in October 2025. These were company decisions responding to European regulation; they were not a general prohibition on political speech. Meta explicitly retained ordinary political posting. [Meta's announcement](#); [Google's current confirmation](#)

The Belgian spending figures from 2024 therefore document an earlier phase.

My inference is that this change increases the relative importance of existing audiences, unpaid circulation, direct contact networks, professional content production, and attention obtained through journalism. It may also make established organizational assets more valuable: organizations with supporters willing to distribute their material possess something that cannot simply be bought through the same advertising channels.

However, the sources examined do not establish which Belgian parties have gained most from this change. That requires new comparative evidence rather than extrapolation from the 2024 advertising hierarchy.

Several bodies of scholarship are especially useful for studying these processes together. The following works provide complementary explanations; none alone covers the full transformation.

Authors and work	Principal contribution to your research question
Luc Huyse, <i>Passiviteit, pacificatie en verzuiling in de Belgische politiek</i> (1970)	Explains how social segmentation, organized constituencies, and elite accommodation sustained Belgian political order.
Kris Deschouwer and colleagues, <i>The Politics of Belgium</i>, third edition (2026)	Provides the current general institutional framework for studying parties, federalism, and democratic innovations.
Lieven De Winter and Caroline Van Wynsberghe, “Kingdom of Belgium: Partitocracy, Corporatist Society, and Dissociative Federalism” (2015)	Connects party domination with organized civil society and the territorial division of political competition.
Pierre Baudewyns, Marleen Brans, Min Reuchamps, Benoît Rihoux, and Virginie Van Ingelgom, editors, <i>The Winter of Democracy: Partitocracy in Belgium</i> (2022)	Examines continuing party power across citizens, candidates, parliaments, and governments.
Niessen and colleagues, “Partitocracy and the future of Belgium” (2022)	Tests whether differences between political elites are reproduced among voters.
Dave Sinardet’s research on the Belgian public sphere	Explains the interaction of language, media, representation, and federal accountability.
Judith Sijstermans, “The Vlaams Belang: A Mass Party of the 21st Century” (2021)	Demonstrates the coexistence of digital mobilization, local organization, and centralized leadership.
Ico Maly, “New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden” (2019)	Connects intellectual normalization, activist organization, platforms, and conventional-media amplification.
Léonie de Jonge, “The Curious Case of Belgium” (2020/2021)	Explains why political and journalistic institutions produce different opportunities for radical-right mobilization.
Harder, Sevenans, and Van Aelst, “Intermedia Agenda Setting in the Social Media Age” (2017)	Shows why the movement of communication online does not itself establish the displacement of established news producers.
Jean Faniel’s research on social concertation	Reveals struggles over intermediary institutions and policy-making authority beneath electoral conflict.
Ike Picone’s Belgian Digital News Report analyses	Supplies current evidence about news use and the differences between linguistic audiences.

The institutional references concerning De Winter and *The Winter of Democracy* are documented in the [2022 author-uploaded chapter and its bibliography](#). A further recent research pointer is **Luc Denayer, Évelyne Léonard, and Marie Van den broeck**'s two-part 2026 study of three federal advisory councils during 1999–2024. It is particularly relevant to the production of policy expertise beneath visible party conflict. CRISP publication record

For a systematic investigation of Belgium, the decisive empirical task is to follow particular issues across these institutions. One would trace where an interpretation originated, which organizations developed it, how journalists and platforms distributed it, whether voters changed their priorities, how parties incorporated it, and what survived coalition negotiation and policy preparation.

That approach would distinguish four outcomes often conflated in discussions of cyberspace: **increased visibility, changed public opinion, altered electoral support, and changed state decisions**. Belgium offers strong evidence that these outcomes can diverge—and that the organizations connecting them remain central to understanding political power.

Denmark

Denmark's political transformation is best understood as a redistribution of functions between parties, political personalities, media organizations, organized interests, and digital platforms. Social media have substantially changed how political attention is acquired and how leaders maintain relationships with voters. Parties nevertheless remain central to candidate recruitment, parliamentary bargaining, and government formation, while organized interests retain considerable influence over policy preparation and implementation.

Your proposed focus on the underlying organization of politics is therefore especially productive in Denmark. The crucial question is how the production of political ideas, their public circulation, electoral mobilization, and state decision-making have become connected in new ways.

My principal interpretation is that **Danish politics increasingly combines personalized public communication with institutionally organized government**. This can produce a striking divergence: the public sphere becomes more confrontational and fragmented while policy continues to emerge through negotiations among a relatively limited set of experienced organizations.

The account below distinguishes established research findings from my interpretation of their combined significance. It incorporates developments through September 2026, while dating older empirical studies explicitly.

Denmark entered the digital era with an unusually extensive infrastructure of political participation outside parliament. Historically, political life developed through agricultural cooperatives, trade unions, churches, folk high schools, voluntary associations, local newspapers, and municipal government. Parties connected these institutions, but did not encompass all political communication.

Three historical traditions are particularly relevant.

First, the agrarian and popular-educational tradition associated with **N. F. S. Grundtvig** treated political membership as something cultivated through education, discussion, collective activity, and familiarity with a shared historical community. Folk high schools helped establish a conception of citizenship extending beyond voting.

Ove Korsgaard, especially in *N. F. S. Grundtvig: As a Political Thinker* (2014), is an important guide to this background. His interpretation emphasizes the relationship between popular education, freedom, and the formation of a politically competent people. It also illuminates a persistent tension between “the people” understood as a democratic citizenry and as a historical-cultural community. [Korsgaard’s book](#), [interview explaining his interpretation](#).

Second, the labour movement developed collective bargaining and political representation alongside institutions supporting everyday social solidarity. Its organizational significance lay in making demands negotiable: leaders could articulate interests, bargain over compromises, and obtain acceptance among members.

Third, local self-government and associational experience provided routes into national politics. Political competence could develop through practical administration, occupational representation, and voluntary work.

These traditions matter because a party member, a trade-union representative, and a social-media follower occupy different relationships to political power. Membership can include obligations, deliberation, leadership selection, and opportunities to challenge decisions. Following a politician usually provides access to communication without equivalent organizational rights.

The digital transformation consequently affects more than the medium through which messages travel. It changes the relationship between **being represented, participating in an organization, and belonging to an audience**.

The erosion of inherited party loyalties began well before social media. Denmark’s 1973 “landslide election,” including the breakthrough of Mogens Glistrup’s Progress Party, already demonstrated the vulnerability of established parties to personalized protest, anti-bureaucratic appeals, and new forms of publicity.

The subsequent development of the Danish People’s Party, founded in 1995, showed another process: protest could be converted into a disciplined organization capable of sustained parliamentary influence. The Venstre–Conservative government formed in 2001, supported by

the Danish People's Party, established immigration and national belonging as central governing issues.

This chronology prevents us from attributing to Facebook or TikTok developments with older organizational and intellectual origins. **Jens Rydgren's** study of the Danish radical right and **Christoffer Green-Pedersen and Pontus Odmalm's** comparison of Denmark and Sweden show why political opportunities and party strategies belong in the explanation. In the latter account, centre-right coalition incentives helped determine how immigration became politicized. [Rydgren, 2004](#), [Green-Pedersen and Odmalm, 2008](#).

The deeper implication is that social grievances do not translate automatically into party alignments. Political actors select, interpret, and combine them. Digital platforms accelerate this process and change its opportunities, but do not eliminate the work of political interpretation.

Several overlapping intellectual conflicts now structure Danish politics. A single left-right line conceals much of their significance.

Underlying conflict	Central political questions	Organizational and electoral implications
Redistribution and economic authority	Who pays, who receives, and who controls economic resources?	Divides socialist, social-democratic, social-liberal, conservative, and market-liberal projects.
National membership and openness	What obligations follow from citizenship, residence, cultural belonging, and humanitarian commitments?	Cuts across the economic division, particularly within the broad left and centre-right.
Education and cultural authority	Whose knowledge, language, tastes, and judgment receive public recognition?	Helps explain conflict between professional metropolitan milieus and groups feeling culturally devalued.
Centre and periphery	Where should services, jobs, institutions, and investment be located?	Creates opportunities for parties representing smaller towns, rural districts, and communities affected by centralization.
Ecological transformation	Who bears the costs of changing agriculture, energy, transport, and consumption?	Links climate politics to occupation, geography, property, and industrial interests.
Political voice and governing competence	Who speaks convincingly for citizens, and who can produce workable agreements?	Creates different opportunities for prominent communicators and experienced parliamentary negotiators.

This is an analytical map rather than a claim that each voter belongs permanently to one camp.

Rune Stubager's research is especially important for understanding education as a political division. His article *The Development of the Education Cleavage: Denmark as a Critical Case* (2010) examines how educational differences become organized political conflict. His broader research connects social position, group perceptions, and party choice. [Stubager's research profile and publications](#).

The relevant distinction extends beyond how much information people possess. Education also affects occupational environments, geographical location, social networks, cultural confidence, and perceptions of legitimate authority.

An economically disadvantaged university graduate and a skilled worker can share an interest in public services while interpreting immigration, national identity, or cultural change differently. Conversely, a prosperous entrepreneur and a lower-income voter can converge in opposition to a perceived cultural establishment while disagreeing over taxation.

Digital communication makes such combinations easier to express. A short video can simultaneously convey economic frustration, cultural resentment, and a claim to everyday common sense, without resolving the tensions among them.

The conflict over cultural authority has a substantial Danish intellectual history. The tradition of cultural radicalism, associated historically with figures such as Georg Brandes, promoted secular criticism, intellectual emancipation, and challenges to inherited authority. Its legacy reaches into journalism, education, literature, and social liberalism.

An important internal critic is **Rune Lykkeberg**. In *Kampen om sandhederne*—approximately *The Struggle over Truths*—published in 2008, he examined how a cultural class committed to criticizing power could fail to recognize its own authority and its capacity to humiliate others. His interpretation of the 2001 political realignment draws on Bourdieu and the distinction between economic and cultural power. [Contemporary assessment by Lars Handesten](#).

For the present inquiry, this helps explain why online anti-elite communication can resonate beyond straightforward economic dissatisfaction. The political message may be that people's experiences have been dismissed, their language ridiculed, or their judgments treated as illegitimate.

My interpretation is that platforms make these experiences easier to collectivize. Individuals encounter others who describe similar injuries to recognition. A dispersed sentiment can thereby acquire a common vocabulary, identifiable adversaries, and political representatives.

However, “the educated,” “the metropolitan,” or “the cultural elite” remain political constructions with considerable internal variation. They should not be treated as unified organizations directing Danish public life.

National conservatism supplies another established vocabulary for interpreting social change. Within this tradition, national continuity, inherited obligations, cultural familiarity, and political sovereignty are treated as conditions of meaningful solidarity.

Søren Krarup and Jesper Langballe, associated with *Tidehverv*, were significant intellectual-political representatives of a national-Lutheran strand. Their critique of cultural radicalism and universalist moral politics helped articulate boundaries between national obligation and claims made in the name of humanity.

Hans Morten Haugen's *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and the Multicultural Challenges* (2011) examines the relationship between church, national identity, and multiculturalism, including conflicts within this religious landscape. His account also makes

clear why this strand should not be equated with Danish Christianity as a whole. [Haugen's study](#).

The digital significance is that national conservatism already possessed an interpretive repertoire before social media: cultural displacement, elite estrangement, threatened continuity, and unequal obligations. Platforms provide new ways to circulate these arguments and connect them with particular incidents.

Yet Danish national-conservative politics also contains substantial economic variation. Welfare protection, rural representation, cultural conservatism, and low-tax liberalism can coexist electorally without forming a coherent common doctrine.

The Social Democrats' repositioning is particularly important because it shows an established party absorbing and reformulating these conflicts. Under Mette Frederiksen, the party combined restrictive immigration positions with renewed emphasis on welfare, work, social obligations, and the interests of people outside highly educated metropolitan milieus.

Two politician-authors illuminate the intellectual substance of this development.

Mattias Tesfaye's *Kloge hænder: Et forsvar for håndværk og faglighed* (2013) defends practical knowledge and craftsmanship. Its relevance lies in challenging the hierarchy that places abstract education above skilled work. This supplies a language of recognition as well as a programme concerning training and employment. [Publisher's account](#).

His *Velkommen Mustafa: 50 års socialdemokratisk udlændingepolitik* (2017) reconstructs internal social-democratic immigration disputes through archives and interviews, including the experiences of mayors in Copenhagen's western suburbs. It demonstrates that these arguments developed through local government and party conflict over decades. [Publisher's account](#).

Kaare Dybvad Bek's *Udkantsmyten* (2015) and *De lærdes tyranni* (2017) address metropolitan centralization, educational hierarchies, and the devaluation of provincial and practical experience. His later *Arbejdets land* (2023) extends his intervention into the relationship between work and the welfare society. These are contributions to political debate, rather than detached descriptions of it. [Discussion of Dybvad's intellectual interventions](#).

Together, these interventions indicate that social-democratic adaptation involved more than changing campaign tone. It attempted to reconstruct the identity of the socially productive and deserving citizen.

The electoral consequences require careful interpretation. In 2019 the Social Democrats returned to government, but their own vote share declined slightly, from approximately 26.3% to 25.9%. **Søren Frank Etzerodt and Kristian Kongshøj's** analysis of the Danish People's Party's collapse treats welfare and economic insecurity alongside immigration. Returning to office cannot simply be read as proof that restrictive immigration produced a large net gain for the Social Democrats. Their 2022 study.

Market liberalism and the green left offer distinct competing projects. Danish market liberalism criticizes taxation, regulation, public-sector expansion, and constraints on individual initiative. **CEPOS** gives this tradition a continuing institutional form through research, policy

proposals, education, and public communication. Its own declared orientation is classical liberal and market-oriented. [CEPOS's statement of purpose](#).

This helps explain why Liberal Alliance's appeal should be distinguished from welfare-oriented national populism. Both may criticize bureaucracy or cultural conformity, but they offer different answers about economic freedom, redistribution, and the proper scope of the state.

On the left, SF, Enhedslisten, and Alternativet combine environmental commitments, welfare, cultural liberalism, and economic criticism in different proportions. Their differences concern ownership and governing strategy as well as tone or generational appeal.

Pelle Dragsted's *Nordisk socialisme: På vej mod en demokratisk økonomi* (2021) is particularly relevant. It develops a programme of economic democratization and democratic ownership, identifying possibilities within existing Nordic institutions. It therefore provides a substantial account of economic power alongside the left's more immediately visible cultural and environmental campaigns. [Publisher's account](#).

These examples show that Danish political ideas continue to be produced through books, parties, occupational experience, newspapers, and policy organizations. Digital communication changes which fragments become widely visible and how they are attached to personalities.

The scale of Danish digitalization is very large, but digital access and political participation must be distinguished. According to the Danish Agency for Digital Government, in 2025, 98% of people aged 15–89 had used the internet within the preceding three months, and 91% used a mobile phone or smartphone to access it. [Official digital-use statistics](#).

The 2026 *Digital News Report* gives the following picture:

Indicator	Denmark, 2026
Use of online news sources	More than 80%
Use of television news	61%
Use of print news	14%
Trust in news overall	55%
Paying for online news	20%
Sometimes or often avoiding news	34%

These are survey measures; channels overlap, so their percentages cannot be added. Online news also includes established publishers' websites and applications. [Kim Christian Schrøder, Mark Blach-Ørsten and Mads Kæmsgaard Eberholst, Denmark report](#).

The organizational implication is substantial. A citizen who reads DR through an application has changed delivery channel while retaining an established editorial intermediary. A citizen who watches a politician's TikTok video encounters a different relationship between communicator, platform, and audience.

Danish broadcasting and professional journalism remain powerful within the digital environment. DR and TV 2 provide widely used common reference points. National

newspapers, specialist political journalism, digital publications, and podcasts continue to investigate, interpret, and circulate political claims.

The media landscape also contains differentiated editorial traditions: liberal and conservative currents, social-liberal journalism, left-oriented criticism, business journalism, and specialist policy reporting. These are tendencies within a plural field, not direct equivalents of party ownership or discipline.

The 2025 Danish *Digital News Report* documents the strength of the public broadcasters, public support for qualifying commercial news organizations, and the growth of digital publications such as Zetland, Føljeton, and Frihedsbrevet. These developments show that digitalization can sustain new journalistic intermediaries as well as political self-publication. [Denmark's 2025 media assessment](#).

Stig Hjarvard's concept of mediatization is useful here: institutions adapt their practices to the conditions under which media make them visible. **Andrew Chadwick's** concept of a hybrid media system further explains how political influence depends on combining older and newer media channels. These are broader frameworks rather than Denmark-specific measurements. [Hjarvard's book](#), [Chadwick's book](#).

Applied to Denmark, this suggests that a successful politician can use a social-media intervention to generate news coverage, use that coverage as validation, and recirculate selected extracts. Traditional journalism and direct communication become mutually consequential.

The power of editors is reduced at the initial publication stage: they can no longer prevent a politician from speaking publicly. Their capacity to investigate claims, establish wider significance, and reach different audiences remains important.

The clearest change is the growing importance of politicians as recognizable personal communicators. Danish leaders increasingly combine policy positions with everyday familiarity, humour, personal experience, and emotional disclosure.

Mette Frederiksen's Instagram presence provides a well-studied example. **Lisbeth Thorlacius's** research examines her professional and publicly presented private identity during the two years following June 2019. It finds particularly strong engagement with private and softer political content. This is evidence concerning audience interaction, not proof of electoral persuasion. [Thorlacius's study, 2024](#).

My interpretation is that this communication joins two kinds of authority: the capacity to govern and the appearance of understanding everyday life. The leader can seem familiar without becoming organizationally accessible.

This affects the internal balance of parties. A leader with a substantial personal audience gains an independent resource in disputes over strategy and presentation. Activists and local organizations may remain formally important while losing some practical control over how the party is publicly understood.

Conversely, maintaining personal prominence requires continual production of content and public reactions. Leadership becomes more exposed to immediate reputational fluctuations.

Digital prominence is distributed across several Danish political traditions. A major study, *Indeks for det danske digitale demokrati 2024*, published in March 2025 by researchers at Roskilde University and the University of Southern Denmark, provides useful comparative evidence.

For its Facebook dataset covering August 2023–August 2024, selected politicians had the following average interactions per post:

Politician	Average interactions per Facebook post
Lars Boje Mathiesen	5,046
Jacob Mark	4,396
Inger Støjberg	4,006
Morten Messerschmidt	3,649
Mette Frederiksen	3,623
Alex Vanopslagh	3,256

These figures measure historical interaction, not unique viewers, supporters, votes, or current rankings. The research team included **Sine Nørholm Just, Eva Mayerhöffer, Claes de Vreese, Kim Andersen**, and colleagues. Its TikTok analysis also found interaction around opposition parties including Liberal Alliance and Enhedslisten. [Full report](#).

This plurality is central to the Danish case. Online success is compatible with national conservatism, market liberalism, social democracy, and the green left.

The analytical common denominator is the ability to produce a recognizable political identity and content that audiences will circulate. Ideology supplies meaning; the communicative form makes that meaning socially accessible.

Alex Vanopslagh’s significance can therefore be understood in terms of presenting market-liberal arguments through a personal style suited to younger audiences. Støjberg represents a different possibility: a leader’s established identity can connect national and territorial grievances. Frederiksen demonstrates that a governing party with extensive institutional resources can adopt personal communication effectively.

These mechanisms do not establish that particular platforms caused any party’s election result.

Independent news creators are developing, while established media also adopt creator-style communication. The 2026 Danish news report identifies Frede Dyrnesli’s *Frede’s Frontpage*, launched in 2022, and TV 2 Kosmopol’s *Aburna’s Boat* as examples of efforts to reach younger audiences through recognizable people and informal formats. [2026 report](#).

Their importance lies in making political information relational: audiences return partly because they know the presenter and trust the style.

We should distinguish four positions: an independent political commentator; a journalist with a personal following; a politician adopting influencer techniques; and an activist mobilizing around a particular issue. Their incentives, accountability, and relationships to parties differ.

Denmark's transformation includes all four. The research examined here does not justify treating independent influencers as the principal owners of Danish political communication.

Research on party campaigns reveals how direct communication can coexist with centralized decision-making. In their study of the 2015 election, **Johan Farkas and Sander Andreas Schwartz** interviewed social-media managers representing the nine parliamentary parties.

Managers principally understood Facebook as a channel for distributing messages and monitoring opinion. They did not systematically incorporate users' political suggestions into policy formation. [*Please Like, Comment and Share our Campaign!*, 2018.](#)

This identifies a fundamental distinction. Citizens may gain opportunities to react to politics while parties gain opportunities to observe those reactions. The two developments do not necessarily produce greater citizen influence over decisions.

A plausible organizational consequence is the expansion of audience feedback alongside continued strategic concentration. Communication teams can test wording, identify emotional responses, and refine presentation without opening candidate selection or policy bargaining to equivalent participation.

The balance may therefore shift from local members articulating demands upward to central teams interpreting audience behaviour. That is an analytical possibility suggested by the research, rather than a measured description of every Danish party.

Platform incentives interact with the incentives of parliamentary competition. A 2025 study by **Peter Aagaard, Sander Andreas Schwartz, Line Nygaard, and Malene Teresa Larsen** analysed 5,093 Facebook posts during two months of the 2021 lockdown.

Niche parties were more inclined to criticize opponents and frequently received greater interaction. Broad electoral parties used more informational communication, with lower reach. The authors relate these differences to parties' positions within the party system. [*Their study.*](#)

The practical tension is that an opposition party can benefit from sharpening a conflict, while a party seeking a coalition must preserve room for compromise.

This produces two different forms of political competence. One involves establishing an unmistakable public position. The other involves negotiating acceptable agreements among actors with different interests.

A leader can excel at both, but success in one does not guarantee success in the other. Nor does a large interaction count tell us how many people agree, how strongly they agree, or whether they will act electorally.

A comparative study by **Schwartz, Matti Nelimarkka, and Anders Olof Larsson** similarly finds that Nordic right-wing populist parties' platform success varies across countries and that their strategies are not radically different from those of other parties. [*Populist Platform Strategies*, 2023.](#)

Most citizens' digital political activity remains less visible than the comment sections suggest. Jakob Linaa Jensen and Sander Andreas Schwartz's longitudinal study of the 2011, 2015, and 2019 Danish elections emphasizes the continued importance of people who read and follow political material without producing much content themselves.

The authors also report that Facebook presence among parliamentary candidates rose from 81% in 2011 to 97% in 2019. Social-media use had become an ordinary feature of electoral politics rather than a specialized activity for a few innovators. [The Return of the "Lurker", 2021](#).

Silent exposure can matter politically. But it means that the visible population of contributors is an unreliable guide to the population receiving political communication.

Jensen's later study of five elections from 2007 to 2022 finds increasing self-reported internet influence on political awareness, opinions, and choice, alongside many respondents reporting no effect. Perceptions of social-media influence specifically stagnated or declined in 2022. These are perceived effects, not experimentally identified vote changes. [Jensen, 2025](#).

The evidence therefore supports a differentiated assessment: internet communication is embedded in Danish elections, while its influence varies among citizens, platforms, and periods.

Hostility can distort participation without the whole electorate becoming radically polarized. The Digitalisation Ministry's account of the 2024 digital-democracy research reports that 58% refrain from online debate. Approximately one in five would like to participate but are deterred by the tone.

It also reports a difference between the measured presence of posts referencing misinformation sources and citizens' perceptions of encountering misinformation. These are distinct measures and should not be treated as directly contradictory. [Ministry's research summary, March 2025](#).

The implication is that formal openness can coexist with unequal practical willingness to speak. A forum can be accessible to everyone while favouring participants comfortable with confrontation.

Alexander Bor and Michael Bang Petersen's comparative research helps clarify the mechanism. Across surveys and experiments, they found limited support for the proposition that online environments generally turn otherwise civil people into hostile discussants. Hostile individuals were also hostile offline, while online visibility contributed to the impression of pervasive aggression. This is comparative evidence, not a Denmark-only estimate. [Their 2022 study](#).

Similarly, **Anja Bechmann and Kristoffer Laigaard Nielbo's** study of Danish Facebook users found that estimates of informational isolation depended substantially on how similarity was measured. It does not support depicting all Danish users as confined within sealed ideological worlds. [Their 2018 study](#).

My interpretation is that the more immediate democratic problem is often **unequal visibility and unequal willingness to participate**, with potentially misleading signals about what the broader population thinks.

Behind public communication, organized interests retain substantial advantages. Denmark's political system has long incorporated employers, trade unions, occupational organizations, local government, and other associations into policy development.

This structure has changed, including through more public campaigning and professional lobbying. Its continuing importance is demonstrated by **Anne Skorkjær Binderkrantz, Peter Munk Christiansen, and Helene Helboe Pedersen's** study of access to the bureaucracy, parliament, and media.

They describe "privileged pluralism": different interests can enter different arenas, but organizational resources generate advantages across several arenas. The same organization can possess administrative expertise, parliamentary contacts, and media capacity. The study measures access rather than policy victories. [*Interest Group Access to the Bureaucracy, Parliament, and the Media, 2015.*](#)

This finding is directly relevant to the substitution hypothesis. Lowering the cost of public expression does not remove the value of specialist personnel, continuing representation, legal knowledge, or negotiating relationships.

A citizens' campaign can force an issue onto the agenda. An established organization may still be better placed to determine the technical design of the response.

The resulting inequality concerns the conversion of attention into decisions. Public visibility and policy access overlap, but neither can be inferred automatically from the other.

Think tanks connect intellectual production with these different arenas of influence. They produce arguments that can circulate simultaneously as expert analysis, political proposals, newspaper commentary, and online content.

An instructive comparison concerns **CEPOS** and **Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd**, commonly abbreviated AE.

In a 2015 study, **Mark Blach-Ørsten and Nete Nørgaard Kristensen** found that both were visible in newspapers, but their organizational connections differed. AE was more embedded in state, government, and organizational boards; CEPOS had weaker connections to those corporatist structures. These findings concern historical datasets, not a current network census. [*Their study.*](#)

This suggests different routes from ideas to power. An organization with established access can introduce proposals through continuing policy relationships. An organization with weaker access may invest more heavily in shifting public debate and the terms on which policies are evaluated.

Jesper Dahl Kelstrup and Blach-Ørsten's later research on think-tank visibility in parliament and the media provides a further route into this subject. Their 2020 article.

The intellectual background of Danish politics therefore includes organized producers of policy knowledge. Their significance cannot be measured solely by followers or public name recognition.

Elite-network research reveals another layer of continuity. Christoph Houman Ellersgaard and Anton Grau Larsen’s mapping of Danish elite affiliations provides a method for identifying connections among business, state institutions, associations, and other organizations. [The Danish Elite Network, 2015](#).

With Markus Bernsen, they also produced *Magteliten: Hvordan 423 danskere styrer landet* (2015). The well-known figure of 423 refers to a research-defined core in a historical network. It should not be interpreted as a permanent headcount or a unified committee controlling every decision.

More recent research by **Lasse Folke Henriksen, Jacob Aagard Lunding, Ellersgaard, and Larsen** examines a large corporate network and finds an association between central network positions and participation in government committees, even after accounting for other characteristics. The association concerns representation and access; it does not by itself establish causal control over policy. [The Hardcore Brokers, 2025 research paper](#).

The combined significance is that new public communicators enter a political environment already structured by durable relationships. Successful communication may help them enter these networks, challenge their decisions, or obtain bargaining power. It does not automatically dissolve the networks.

The Green Tripartite agreements provide a concrete example of how contemporary Danish state decisions are organized. The 2024 process brought government together with agricultural, industrial, trade-union, environmental, and municipal actors. A subsequent parliamentary agreement secured broad political support.

The official account also describes local tripartite groups involving municipalities, the state, agricultural representatives, and nature-conservation representatives. Thus the organizational process extends from national negotiation into local implementation. [Government account of the agreements](#).

This is highly relevant to climate politics. Public mobilization can make an issue urgent, but implementation involves landowners, financing, administrative capacity, specialist knowledge, and negotiated allocations of costs.

Large foundations can also participate in this infrastructure. The Novo Nordisk Foundation allocated DKK 10 billion for 2025–2035 to initiatives within the Green Tripartite framework, including land conversion, research, and community engagement. [Foundation’s description](#).

My interpretation is that this illustrates a form of power exercised through the capacity to make policy programmes practicable. It differs from electoral authority and from audience influence, although all three can affect the same policy process.

Ove Kaj Pedersen’s “competition state” offers an important interpretation of the governing assumptions behind these processes. In *Konkurrencestaten* (2011), he examines the organization of the state around international competitiveness, knowledge, skills, and economic development. [Publisher’s account](#).

Applied to Denmark, this perspective directs attention to assumptions that can survive changes of coalition: the importance of employment, productive capacity, public finances, education, and international economic integration.

The implication is not that parties agree on all policies. They differ over distribution, public provision, ownership, taxation, and cultural questions. However, they often negotiate within a shared vocabulary of economic feasibility and state capacity.

This helps explain why apparently dramatic changes in public communication may coexist with considerable administrative continuity.

It also identifies a possible source of renewed protest. Citizens can perceive that electoral alternatives differ sharply in presentation while some governing constraints remain comparatively stable. Digital political entrepreneurs can mobilize around that perceived distance.

Digitalization also strengthens direct administrative relationships between citizens and the state. Statistics Denmark reports that 82% of people aged 15–89 used public digital services at least weekly in 2025; 83% expressed general trust in public digital solutions. [Statistics Denmark](#).

These administrative relationships have political significance. Citizens increasingly experience the state through interfaces, identification systems, messages, applications, and automated procedures.

Such arrangements can improve accessibility and efficiency while also raising questions about exclusion, discretion, and accountability. Crucially, they concern a different form of directness from social-media communication: direct access to an administrative service does not necessarily confer influence over the rules governing it.

The **borgerforslag** system provides a more explicitly political connection. A proposal receiving 50,000 eligible supporters within 180 days can proceed towards parliamentary consideration. However, it still requires formal introduction by MPs or ministers, and a parliamentary resolution is not itself legislation. [Official explanation](#).

Here digital participation is connected to representative institutions through defined procedures. The public can help establish an agenda, while parliament retains responsibility for decisions.

The 2025–2026 electoral developments demonstrate the continuing distinction between public prominence and governing power. The Social Democrats suffered substantial losses in the November 2025 local elections, including losing the Copenhagen lord mayoralty. Contemporary explanations emphasized living costs, welfare services, and dissatisfaction with the governing coalition. [Reuters, November 2025](#).

At the general election on 24 March 2026, the Social Democrats remained the largest party but fell from 50 to 38 seats. Neither established bloc secured a majority, and the Moderates' 14 seats made them pivotal to government formation. [Reuters, March 2026](#).

Frederiksen's third government took office on 3 June 2026. It brought together the Social Democrats, SF, the Social Liberals, and the Moderates, with parliamentary support beyond the governing parties. [Prime Minister's Office](#), [Reuters on the coalition](#).

Several implications follow from these events.

The Social Democrats' capacity to connect different social constituencies has become more difficult to maintain. A party seeking support from metropolitan professionals, public-service workers, industrial workers, and provincial communities faces conflicting expectations.

Centrist cooperation can improve parliamentary coordination while making electoral differentiation more difficult. Voters dissatisfied with such cooperation can move in several ideological directions.

An established leader can also retain substantial governing influence after electoral losses because political power depends on coalition possibilities and other parties' willingness to negotiate.

None of these observations identifies social media as the principal cause of the election result. A convincing causal account would require evidence connecting exposure, changing attitudes, turnout, and individual vote choice.

The research literature is strongest when several approaches are combined. For a systematic investigation, the following authors provide complementary starting points:

Research task	Particularly relevant authors and works
Historical formation of Danish democratic culture	Ove Korsgaard, especially his work on Grundtvig and popular education.
Overall distribution of political power	Lise Togeby, Jørgen Goul Andersen, Peter Munk Christiansen, Signild Vallgård, and Torben Beck Jørgensen, <i>Magt og demokrati i Danmark</i> (2003).
Education, social identity, and electoral divisions	Rune Stubager; Jørgen Goul Andersen.
Party strategies and immigration's political importance	Christoffer Green-Pedersen, Pontus Odmalm, Jesper Krogstrup; Jens Rydgren; Susi Meret.
Cultural authority and recognition	Rune Lykkeberg; the political interventions of Tesfaye and Dybvad.
State transformation and economic assumptions	Ove Kaj Pedersen, <i>Konkurrencestaten</i> .
Organized interests and unequal access	Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Helene Helboe Pedersen.
Elite networks and professional policy careers	Ellersgaard, Larsen, Henriksen, Lunding; Blach-Ørsten, Ida Willig, and Leif Hemming Pedersen.
Think tanks and public argument	Jesper Dahl Kelstrup, Blach-Ørsten, and Nete Nørgaard Kristensen.
Political communication and changing audiences	Jakob Linæa Jensen, Schwartz, Farkas, Thorlacius, and Aagaard.

Research task

Digital participation,
information environments,
and hostility

Particularly relevant authors and works

Just, Mayerhöffer, de Vreese, Kim Andersen, Bechmann,
Nielbo, Bor, and Michael Bang Petersen.

The earlier national power inquiry provides an institutional baseline against which newer forms of influence can be assessed. Research on former politicians' subsequent careers also helps identify the growth of policy professions without assuming that all movement between sectors constitutes lobbying. [*Magt og demokrati i Danmark, PR, Lobbyism and Democracy, 2017.*](#)

The next stage of Danish political development will depend especially on how temporary attention becomes durable organization. Several possibilities follow from the evidence, although they remain conditional.

Personal political audiences may become increasingly important resources in leadership contests and party formation. The established politician who carries a reputation, professional network, and online following into a new organization has advantages that a previously unknown communicator lacks.

Parties may become more professionalized in communication while maintaining smaller circles of active organizational participation. This would increase the importance of who controls candidate recruitment, campaign data, policy expertise, and financing.

Issue campaigns may also develop stronger organizational forms. Digital mobilization can lead to local groups, associations, specialist expertise, or parliamentary representation. Its initial informality does not determine its eventual structure.

Finally, established media and public institutions may adapt successfully enough to retain shared arenas of information and accountability. Denmark's existing institutional resources make this a significant possibility, even as audience fragmentation continues.

For an empirical map of these developments, I would follow each important political intervention through five stages: **who formulated its interpretation of society; who financed or organized its circulation; which audiences encountered and adopted it; which party or organization converted it into bargaining power; and which institutions shaped its implementation.** That approach would reveal where Denmark's new digital political reach has transferred power, where it has reinforced existing advantages, and where it has created influence that remains primarily communicative.

Sweden

Sweden is undergoing a profound reorganisation of political influence, in which digital audiences, intellectual networks and parliamentary organisations have become more loosely connected. Social media increasingly determines which grievances become visible, which personalities acquire authority and which issues parties must address. Yet parties, organised interests, professional journalism and administrative expertise retain substantial power over the conversion of public attention into government decisions.

The Swedish evidence therefore supports an important qualification to your hypothesis: **the displacement of party-mediated political communication is much greater than the displacement of parties as organisations of political power.** Among younger voters, the communicative transformation is particularly advanced. Across the population as a whole, established news organisations remain powerful, including through their digital services.

This analysis uses information available on **10 September 2026**, immediately before the parliamentary, regional and municipal elections scheduled for 13 September. Consequently, the parliamentary reference point is the completed 2022 election, alongside developments during the subsequent term. [Swedish Election Authority: elections in 2026](#)

To understand the processes beneath party competition, I would distinguish five forms of power. This distinction is my synthesis of the research discussed below.

Form of power	What it determines	Principal organisational locations
Economic and organisational resources	Who can sustain research, campaigns and professional personnel	Companies, employer organisations, unions, foundations, publicly funded parties
Intellectual authority	Which diagnoses and solutions appear credible	Universities, think tanks, policy experts, public inquiries
Public visibility	Which issues and personalities command attention	Journalism, platforms, influencers, podcasts, political communication teams
Electoral organisation	How support becomes parliamentary representation	Parties, candidate-selection procedures, local branches, youth organisations
Governing capacity	How proposals become legislation and administrative practice	Government, parliamentary groups, ministries, agencies, municipalities

The central change is that these resources increasingly reside in different organisations. A commentator may command a large audience without controlling candidates or possessing policy expertise. A business association may have limited public visibility while exercising considerable influence over regulatory design. A party can compensate for declining membership with public finance, professional staff and external communication networks.

Sweden's earlier political order rested on a dense organisational society. Its background was much broader than a collection of parliamentary parties.

The labour movement connected the Social Democratic Party with trade unions, educational associations, local political organisations and a wider culture of collective advancement. Other political traditions developed through agrarian organisations, business associations, religious movements and liberal civic institutions. Political identity was reproduced through workplaces, associations, meetings, educational activities and local relationships.

These organisations performed several functions simultaneously. They interpreted social experience, selected representatives, educated activists, negotiated interests and maintained attachments that survived individual elections. Parliamentary conflict expressed disagreements already organised within society.

Michele Micheletti's *Civil Society and State Relations in Sweden* is an important historical starting point. It examines the relationship between popular movements, interest organisations and the state, including changes in social-democratic predominance and forms of collective action. Its relevance is that it places contemporary digital participation within a much longer transformation of organised citizenship. Micheletti, *Civil Society and State Relations in Sweden*

The older system also had an intellectual dimension. Organisations helped establish the categories through which people understood society: labour and capital, solidarity, productivity, social security, responsibility and equality. Their influence depended partly on making these categories habitual, rather than persuading voters afresh during every campaign.

Nevertheless, the earlier public sphere was never exclusively mediated by parties. Newspapers, radio and television already allowed politicians and commentators to address national audiences directly. The digital transformation changes the cost, speed, selectivity and number of access points to public attention; it did not invent communication outside party membership.

A distinctive Swedish moral background helps explain why organisational change has not produced a simple rejection of the state. **Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh**, in *The Swedish Theory of Love*, analyse the coexistence of strong individual autonomy and collective public provision. In their interpretation, public institutions can liberate individuals from dependency on relatives, spouses, employers or charity. Welfare solidarity and individualism therefore reinforce one another in a specifically Swedish configuration. [Berggren and Trägårdh, *The Swedish Theory of Love*](#)

The implication for current politics is substantial. Competing camps can all promise autonomy and security while locating their foundations differently: universal services, market choice, national cohesion, family stability or economic independence. Electoral movement towards the right need not indicate abandonment of expectations that public institutions should provide security.

The first major disruption of the older intellectual order preceded social media by several decades. It concerned the organised challenge to social-democratic economic assumptions.

Timbro's institutional history identifies a 1971 memorandum by Swedish Employers' Association information director **Sture Eskilsson** as an important step towards sustained opinion formation in defence of market institutions. Timbro took its contemporary form in 1978. Books, translations, education, magazines and policy arguments were central to its activity. [Timbro's institutional history](#)

The significance was organisational. Business interests sought to influence the background understanding of society: whether taxation represented solidarity or an impediment to initiative; whether public provision meant security or restricted choice; whether inequality primarily reflected domination or incentives.

Mark Blyth's *Great Transformations* (2002) provides an influential explanation of this process. Its Swedish chapters examine the construction and subsequent dismantling of "embedded liberalism." Blyth treats economic ideas as resources through which actors interpret crises, construct alliances and make institutional alternatives politically conceivable. This helps explain why intellectual organisation can influence policy long before a particular reform becomes an electoral issue. [Blyth, *Great Transformations*](#)

From this perspective, the current digital struggle rests on older ideological work. Online arguments about welfare profits, taxation, bureaucracy and individual freedom often redistribute concepts developed through decades of publishing, research and political education.

A second transformation concerns the people who perform this work. **Christina Garsten, Bo Rothstein and Stefan Svallfors**, in *Makt utan mandat: De policyprofessionella i svensk politik* (2015), investigated the growing importance of people employed to influence politics without themselves holding an electoral mandate.

Svallfors subsequently developed this research in *Politics for Hire* (2020). The relevant population includes political advisers, organisational experts, lobbyists, communication specialists and think-tank personnel. Their work connects political leadership, organised interests, expertise and administrative processes. [Svallfors's research and bibliography, *Politics for Hire*](#)

This professionalisation can coexist with apparently spontaneous digital politics. Public-facing communication becomes more personalised while the preparation of arguments, proposals and negotiations becomes more specialised.

Svallfors's article "**Politics as Organized Combat—New Players and New Rules of the Game in Sweden**" (2016) interprets the changing system as an increasingly professional and less publicly visible struggle over policy. His account draws attention to the interaction between money, participation, inequality and political access. [Svallfors, "Politics as Organized Combat"](#)

For your inquiry, this produces a crucial distinction: **the capacity to attract attention and the capacity to shape an administratively workable decision are separate political assets.**

The contemporary intellectual field contains several overlapping organisational networks. Their formal relationships should be distinguished from ideological sympathy or occasional cooperation.

Organisation or network	Documented institutional relationship	Main intellectual role
Timbro	Funded by Stiftelsen Fritt Näringsliv, which is financed by Svenskt Näringsliv; declares independence from parties	Market liberalism, ownership, taxation, entrepreneurship and limits on public intervention
Tiden	Its association members are the Social Democrats, LO and ABF	Labour-movement ideas, welfare, equality and social-democratic renewal
Katalys	Principally financed by participating trade unions	Class analysis, redistribution, labour conditions and public welfare
Arenagruppen / Arena Idé	Independent nonprofit ownership; mixed revenues, with union support for particular activities	Progressive policy research, publishing, education and public debate
Fores	Foundation with Centre Party connections; the party is its largest individual funder	Green liberalism, markets, climate policy and international cooperation
Oikos	Conservative intellectual organisation associated with Mattias Karlsson and the SD milieu	Conservative ideas, education, policy development and movement formation
SNS	Independent membership organisation linking companies, institutions and researchers	Research-based discussion and contact between business, government and academia

The funding and organisational relationships are documented by [Timbro](#), [Tiden](#), [Katalys](#), [Arenagruppen](#), [Fores](#), [Oikos](#) and [SNS](#).

These organisations exercise different kinds of influence. Some formulate proposals close to party politics. Others develop arguments over a longer period, cultivate writers or provide meeting places where people acquire contacts and reputations.

A foundation, business association or union can therefore exercise intellectual influence without controlling a party. Conversely, organisational independence does not mean an absence of ideological orientation or financial dependence. The appropriate questions are who finances the work, who appoints governing bodies, who recruits personnel and how proposals enter political decision-making.

The academic and publishing sphere also contains important participants who actively contest the prevailing interpretation of Sweden. **Göran Therborn, Daniel Suhonen and Jesper Weithz**, through the *Klass i Sverige* project, sought to restore class relations, ownership and inequality to the centre of political analysis. Its reports, seminars and publications combined research with a deliberate intervention in public debate. Therborn's *Kapitalet, överheten och alla vi andra* belongs to the same intellectual effort. [Katalys: Klass i Sverige](#)

Their significance is partly strategic. If political conflict is understood mainly through migration and cultural identity, redistribution becomes less central. A renewed class interpretation attempts to reorganise which experiences are connected and which political alliances appear natural.

There are also institutions that connect academic discussion with public commentary. **Axess**, for example, explicitly describes its role as connecting academic and publishing spheres through essays, reviews, seminars, books and television. Its relationship with the Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson foundation illustrates how private resources can sustain intellectual production beyond ordinary party campaigning. [Axess: organisation and purpose](#)

Such institutions should be distinguished from both university research and mass political influencers. Their audiences may be comparatively specialised, but they can influence the people who subsequently formulate public arguments.

A particularly important development is the deliberate construction of a shared liberal–conservative intellectual programme.

On 23 September 2025, **Adam Danieli of Timbro and Arvid Hallén of Oikos** published *Tidö 2.0 – Nystart för Sverige*, containing 132 proposed reforms. The introduction acknowledges their different understandings of freedom while seeking common ground for cooperation during 2026–2030.

Its proposals combine economic liberalisation with conservative institutional and cultural priorities. They include gradually halving public-service funding, closing the educational broadcaster UR and phasing out state support for study associations. These are **think-tank proposals**, expressly distinguished by the authors from a negotiated government agreement. [Danieli and Hallén, *Tidö 2.0*](#)

This is unusually direct evidence of the background process you are asking about. Intellectual actors are attempting to transform a parliamentary accommodation into a more durable ideological alliance.

My interpretation is that the project seeks to connect several constituencies: people dissatisfied with migration and crime, advocates of market reform, cultural conservatives and voters critical of established institutions. Their grievances differ, so cooperation requires a language in which their demands can be represented as parts of one project.

That convergence remains incomplete. Fores exemplifies a different liberal combination, linking market preferences with environmental and internationalist commitments. Nor does the cooperation of two think tanks establish agreement throughout the business community or among all liberal voters.

The scale of digitalisation is unmistakable, but the identity of the information producer remains important.

Nordicom's *Media Barometer 2025*, published in May 2026, found that 84% of people aged 9–85 used social media on an average day. YouTube reached 52%, exceeding scheduled television's 46%. Yet newspapers still reached 60% daily, overwhelmingly through digital reading, and SVT remained the most widely used news service. [Nordicom, media use in 2025](#)

A person reading a newspaper on a telephone has entered cyberspace while remaining within professional journalism. A television debate circulating as short clips similarly combines established production with platform distribution.

The **2026 election special from Internetstiftelsen** provides a direct test of the replacement hypothesis:

Political-information source	Internet-using adults accessing it during the preceding year	Daily use
Established television, radio and newspapers combined	91%	68%
Social media	50%	24%
Party websites	18%	2%

Newspapers include digital and printed editions. These findings establish the weakness of direct party websites as information channels, while demonstrating the continuing importance of established news producers. [Internetstiftelsen: political information in 2026](#)

The main survey covered 2,417 adults, with fieldwork from December 2025 to January 2026. It therefore describes early-election-year habits, not the completed September campaign, and measures reported use rather than causal electoral influence. [Survey methodology](#)

The generational difference is much sharper. Among first-time voters, 52% encountered political content through social media daily, compared with 41% through established media. Among retirees aged 65 or above, the corresponding figures were 13% and 91%. First-time voters' reported political use of TikTok rose from 23% in the 2022 survey to 48% in 2026, although these are different cohorts. Even so, 60% of first-time voters expected televised leaders' debates to matter for their voting decision. [Internetstiftelsen: differences between voter groups](#)

This suggests a gradual generational reorganisation of political socialisation. Younger citizens increasingly encounter political identities and arguments before joining, or developing durable attachment to, a party.

The Sweden Democrats' rise provides the most consequential Swedish example of interaction between social grievances, digital communication and organisational expansion.

Its explanation requires several mechanisms to be separated.

First, there was a demand for representation. In **“Economic and Social Outsiders but Political Insiders” (2023)**, Ernesto Dal Bó, Frederico Finan, Olle Folke, Torsten Persson and Johanna Rickne found that SD municipal politicians disproportionately came from social and economic groups underrepresented among other parties' representatives. Areas containing more people from these groups also tended to produce stronger SD support.

The authors connected these patterns with widening economic differences and employment insecurity, while explicitly acknowledging difficulties in establishing causality. Much of their administrative evidence predates the most recent platform transformation. The study therefore

helps explain the social constituency available for mobilisation; it does not show that social media created that constituency. [Dal Bó and colleagues, full study](#)

Second, digital communication provided opportunities to contest journalistic selection. A political organisation that regards established media as hostile has incentives to construct its own channels, distribute its own interpretations and encourage supporters to circulate them.

Third, the presentation of particular events can become a repeated account of national decline. An individual crime, administrative failure or controversial statement can be connected to a general explanation involving migration, elite irresponsibility or institutional weakness. Repetition gives separate events a common political meaning.

This mechanism can operate with accurate factual material as well as misleading content. Its political force often lies in selection, emphasis and generalisation. Determining whether a particular account is false requires a separate factual examination.

Mattias Ekman and Andreas Widholm have provided especially useful research on the organisational side of this process. Their study of **Riks during the 2022 election campaign** examined party-produced news distributed through YouTube. They identified combinations of description, interpretation and outrage that presented campaign issues in ways favourable to SD. Riks was operated by the party during the period studied. [Ekman and Widholm, “Political communication as television news”](#)

The broader implication is that a party can construct an ongoing media operation rather than depend solely on intermittent election advertising. Such an operation cultivates an audience between elections and supplies interpretations of daily events.

A related controversy revealed how apparently independent communication can conceal organisational origins. TV4’s 2024 investigation identified 23 accounts operated from SD’s communication apparatus. In a subsequent SVT interview, communication chief Joakim Wallerstein said no additional accounts would be created before the European election and argued that the exposed accounts were no longer anonymous because their origin had become known. [SVT’s interview and account of the investigation](#)

The analytical lesson is that a dispersed digital appearance does not establish dispersed organisational control. However, the existence of such accounts does not itself quantify how many votes they changed.

The difficulty of identifying political sponsorship extends beyond SD. In November 2025, Social Democratic-owned **AiP Media** announced clearer attribution following criticism of accounts including Politikollen and Jävla uland. Party ownership was disclosed on websites but less immediately apparent on some social accounts. AiP’s management defended its editorial independence. The organisational arrangements differed from SD’s internal operation, so the cases should not be treated as equivalent in scale or conduct. [SVT on AiP’s attribution changes](#)

The wider digital political field includes several different kinds of public authority.

The Internetstiftelsen survey names politicians, journalists and independent commentators among the people respondents follow. Examples include **Henrik Jönsson, Marcus Oscarsson,**

Hanif Bali, Ivar Arpi, Aron Flam, Daniel Suhonen and Anders Lindberg. These names indicate a mixed field rather than a single category of “influencers”; the survey’s spontaneous mentions are not a census of audience size or political persuasion. [Internetstiftelsen’s account-following findings](#)

Their organisational positions matter. A journalist carries authority associated with a newsroom. A politician brings an established political identity. An independent commentator can develop a personal enterprise based on regular content, subscriptions, donations, lectures or other products.

Henrik Jönsson’s platform illustrates this last model through recurring video commentary, podcasts, newsletters and supporter infrastructure. His declared independence is part of his public identity; it should be distinguished from an independently audited account of every financial relationship. [Henrik Jönsson’s publication platform](#)

My interpretation is that this model produces two pressures. It increases the commentator’s independence from party officials while increasing dependence on audience retention. A recognisable interpretive style becomes economically and politically valuable.

The relationship with followers also differs from party membership. Followers can develop familiarity and loyalty without participating in internal elections, programme formation or collective responsibility. Their attachment centres more strongly on a person’s voice and interpretation of events.

This helps explain why digital influence can grow while conventional participation remains limited. In the 2026 survey, approximately 30% reported discussing politics online during the preceding year, while only 5% reported trying to change somebody else’s opinion. Twenty-two per cent had refrained from expressing an opinion to avoid harsh criticism, hate or threats. The same research found greater reported sharing of political posts among clearly left-wing than clearly right-wing respondents, complicating claims of uniform right-wing control. [Internetstiftelsen: political conversation online](#)

Visibility consequently reflects unequal willingness and capacity to participate as well as the distribution of political opinions.

Established organisations are actively learning how to manufacture and support personalised digital communication.

Two initiatives provide particularly clear evidence.

Oikos’s Illustra 2026 trains conservative creators and communicators in video, graphics, political argument and media strategy. It offers access to television and podcast studios, encourages practical production and explicitly states that party membership is unnecessary. [Oikos: Illustra 2026](#)

On the labour side, **Katalys’s Nätknegarna** supports young trade unionists who want to communicate about their lives, work and politics through social media. Katalys also discloses additional 2026 support from LO and Handelsanställdas förbund for digital opinion formation. [Nätknegarna, Katalys’s funding disclosure](#)

These initiatives reveal an organisational adaptation with considerable theoretical significance. Institutions provide recruitment, training and infrastructure, while individuals provide a personal voice and experience-based credibility.

The resulting communication can feel direct because the speaker addresses an audience personally. Its production nevertheless depends on organised resources.

This development also changes political recruitment. The older route through meetings, committee work and internal organisational advancement is joined by routes through writing, broadcasting, editing and audience cultivation. The skills that make someone useful to a political movement increasingly include the ability to translate an abstract position into a short, recognisable and emotionally accessible presentation.

Youth organisations remain part of this process. **Andreas Widholm, Mattias Ekman and Anders Olof Larsson's "A Right-Wing Wave on TikTok?" (2024)** analysed 500 videos from the early 2022 Swedish election campaign. Private individuals were prominent, but party youth organisations were more visible than party headquarters or individual politicians. Right-leaning material predominated in the sampled election hashtags.

The study demonstrates the participation of inherited organisations in new channels. Its hashtag sample and engagement measures do not establish the views of all young Swedes or the number of votes influenced. [Widholm, Ekman and Larsson, TikTok study](#)

Digital mobilisation also creates movements whose political reach exceeds their connection to electoral parties.

The clearest Swedish example is **Greta Thunberg and Fridays for Future**. A local protest outside parliament in 2018 became an international movement through the interaction of physical protest, hashtags, social communication and professional media coverage. The movement explicitly identifies itself as independent of political parties. [Fridays for Future's account of its origins](#)

Its significance is the separation of several kinds of success. An actor can achieve international recognition, mobilise demonstrations and reshape the moral language of an issue without controlling a parliamentary group.

A movement's audience also need not correspond to one national electorate. International attention, young participants below voting age and supporters dispersed across several parties can generate enormous visibility with an uncertain domestic electoral effect.

This distinction applies beyond environmental politics. Digitally connected communities can organise around identity, local services, foreign conflicts or particular policy grievances. Their pressure may reach parties through journalism and public controversy rather than through formal organisational affiliation.

The resulting situation requires parties to respond to constituencies that they do not fully organise and cannot reliably discipline. Conversely, movements depend on institutions they do not control when they seek binding decisions.

The changing balance between journalism and political communication is more complex than a decline of the old media.

Ekman and Widholm's concept of "**parasitic news**" captures one aspect. Their research examines political actors borrowing the forms and authority of journalism. The cases include Samhällsnytt, a regional Moderate news operation and a news-style programme associated with Green politicians.

The concept concerns the appropriation of journalistic conventions, not necessarily factual falsity. A political organisation can publish accurate information while presenting it in a format that obscures or softens its partisan purpose. [Ekman and Widholm, "Parasitic news"](#)

Their further study, "**Media criticism as a propaganda strategy in political communication**" (2023), examined Swedish MPs' Twitter activity during the 2018 campaign. It found that media criticism was concentrated on the right and frequently targeted public service. The authors connect this practice with personalisation and political communication strategy. Their terminology should be attributed: critical scrutiny of journalism is not inherently illegitimate. [Ekman and Widholm, media-criticism study](#)

Analytically, challenging journalistic authority can perform several functions at once. It disputes a particular report, strengthens a politician's relationship with supporters and supplies a reason to trust alternative channels. A media controversy can therefore become a contest over who has the authority to establish what happened.

Yet professional journalism retains considerable legitimacy. **Ulrika Andersson's 2026 SOM chapter**, using observations through 2025, finds broadly stable aggregate media trust alongside political differentiation. Reported trust in SVT and Sveriges Radio was 70% each, compared with 7% for YouTube and 4% for Facebook.

The partisan differences are revealing: SVT trust stood at 83% among Social Democratic sympathisers, 74% among Moderate sympathisers and 41% among SD sympathisers. Thus the governmental right itself contains different relationships to public-service authority. These are measures of content trust, not audience reach. Andersson, "Strukturella förändringar i förtroendet för svenska medier"

Oscar Westlund's Swedish contribution to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025* likewise documents the continuing strength of public service and digital publishers. It reports that 31% paid for online news. The decline of print has therefore coexisted with viable subscription-based journalism. [Westlund, Sweden country report](#)

Public opinion increasingly forms through interaction between these systems. Journalism supplies investigations and events; political actors reinterpret them; platforms distribute competing interpretations; journalists then report the resulting controversy.

The parliamentary realignment reflects a changing relationship between economic and cultural divisions.

In the 2022 election, SD received 20.54% and 73 seats, exceeding the Moderates' 19.10% and 68 seats. The original combined M–KD–L–SD total was 176 seats, against 173 for the other four parliamentary parties. The latter grouping did not represent a unified policy coalition.

These are election allocations; subsequent party departures mean they should not be presented as unchanged current affiliations. [Official 2022 results](#)

The resulting governing arrangement joined a Moderate-led cabinet with Christian Democratic and Liberal ministers to external parliamentary cooperation with SD. The government's own 2025 statement presented security, migration, integration, energy and economic recovery as major elements of this four-party project. [Statement of Government Policy, 2025](#)

A further sign of changing boundaries appeared in March 2026, when Liberal leader **Simona Mohamsson** defended the party executive's decision to accept SD ministers in a future government. Her explanation emphasised changes in SD and constructive cooperation; this was a contested political interpretation accompanying a reversal of the earlier position. [SVT's interview with Mohamsson](#)

These developments can be interpreted as the institutional consequences of a changed hierarchy of political conflicts. When migration, crime, national identity and attitudes towards SD acquire greater importance, they affect which economic disagreements can be tolerated within a coalition.

Digital communication contributes by repeatedly foregrounding these issues and by making support for, or rejection of, particular alliances part of personal political identity. But coalition formation also depends on electoral arithmetic, leaders' decisions and negotiated policy. The communication environment helps reshape the incentives; it does not determine the outcome by itself.

Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson, Torbjörn Bergman, Annika Bergström and Johan Hellström's *Polarisering i Sverige* (2021) offers an important baseline. They found that economic left–right divisions continued to structure opinion while cultural-value issues became more significant. They did not find a general increase in all forms of issue polarisation across their long historical series, and distinguished democratic disagreement from socially destructive polarisation. Those conclusions concern the period studied, rather than establishing Sweden's condition in 2026. SNS research presentation

The political space is consequently multidimensional. A voter may favour extensive public welfare, restrictive immigration and strong policing simultaneously. Another may favour markets, liberal migration and demanding climate policy. Such combinations explain why the parties' intellectual environments overlap without merging completely.

The demand for a capable state remains a major force across these divisions.

A 2026 SOM chapter by **Julia Bergquist, Felix Cassel, Maral Darakhsh and Björn Rönnerstrand**, *Den starka statens återkomst*, provides striking evidence. In a forced-choice question in the 2025 survey, 75% preferred a society dominated by the public rather than private sector. The proportion was 69% among SD sympathisers and 50% among Moderate sympathisers.

The question's binary wording limits interpretation: it does not measure support for a specific nationalisation programme, still less authoritarian government. It nevertheless complicates any account in which cultural movement to the right means a general conversion to market liberalism. [Bergquist and colleagues, "Den starka statens återkomst"](#)

My interpretation is that several camps compete over the restoration of reliable institutions. The disagreement concerns what has weakened them and which institutions deserve reinforcement.

A class-centred left may emphasise privatisation, inequality and depleted welfare capacity. Conservatives may emphasise integration, authority and national cohesion. Market liberals may emphasise bureaucracy, incentives and organisational inefficiency. Similar dissatisfaction can therefore be attached to different causal explanations.

Territorial experience adds another dimension. **Jenny de Fine Licht, David Karlsson and Louise Skoog**, in their 2026 chapter *Missnöjets geografi*, examine perceived territorial injustice using the 2025 SOM survey. Their findings show that relationships between perceived neglect, immigration attitudes and SD support are conditional rather than reducible to one simple association. De Fine Licht, Karlsson and Skoog, “Missnöjets geografi”

This matters because online narratives often acquire force by giving a wider meaning to experiences of service withdrawal, distance from decision-makers or regional disadvantage. Their resonance cannot be understood solely by inspecting the content circulating online. Nor does the evidence establish a universal collapse of Swedish social trust. **Klara Persson and Anders Carlander’s 2026 analysis** finds comparatively stable national average interpersonal trust across 1996–2025, alongside generational and ideological differences. They also show why changes in the composition of political categories can be mistaken for declining trust within every group. [Persson and Carlander, “Vart är tilliten på väg?”](#)

The consequences for state functioning are substantial, but they operate through institutional filters.

Parties continue to organise parliamentary decision-making. The Riksdag describes party-group deliberation, specialist groups, secretariats and advisers as central to the preparation of positions. MPs retain personal mandates, but voting loyalty is traditionally strong. Public financial support also sustains professional party organisation independently of membership income. [The parties at work](#), [Financial support to parties](#)

This makes a particular combination possible: weaker social roots alongside stronger professional organisation. A party may communicate with fewer citizens through durable membership relationships while maintaining considerable control over the allocation and exercise of public office.

The policy process adds further filters. Public inquiries, ministry analysis, consultation, legal scrutiny and parliamentary committee work provide routes through which demands must be translated. The exact procedure varies, but governing requires specialised work beyond public mobilisation. [How Swedish legislation is made](#)

This helps explain the continuing influence of policy professionals. Once a subject attracts public attention, those who possess prepared proposals and institutional access can become more influential than the people who initially created the controversy. The welfare sector offers a concrete research example. **Stefan Svallfors and Anna Tyllström’s “Resilient Privatization”** examines how actors defended for-profit welfare provision through organisation and discursive work. Their analysis helps explain why public criticism does not automatically reverse an institutional arrangement. Organised defenders can shape

interpretations and maintain effective communication with decision-makers. [Svallfors and Tyllström, “Resilient Privatization”](#)

Administrative arrangements also constrain personalised political command. Swedish governments possess substantial powers to steer agencies through legislation, funding, instructions and appointments. However, decisions are collective, and intervention is prohibited in specified individual matters involving the application of law or exercise of public authority. Agency autonomy should therefore be understood precisely, alongside the government’s general steering powers. [Public agencies and how they are governed](#)

The resulting tension is between the speed of public communication and the requirements of implementation. An online controversy can produce immediate demands for action; a lawful, financed and workable response may require prolonged preparation.

A plausible consequence—an analytical inference rather than a measured universal tendency—is growing pressure on leaders to demonstrate responsiveness through announcements, inquiries, organisational changes and visible interventions. Whether those responses improve performance must be evaluated separately.

The intellectual struggle increasingly concerns the institutions that reproduce public authority itself.

Debates over public broadcasting, educational associations, cultural funding, research and civil-society support have a significance extending beyond expenditure. These institutions shape who can speak with authority, which experiences acquire recognition and which people obtain the resources to develop public arguments. When political actors dispute their funding or organisation, they may also be disputing the future structure of political competition. This is why a programme such as *Tidö 2.0* deserves attention beyond its individual policy proposals: the relevant question is how institutional reform could alter the production and circulation of ideas.

That interpretation should not presume a single coordinated establishment. Professional norms, ideological preferences, formal organisational ties and direct political control are different relationships. Their empirical identification requires different evidence.

Face-to-face networks also continue to matter. **Maria Wendt’s *Politik som spektakel* (2012)** examines Almedalen through the relationship between political performance and media power. The festival illustrates how public visibility and meetings among organisational intermediaries can occupy the same space. [Wendt, *Politik som spektakel*](#)

A later digital study by **Nils Gustafsson and Anders Olof Larsson**, “*RIP #almedalen*”, traces the festival’s Twitter hashtag across election years. It finds changing dominant actors and little support for the expectation of equalised agenda access. Its evidence also shows why a platform community’s changing ideological composition cannot simply be treated as a change in the whole electorate: participation in the venue itself changes. [Gustafsson and Larsson, “RIP #almedalen”](#)

Platform ownership introduces another concentration of power above the domestic political networks.

Political actors can bypass a Swedish editor while becoming dependent on a platform's recommendation systems, monetisation rules and account policies. Direct communication remains mediated, although the intermediary's role is different.

A 2026 study by **Helle Sjøvaag, Morten Falch, Reza Tadayoni, Mikko Grönlund and Tobias Lindberg** examines concentration across Nordic communication markets. It identifies the importance of telecommunications infrastructure and globally concentrated internet services alongside domestic media organisations. This broadens the analysis from “who owns the newspaper?” to who controls distribution, revenue and access. [Nordicom's account of the study](#)

There is also a security dimension, although it should remain distinct from ordinary domestic disagreement. In September 2026, Sweden's Psychological Defence Agency reported a network of approximately 1,200 X accounts used for influence activities against Sweden and other countries. The agency assessed that a state actor had purchased the network and described activity taking opposing positions on the same subjects. [MPF's report on the Holiday network](#)

At the same time, its 4 September assessment stated that it was not observing coordinated foreign information campaigns aimed at influencing the Swedish election. These statements concern different scopes and periods. Neither supports explaining Swedish political realignment primarily through foreign manipulation. [MPF's assessment of 4 September 2026](#)

The scholarship is strongest when its different levels of explanation are combined.

For the historical organisation of society, Micheletti and Berggren–Trägårdh explain the relationship between associations, individuals and public institutions. Blyth explains how organised economic ideas change the range of politically conceivable solutions. Garsten, Rothstein, Svallfors and Tyllström explain professional influence and the translation of resources into policy access.

For the digital transformation, Ekman and Widholm provide particularly concrete studies of the changing boundary between political communication and journalism. Larsson, Widholm and Gustafsson investigate actual platform practices and organisational participation. Oscarsson and colleagues, together with the SOM researchers, provide the survey evidence needed to distinguish visible conflict from broader social change.

Two additional research traditions are especially useful. **Kristoffer Holt**, including his work with **Tine Ustad Figenschou and Lena Frischlich**, develops a multidimensional understanding of alternative media. This helps avoid equating “alternative” with either factual unreliability or a particular ideology. [Holt's university publication record](#)

Jesper Strömbäck and Adam Shehata's research on political communication, learning, news use and trust provides tools for examining what citizens actually learn from different media environments. Strömbäck's work with Nayla Fawzi and Yariv Tsfaty also distinguishes critical evaluation of journalism from broader delegitimation of news institutions. [Strömbäck's research publications](#)

The unresolved task is to connect these levels empirically. A comprehensive explanation would trace how a particular grievance becomes an intellectual diagnosis, receives organisational support, circulates through journalism and platforms, changes party incentives and enters administrative practice.

For Sweden, the decisive research question is therefore **which actors can connect these stages successfully**. Studying only parties misses much of the production of public attention. Studying only influencers misses the organisations that supply money, training, policy expertise and access. Following their connections makes it possible to explain why some highly visible campaigns have limited governing consequences, while other ideas acquire durable influence over the Swedish state.

Norway

Norway is undergoing a substantial reorganization of political influence, but the transformation is uneven: digital platforms have changed the production of political attention more profoundly than they have changed the institutions that turn attention into government decisions. Parties increasingly receive issues, reputational pressures, and potential supporters from networks they do not control. Nevertheless, organized labour, business associations, professional administration, established journalism, and parliamentary bargaining remain unusually consequential.

Your hypothesis therefore captures an important development, especially among younger Norwegians. The qualification is that *communication moving into cyberspace*, *communication escaping established institutions*, and *political power escaping parties* are three distinct processes. In Norway, the first has advanced furthest; the second is substantial but selective; the third requires much more careful differentiation.

The account below draws on evidence available through September 2026. The broader model connecting the findings is my synthesis; I identify particular authors’ arguments separately.

The scale of digital migration is unmistakable, but its political meaning requires distinguishing audiences, institutions, and participation. Statistics Norway’s latest media evidence provides a useful starting point:

Indicator	Finding	What it establishes
Daily internet use, population aged 9+, 2025	96%	Digital communication is virtually universal.
Daily online-newspaper readership, 2025	61%	Established journalistic formats retain extensive digital reach.
Daily printed-newspaper readership, 2025	15%	The physical distribution system has contracted dramatically.

Indicator	Finding	What it establishes
Daily social-media use, 2025	82%	Platforms occupy a central place in everyday communication.
Daily social-media news use among ages 16–24, 2025	81%	Platforms are particularly important for younger people’s information environments.
Daily online-newspaper readership among ages 16–24, 2025	42%	Young people’s platform exposure coexists with substantial newspaper use.

These categories overlap: reading an article through a social platform can involve both social-media distribution and an established newspaper’s journalism. The figures should therefore not be added together or interpreted as mutually exclusive audience shares. Sources: [Statistics Norway’s media statistics](#), [social-platform use](#), and [Norsk mediebarometer 2025](#).

Political expression is much less universal than platform use. In Statistics Norway’s 2025 participation survey, 15.2% of people aged 16+ reported discussing social issues online during the preceding year, while 13.3% had contacted a politician or public authority and 10.4% had participated actively in an organization, action group, or party. These are overlapping activities measured differently from daily media use. Their significance is that **a large audience should not be confused with a large body of active political organizers**. [Statistics Norway, political participation](#).

For your inquiry, Norway’s underlying power structure can consequently be divided into five interacting processes:

Process	Principal participants	Main source of influence
Formation of political identities	Families, workplaces, associations, educational institutions, media, creators	Defining belonging, grievances, and legitimate aspirations
Organization of public attention	Journalists, platforms, politicians, influencers, campaign groups	Making particular issues visible and urgent
Production of policy arguments	Researchers, professional communities, think tanks, interest organizations	Defining credible explanations and feasible solutions
Political aggregation and bargaining	Parties, parliamentary groups, unions, employers, territorial interests	Combining demands into electoral and governing agreements
Authoritative decision and implementation	Parliament, ministries, agencies, courts, municipalities	Legislation, budgets, regulation, administration, and adjudication

Platforms can intervene in every process, but their capacity to displace established actors differs considerably between them.

The historical foundation is a combination of class organization and territorial countercultures. Stein Rokkan remains the indispensable starting point because he explained why Norwegian politics cannot be understood through the economic left–right division alone.

In “Norway: Numerical Democracy and Corporate Pluralism” (1966), Rokkan distinguished electoral representation from the organized influence exercised through negotiations involving the state and major social interests. His related work with Seymour Martin Lipset on cleavages, and with Henry Valen on Norwegian mass politics, connected party competition to enduring conflicts over class, territory, religion, and culture.

Historically, opposition to the political and cultural centre was organized through several different environments: farmers’ organizations, lay religious movements, temperance associations, language movements, and local communities defending their autonomy. These environments overlapped without becoming identical. The religious southwest and working-class northern communities, for example, did not constitute the same political periphery.

This matters for contemporary digital politics. A campaign against centralization may express a demand for stronger public services. Opposition to an energy project may combine environmental conservation, indigenous rights, local economic concerns, and hostility to distant decision-makers. A rural protest cannot automatically be assigned to economic liberalism or cultural conservatism. Rokkan’s distinction between electoral equality and unequal organizational resources remains a useful foundation for analysing these combinations. [“Numerical Democracy and Corporate Pluralism Revisited”](#).

Recent research confirms the need for this differentiation. **Stine Hesstvedt and Jo Saglie**, in “The urban-rural cleavage: Analysing more than 40 years of Norwegian survey data” (2025), examine election surveys from 1977–2021. They find growing environmental divisions and greater importance attached to centre–periphery issues among rural voters. They do not find a corresponding general movement of rural voters toward more right-wing economic positions; moral and religious differences between urban and rural populations narrowed. [Hesstvedt and Saglie, 2025](#).

The implication is substantial: digital networks can reactivate old territorial grievances through new issues without reproducing their previous party alignment. The social conflict can persist while the party benefiting from it changes.

Norway’s state also rests on intellectual and professional projects that extend beyond electoral programmes. Rune Slagstad’s *De nasjonale strateger*—first published in 1998—is particularly close to the kind of investigation you propose. He reconstructs Norwegian modernization through the relationship between knowledge, political projects, and institution-building. Technical and economic modernization, democratic development, and cultural formation belong to the same historical account.

The importance of Slagstad’s approach is that ideas become powerful when incorporated into educational systems, administrative professions, economic institutions, and governing practices. Political intellectuals matter partly because they help establish the categories through which the state understands society. His treatment of market-oriented technocracy also makes it possible to examine transformations within a state that continues to present itself as egalitarian and socially protective. [Slagstad, *De nasjonale strateger*](#).

Applied to the present, this suggests a distinction between two kinds of intellectual influence. One concerns the immediate interpretation of events: who is blamed for high prices, immigration problems, or institutional failures. The other concerns durable governing

assumptions: how economic sustainability is calculated, how welfare services are organized, and which forms of knowledge count as authoritative.

An influencer may alter the first rapidly. Changing the second usually requires entry into parties, professional networks, commissions, ministries, or organized campaigns capable of sustained work.

The weakening of mass-party society began before contemporary social platforms. The official Norwegian Power and Democracy Inquiry of 1998–2003 is exceptionally important here. Its majority synthesis, associated with **Øyvind Østerud, Fredrik Engelstad, and Per Selle**, already described a transition from mass parties toward network parties.

Its 2003 account identified stronger professional leadership, centralized party apparatuses, closer integration with parliamentary groups, informal recruitment networks, and weaker surrounding membership environments. Even the early internet and email were understood as disproportionately useful to activists who already possessed political influence. [NOU 2003:19, discussion of parties and representative government](#).

This earlier diagnosis changes the causal interpretation of the last decade. Social media entered a political system already experiencing organizational thinning and professionalization. They accelerated some tendencies, supplied new alternatives to membership activity, and changed the resources needed for public prominence.

The processes can reinforce one another. If citizens receive political information and opportunities for expression elsewhere, fewer need the local party branch for those purposes. If party leadership can communicate directly with a large audience, it may become less dependent on members as intermediaries. Yet this can strengthen the central party organization while weakening the ordinary member's role.

Norway's party finances illustrate that combination. For 2025, reported party income totalled approximately NOK 1.047 billion; public subsidies supplied 60.6%, membership fees 6.8%, and contributions 20.7%. These figures do not measure internal democracy, but they demonstrate that parties retain substantial institutional resources without depending primarily on dues-paying membership. [Statistics Norway, political-party financing, released August 2026](#).

Consequently, declining membership mediation can coexist with financially durable, professionally staffed parties. The relevant transformation is partly **from participation through an organization toward communication managed by an organization**.

Organized economic interests remain a major foundation of Norwegian government. The labour movement is especially important because its influence combines workplace representation, bargaining capacity, political relationships, financial resources, and institutions producing arguments about society.

Kristine Nergaard's recent Fafo report estimates union density at **52% in 2024**, its highest level since 2002. That is powerful evidence against an account in which digital communication has dissolved Norway's organized social foundations. [Nergaard, Organisasjonsgrader, tariffavtaledekning og arbeidskonflikter 2023 og 2024](#).

Unions and employers possess resources that a large online following does not automatically confer: knowledge of particular industries, the capacity to negotiate, established access to decision-makers, and responsibility for implementing agreements. Their influence can therefore remain strong even when their public communication appears less spectacular than an influencer's.

This is also why “elite influence” needs disaggregation. Business organizations, trade unions, ministries, universities, and cultural institutions possess different resources and often disagree. Their cooperation in one policy area does not establish a unified political bloc across all areas.

Arendalsuka reveals how public communication and organized access interact. Norway's political festival brings institutions and decision-makers into a concentrated public setting. It is simultaneously a venue for debate, organizational visibility, networking, and lobbying.

Research by **Dag Wollebæk and Ketil Raknes** shows that access is shaped by resources. Raknes's account emphasizes spending and professional political staff: organizations with greater resources can attract senior politicians and sustain relationships beyond public events. His research with **Øyvind Ihlen** also stresses credibility, goodwill, and the presentation of workable proposals. [Raknes's research account, including references to the 2022 studies.](#)

The connection to digital politics is revealing. Online communication often rewards confrontation; policy influence may depend on being regarded as a reliable, useful interlocutor. An organization able to mobilize public pressure while also providing a credible policy solution can possess both advantages.

That gives professional intermediaries an enduring role. The transition into cyberspace changes their methods and the competitive environment, but does not necessarily eliminate their position.

The principal intellectual environments cut across the parliamentary blocs. The following is an analytical map of overlapping tendencies, rather than a claim that each environment has a single leadership or coordinated strategy:

Intellectual environment	Central ideas and concerns	Main political connections
Social-democratic labour environment	Collective security, organized work, redistribution, public services, negotiated economic change	Labour, trade unions, parts of the broader left
Market-liberal and institutional conservative environment	Enterprise, private ownership, individual responsibility, economic incentives, constitutional liberalism	Conservatives, Liberals, and parts of the wider non-socialist camp
Agrarian and territorial environment	Decentralization, local services, national control over resources, protection of rural livelihoods	Centre Party and geographically rooted interests across parties
Socialist and redistributive environment	Economic power, inequality, labour rights, public ownership, opposition to commercialization	Red, Socialist Left, and sections of organized labour

Intellectual environment	Central ideas and concerns	Main political connections
Environmental and ecological environment	Emissions reduction, nature protection, changes in production and consumption	Greens, Socialist Left, Liberals, environmental organizations
National-populist environment	Immigration restriction, public order, national preference, everyday costs, opposition to perceived elite detachment	Progress Party and heterogeneous online constituencies
Christian and communitarian environment	Family, religious freedom, civil society, ethical limits, social responsibility	Christian Democrats and religious organizations

Several conflicts run *within* these environments.

The social-democratic attachment to industrial employment can conflict with demands for a rapid petroleum transition. Market liberals may agree with national populists on taxes while disagreeing over immigration, international openness, or institutional norms. Rural conservationists can oppose developments promoted as essential to green modernization. Christian social responsibility can generate positions different from both secular economic liberalism and nationalist restriction.

Digital communication allows an individual to participate in several such environments without accepting a complete party programme. A person can consume conservative economic commentary, support a local environmental protest, and favour extensive public welfare provision. Parties subsequently face the difficult task of assembling these issue-specific positions into a governing coalition.

Think tanks have become important places where these environments acquire arguments, personnel, and public expression. Three institutions are particularly useful for understanding the Norwegian configuration.

Civita identifies itself as a liberal think tank promoting individual freedom, responsibility, an open economy, civil society, liberal democracy, and human rights. It explicitly describes its role as connecting people from academia, business, media, organizations, and politics. Its importance lies partly in providing a common intellectual meeting place beyond any one party, through publications, training, seminars, and public interventions. [Civita's account of its purpose and financing](#).

Agenda, established in 2014 on the initiative of LO, develops ideas for the centre-left while describing itself as independent of parties. Its conceptual emphasis is substantive freedom: people need relatively equal opportunities, social trust, functioning institutions, and material security to exercise freedom effectively. It combines analysis with political education and public communication. [Agenda's institutional description](#).

Manifest Analyse is more explicitly rooted in labour, welfare-state questions, and economic justice. Most of its financing comes from subscriptions by more than 260 units of the trade-union movement. Its reports, pamphlets, conferences, publishing relationships, and media activities translate complex economic arguments into material usable in political debate. [Manifest's description of its work and funding](#).

The distinction between Agenda and Manifest should not be exaggerated into a rigid division. They overlap, but their positioning and organizational relationships differ. Similarly, Civita should not be treated as the intellectual command centre of every movement on the right.

Johan Christensen and Cathrine Holst directly studied these institutions in “How Do Advocacy Think Tanks Relate to Academic Knowledge? The Case of Norway” (2020). Their analysis examines how think tanks combine ideological advocacy with claims to scientific credibility. An important distinction concerns conducting academic research versus selecting, translating, and circulating existing research for political purposes. [Christensen and Holst, 2020](#).

For your question, the larger consequence is that some intellectual functions previously associated with membership-based party education are increasingly performed by specialized organizations. Their output then circulates through podcasts, newsletters, videos, media appearances, and social platforms. The production of political ideas remains organized, even when their distribution looks individualized.

Norway’s humanitarian internationalism is another influential intellectual formation. It supplies a language through which foreign policy, development assistance, human rights, and national identity are connected.

Terje Tvedt, particularly in *Det internasjonale gjennombruddet* (2017), is an important critical interpreter of this transformation. His account of a humanitarian–political complex directs attention to relationships between state institutions, aid organizations, and public understandings of Norway’s international mission. His work should be read as an argued interpretation of Norwegian development, including its normative assumptions. [Tvedt’s University of Bergen profile and bibliography](#).

The 2003 Power and Democracy Inquiry also discussed the connections between Norway’s humanitarian identity, state activity, organizations, and research environments. [NOU 2003:19, concluding analysis](#).

My interpretation is that such an environment exercises influence partly by defining what a responsible Norwegian state should aspire to be. Digital criticism can challenge its credibility, expose contradictions, or question its priorities. Yet shared funding relationships or moral vocabularies do not by themselves prove centralized control. The empirical task is to trace specific appointments, grants, arguments, institutional relationships, and policy decisions.

Expert knowledge constitutes a further source of power that cannot be measured by public popularity. Johan Christensen’s *The Power of Economists within the State* (2017) is especially relevant. Comparing Norway with Denmark, Ireland, and New Zealand, it investigates how economists’ institutional positions helped economic ideas shape tax reform.

The explanatory mechanism is organizational: recruitment, professional authority, and location within the state affect whether particular ideas become policy. Norway’s social-democratic tradition therefore does not preclude substantial influence from market-oriented economic reasoning. Conversely, this research does not establish that economists control the state as a whole. [Christensen’s book](#).

Christensen and Holst's work on Norwegian advisory commissions is another direct route into your question. Commissions connect scientific expertise, political mandates, and public justification. Their composition and procedures help determine which problems receive authoritative recognition and which solutions enter the governmental agenda. [“Advisory commissions, academic expertise and democratic legitimacy: the case of Norway”](#).

The democratic assessment is contested. Expertise can narrow the range of publicly imaginable choices, but governments also require reliable specialist knowledge. **Christensen, Holst, and Anders Molander**, in *Expertise, Policy-making and Democracy*, examine how expert institutions can combine knowledge quality with democratic accountability. Publisher description.

Digital politics intensifies this tension. A minister may face an immediate demand to act while the available options remain shaped by fiscal estimates, legal obligations, administrative capacity, and specialist advice. Public responsiveness and operational discretion can consequently move in different directions.

The Norwegian media system has adapted to digital communication with considerable institutional continuity. Trine Syvertsen, Gunn Enli, Ole J. Mjøs, and Hallvard Moe's *The Media Welfare State: Nordic Media in the Digital Era* (2014) provides the central framework.

Their argument connects Nordic media arrangements to universal accessibility, editorial independence, diversity and quality, and relatively broad acceptance of media policy institutions. These arrangements help explain why global platforms encounter different national environments. [The Media Welfare State](#).

Norway's national news brands, public-service broadcasting, local journalism, and specialist publications continue to organize substantial parts of public life. Their influence extends beyond audience size. They select matters for investigation, establish shared factual reference points, expose misconduct, and determine which controversies receive sustained scrutiny.

Recent evidence supports qualified resilience. Hallvard Moe and Carolin Schefner's 2026 Reuters Institute account reports **53% overall news trust**, against a 37% global average, and **40% paying for online news**. It describes strong established news organizations alongside the growing importance of creators. [Reuters Institute, Norway 2026](#).

The most important boundary therefore runs through cyberspace itself: between communication that retains editorial institutions and communication organized primarily around personalities, platform incentives, or activist communities.

Digital political communication changes mediation rather than simply removing it. Rune Karlsen's "Followers are opinion leaders" (2015) offers a particularly useful finding. People following parties and politicians on social networks were disproportionately active opinion leaders in both online and offline settings.

The message apparently delivered "directly" by a politician often gains influence through people who interpret and retransmit it to others. Digital platforms enlarge and alter the intermediary population: activists, workplace acquaintances, group administrators, creators, and highly engaged citizens can all participate. [Karlsen, 2015](#).

This provides a more precise development of your hypothesis. The older local party intermediary may lose importance while a new network intermediary acquires it. Some new intermediaries remain closely connected to established organizations; others build autonomous audiences.

Karlsen and Bernard Enjolras's 2016 study of Norwegian candidates further complicates the displacement argument. Using the 2013 candidate survey and Twitter data, they found that individualized campaigning and digital activity did not automatically produce influence. Central party positions and visibility across established and social media remained important. These are historical findings, not measurements of contemporary TikTok, but they demonstrate a mechanism through which existing political resources become digital advantages. [Karlsen and Enjolras, 2016](#).

Bente Kalsnes's "The Social Media Paradox Explained" (2016) identifies a related discrepancy. Parties endorsed interactive communication more readily than they practised it. Reputational concerns, limited staff, possible adverse news coverage, and expectations of authentic personal replies constrained dialogue. [Kalsnes, 2016](#).

An interactive platform can therefore support highly centralized political communication. Commenting opportunities do not themselves redistribute authority over candidate selection, policy formation, or coalition agreements.

The newer influencer environment introduces a distinct source of political legitimacy: familiarity acquired outside politics. Entertainment creators can assemble audiences before developing recognizable political positions. When they subsequently discuss taxes, immigration, crime, or climate, they bring relationships of familiarity into political interpretation.

The 2025 campaign offers concrete examples. Oskar Westerlin and the **Gutta** YouTube venture hosted political discussion and attracted established political figures. Wolfgang Wee's long-conversation format and the visibility of Progress youth politician **Simen Velle** also became relevant to debate about young voters. Stine Hesstvedt's analysis treats these developments as part of a changing political environment while leaving their lasting electoral significance open. [Hesstvedt's analysis of the 2025 gender divide](#).

Støre's appearance on a male-influencer YouTube channel approached 480,000 views, with further circulation on TikTok reaching millions, according to the Reuters Institute. This shows an established governing party seeking access to an externally assembled audience. It does not establish how many viewers changed their votes. [Reuters Institute, Norway 2026](#).

The ideological direction is also variable. The union-associated creator **Snorre Rein**, supported by Agenda, challenged messages from Gutta and financier Øystein Stray Spetalen during the campaign. Organized labour's wider environment was thus adapting to creator-based communication. VG's interview with Rein.

These arrangements can be temporary. Gutta was described as discontinued in July 2026 reporting. Its campaign importance should therefore be treated as a specific episode, rather than evidence of an already permanent political institution. [E24, July 2026](#).

The underlying transformation is the availability of audiences whose political attention parties can access through negotiation with people outside the party system. Such intermediaries possess influence over who appears, how discussion is framed, and what kind of personality seems credible.

Alternative media add a struggle over the authority to define reality. Immigration-centred publications such as Document, culturally contrarian publications such as Subjekt, personality podcasts, and ordinary commercial online newspapers should be distinguished. Their editorial structures, subject matter, political commitments, and relationships to established journalism differ.

Two research contributions are especially relevant:

- **Tine Ustad Figenschou and Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk**, “Challenging Journalistic Authority: Media criticism in far-right alternative media” (2019), examines challenges to established journalism’s authority. [Article](#).
- **Bente Kalsnes and Anders Olof Larsson**, “Facebook News Use During the 2017 Norwegian Elections—Assessing the Influence of Hyperpartisan News” (2021), directly addresses the circulation of politically partisan news during a Norwegian election. [Article](#).

For the wider theoretical account, criticism of media bias can perform an organizational function. It gives an audience a reason to return to a particular source and a shared explanation for why its concerns supposedly receive inadequate recognition elsewhere. Over time, distrust of established institutions can become part of group identity.

The boundaries remain permeable. Document received press support for the first time in 2023, illustrating that a challenger can also enter established institutional arrangements. The Norwegian system can absorb some innovations and conflicts through existing media policy. [Reuters Institute, Norway 2025](#).

The Progress Party’s recent advance illustrates substantial realignment within an enduring party system. In the 2025 parliamentary election, Labour received 28.0% and 53 seats; Progress received 23.8% and 47 seats; the Conservatives received 14.6% and 24 seats. The five parties on the Labour side collectively obtained 88 seats, against 81 for the four parties on the opposing side. [Official election results](#).

The current government remains a Labour government headed by Jonas Gahr Støre. The broader parliamentary majority does not constitute a five-party cabinet. [Official government composition](#).

Several mechanisms may contribute to Progress’s appeal: cost-of-living concerns, immigration and security issues, rejection of perceived elite detachment, accessible personalities, and communication suited to informal digital environments. Their relative causal importance cannot be read directly from engagement figures.

Bente Kalsnes’s comparison of Progress and the Sweden Democrats is instructive. Her 2019 study found differences in their use of populist communication, associated with their institutional positions and stages of development. Norwegian patterns should therefore not be inferred mechanically from neighbouring countries. [Kalsnes, 2019](#).

The gender and age findings are striking. Øyvind Kleven and Johannes Bergh report that Progress support among men under 35 rose from 15% in 2021 to **38% in 2025**; among women under 35 it rose from 7% to **17%**. The party advanced among both groups, especially men. [Kleven and Bergh, 2025](#).

Hesstvedt usefully distinguishes a redistribution of support within the right from a deeper, enduring transformation of generational values. The latter would require evidence that new alignments persist beyond one campaign and across changing circumstances.

There are also strong reasons to avoid technological determinism. The same official voter study finds that **39% of those voting in both 2021 and 2025 changed parties—compared with 40% between 2001 and 2005**. Moreover, former Centre voters moved substantially toward both Labour and Progress. Electoral fluidity predates today's platforms and can benefit different political directions. [Kleven and Bergh's voter-transition analysis](#).

Petroleum, electricity, territory, and environmental protection produce especially important conflicts beneath party competition. Norway's resource economy creates material connections among industrial employment, public revenue, business interests, regional development, and environmental commitments.

These connections make it possible for parties opposed on other questions to cooperate over resource extraction. In May 2025, for example, parliamentary pressure to restart frontier petroleum licensing followed a Conservative proposal supported by Centre. [Reuters on the parliamentary decision](#).

Digital campaigns can reshape the interpretation of such questions. Electricity prices can become a debate about whether national resources serve citizens or international markets. Wind development can become a debate about who controls local landscapes. Petroleum policy can become a conflict between national prosperity and responsibility for global emissions.

These are changes in the political meaning attached to material arrangements. Online communication can connect dispersed grievances and supply a common vocabulary, but the grievances do not originate solely in communication.

The **Fosen conflict** demonstrates how several forms of power interact. In October 2021, the Supreme Court unanimously found that the disputed wind developments violated Sámi reindeer herders' cultural rights and invalidated the licence and expropriation decisions. [Supreme Court judgment summary](#).

Subsequent protests challenged the prolonged implementation process; settlements in 2023–2024 allowed continued operation with compensatory arrangements. [Reuters on the March 2024 settlement](#).

Analytically, Fosen combines indigenous organization, legal claims, public protest, environmental disagreement, administrative action, and negotiation. It shows why social mobilization, institutional rights, and executive decision-making must be studied together. It also demonstrates that “green” politics contains conflicts over the distribution of environmental burdens.

European integration creates another separation between national political communication and effective governing authority. Norway's position outside the EU but inside the European Economic Area means that important rules affecting Norwegian society originate in a political system in which Norway lacks ordinary member-state representation.

John Erik Fossum, in "The EU and Third Countries: Consequences for Democracy and the Political Order" (2023), analyses the democratic consequences of this arrangement. Formal sovereignty and extensive incorporation of external rules coexist; informal participation only partly compensates for the asymmetry. Related work includes **Erik Oddvar Eriksen and Fossum's** *The European Union's Non-Members: Independence under Hegemony?* (2015). [Fossum, 2023](#).

This is particularly relevant to online sovereignty politics. A campaign can rapidly mobilize a national audience around a demand whose implementation requires navigating international obligations and relationships. The resulting gap between public expectations and governmental room for action can generate further distrust.

The connection is concrete: Centre left the government in January 2025 following disagreement over EU energy directives. The conflict joined European integration, resource control, and domestic coalition politics. [Reuters on the subsequent government reshuffle](#).

Norwegian scholars disagree over whether constraints on elected majorities represent democratic erosion or democratic protection. This disagreement emerged clearly within the 2003 Power and Democracy Inquiry.

The majority emphasized the weakening of representative control through internationalization, judicialization, market reforms, and institutional fragmentation. **Hege Skjeie** challenged an understanding of democracy centred too exclusively on territorial majority rule. Rights and international protections can empower groups whose position within national majorities is weak. **Siri Meyer** emphasized dimensions of power involving culture, language, identity, and lived experience. Their separate statements are important parts of the inquiry, rather than minor qualifications to a unanimous conclusion. [The inquiry's dissenting statements](#).

These perspectives illuminate different aspects of contemporary conflicts:

- A sovereignty-centred approach asks whether voters can effectively alter policy.
- A rights-centred approach asks whether vulnerable groups remain protected when majorities mobilize against them.
- A cultural approach asks whose experiences and categories receive recognition in public life.

Digital mobilization can strengthen popular intervention while intensifying pressure on minorities or narrowing permissible expression within particular communities. Its democratic meaning depends on the institutional and social relationship being examined.

The sovereign wealth fund illustrates how Norway institutionalizes long-term restraint. Its framework separates parliamentary decisions, the Finance Ministry's responsibilities, and operational investment management. The fiscal guideline links spending over time to the fund's expected real return, estimated at around 3%, while allowing adjustment to economic circumstances. [Norges Bank Investment Management, fund purposes and governance](#).

The broader significance is that large national resources are governed through a combination of political authorization, expert management, and durable conventions. Campaigns can challenge spending priorities or investment ethics, but immediate public attention does not itself determine operational decisions.

My inference is that petroleum wealth has a dual political effect. It provides resources that help sustain institutions and accommodate competing demands. It also sharpens the question of why citizens experience costly or inadequate services in a wealthy country. Digital communication can make that discrepancy politically potent.

Online conflict should not be equated with comprehensive social polarization. Norwegian research offers unusually useful distinctions here.

Karlsen, Kari Steen-Johnsen, Dag Wollebæk, and Enjolras’s “Echo chamber and trench warfare dynamics in online debates” (2017) found that participants often encountered disagreement. Reinforcement of prior positions could occur through confrontation as well as through agreement. Their “trench warfare” concept therefore identifies a process in which opposing camps repeatedly meet without becoming more receptive to one another. [Karlsen and colleagues, 2017](#).

Wollebæk and colleagues’ “Anger, Fear, and Echo Chambers” (2019) adds the importance of emotional selection. Anger was associated with particular forms of online debating and information seeking. These observational findings help explain why visible discourse can be more confrontational than the broader population. [Wollebæk and colleagues, 2019](#).

The 2022 Freedom of Expression Commission concluded that available research did not establish a general trend toward increasing polarization in Norway. It also warned against taking online comment sections as representative of society as a whole. That is a dated assessment, not a guarantee about subsequent developments, but it establishes the need for evidence rather than inference from highly visible disputes. [NOU 2022:9, English summary](#).

For your research programme, three changes should therefore be measured separately: ideological distance between citizens, hostility between political groups, and the intensity of visible communication. They can develop differently.

The most productive reading strategy is to combine several Norwegian research traditions. No single author adequately covers the whole transformation.

Research problem

Historical formation of parties and territorial identities

Intellectual projects embedded in state development

Changes in representative and organizational power

Humanitarian internationalism and national self-understanding

Expertise, commissions, and policy authority

Particularly relevant authors and works

Stein Rokkan; Henry Valen; Hesstvedt and Saglie’s 2025 urban–rural study

Rune Slagstad, *De nasjonale strateger*

Østerud, Engelstad, and Selle; NOU 2003:19, read alongside Skjeie’s and Meyer’s dissents

Terje Tvedt, *Det internasjonale gjennombruddet*

Johan Christensen; Cathrine Holst; Anders Molander

Research problem	Particularly relevant authors and works
Think tanks as intellectual intermediaries	Christensen and Holst's 2020 Norwegian study
Resilience of the media system	Syvertsen, Enli, Mjøs, and Moe, <i>The Media Welfare State</i>
Parties, opinion leaders, and digital campaigning	Rune Karlsen; Bernard Enjolras; Bente Kalsnes
Online confrontation and emotional dynamics	Kari Steen-Johnsen; Dag Wollebæk; Karlsen and Enjolras
Alternative media and journalistic authority	Tine Ustad Figenschou; Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk; Kalsnes and Anders Olof Larsson
Electoral realignment and generational differences	Johannes Bergh; Øyvind Kleven; Stine Hesstvedt
Organized access and lobbying	Ketil Raknes; Dag Wollebæk; Øyvind Ihlen
European integration and democratic authority	John Erik Fossum; Erik Oddvar Eriksen

The analytical advance comes from connecting their questions. Rokkan explains the social divisions that generate demands; Slagstad explains how ideas become institutions; the power inquiry examines shifts in authority; media researchers explain changing visibility and mediation; electoral studies test whether apparent realignments reach the ballot box.

Norway's likely development is continued competition between increasingly fluid public mobilization and more durable institutions of political conversion. Parties will face stronger incentives to recruit recognizable personalities, adapt to externally generated issues, and seek access to audiences assembled by creators. Think tanks, unions, and business interests will continue developing their own digital communication, often combining institutional resources with personalized presentation.

That does not imply equal outcomes for all actors. Organizations capable of maintaining expertise, relationships, and continuous activity can turn a temporary wave of attention into a lasting policy intervention. A creator with a large audience may remain influential over reputations while possessing limited capacity to draft legislation, negotiate a budget, or administer a programme.

For the right, the central uncertainty is whether recent mobilization becomes a stable social and generational alignment. For Labour and the broader left, the challenge is to reconnect durable organizational resources with forms of communication that reach people outside inherited labour-movement environments. For territorial and environmental movements, the opportunity lies in assembling coalitions that cross established party boundaries.

The decisive development to watch is therefore **who acquires the capacity to connect public attention, credible policy arguments, organized support, and authoritative decisions.** Norway's digital transformation is already changing the first link dramatically. Its deeper political consequences will depend on how far new actors can establish themselves across the remaining links.

Finland

Finland's political transformation is best understood as a redistribution of power among parties, organized interests, professional experts, established media and online communities. Digital communication has substantially changed who can formulate political identities, introduce issues into public debate and become a recognizable political figure. However, Finnish evidence does not support the stronger proposition that parties have already become largely dispensable. Their control over political recruitment, parliamentary cooperation and government formation remains considerable.

The distinctive development is that **political communities increasingly form outside parties, while parties remain central to turning their demands into state decisions.** Finland's clearest example is the relationship between the online anti-immigration movement and the Finns Party. At the same time, economic organizations and administrative experts retain channels of influence that depend relatively little on mass popularity.

I will distinguish findings established by the cited research from the broader interpretation I draw from them. The analysis incorporates research and media evidence available through 2026.

The historical starting point is a society in which organized collective activity and state authority developed together. Finnish political life emerged from national mobilization, language struggles, agricultural organization, the labour movement and a comparatively strong administrative tradition. The country's later reputation for consensus should not obscure the profound conflict culminating in the Civil War of 1918. Cooperation was subsequently constructed across enduring divisions.

Risto Alapuro's *State and Revolution in Finland* is a foundational reference for understanding the relationship between state formation, class relations and political mobilization. Its relevance to the present question is methodological: electoral parties should be studied as expressions of wider forms of social organization, rather than as self-contained competitors. His historical work provides an essential starting point before examining what digital communication has changed. [Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland*](#).

Over much of the twentieth century, political attachment could be reproduced through several overlapping settings: the workplace, a trade union, a cooperative, a local association, a newspaper, municipal politics and a party organization. These environments supplied more than

information. They provided trusted interpreters, political vocabulary, social recognition and opportunities to participate.

The significance of the digital transition becomes clearer against this background. When an online community supplies those same functions, it assumes some of the work previously performed by associations and party milieus. A person can acquire a political identity, learn its arguments, recognize its opponents and participate in collective activity before having any formal relationship with a party.

Yet Finland's state also developed through cooperation among organized interests. Governments, employers, unions and administrative specialists could negotiate policy through institutions with their own accumulated knowledge and relationships. These channels never depended exclusively on mass party participation. Consequently, the weakening of a party's social roots does not automatically weaken every organization historically connected to it.

Pauli Kettunen's work is particularly valuable here. His studies of the welfare state, the competition state and the security state examine changing ways of defining national solidarity and collective necessity. These categories help explain why Finnish political disagreement often concerns competing interpretations of what preserving the national community requires: redistribution, competitiveness, ecological adjustment or security. His relevant later works include "Welfare state, competition state, security state" and "Democratic welfare nationalism and competitive community." [Kettunen's bibliography.](#)

My interpretation is that these competing definitions of national necessity are a deeper organizing force than many individual controversies. Parties compete partly by presenting their preferred policy as the condition for maintaining a viable Finland.

The intellectual background consists of several overlapping political milieus. Their boundaries do not coincide perfectly with party boundaries. Economic liberalism can coexist with cultural liberalism or cultural conservatism; support for the welfare state can accompany either an inclusive or a restrictive conception of national membership.

The following table maps these currents analytically. It identifies characteristic connections and tensions, rather than suggesting that each milieu operates under unified direction.

Political milieu	Main organizational connections	Central intellectual argument	Tension sharpened by digital politics
Business and market reform	National Coalition Party; employers' organizations; business policy institutes	Prosperity depends on entrepreneurship, employment, investment and competitive institutions	International business openness can conflict with nationalist demands concerning immigration and sovereignty
Labour and social democracy	SDP; unions; labour movement institutions	Social protection and collective bargaining support equality and social stability	Established organizational loyalties compete with more individualized political identification

Political milieu	Main organizational connections	Central intellectual argument	Tension sharpened by digital politics
Agrarian and regional politics	Centre Party; agricultural and forestry interests; municipal networks	National development must preserve viable communities throughout the country	National attention concentrates on urban controversies, while local organization retains electoral value
Green and socially liberal politics	Greens; environmental and rights organizations; parts of university and professional life	Ecological limits and individual rights require institutional change	Strong online visibility can coexist with difficulties reaching voters whose livelihoods make adjustment costly
Socialist and egalitarian politics	Left Alliance; labour, welfare and activist networks	Inequality reflects political choices concerning ownership, taxation, services and work	Cultural progressivism and economic redistribution do not always attract identical constituencies
Nationalist and immigration-restrictive politics	Finns Party; associated intellectual production; autonomous online communities	Established elites insufficiently defend national membership, everyday security and citizens' material interests	Participation in government subjects oppositional promises to budgetary and coalition constraints
Linguistic and religious representation	Swedish People's Party; Swedish-language institutions; Christian Democrats and related associations	Particular cultural, linguistic or ethical commitments require durable representation	Cohesive institutions can preserve influence despite comparatively modest national online audiences

Two relationships within this map are especially important.

First, the competition between the SDP and the Finns Party cannot be reduced to a contest between redistribution and economic liberalism. It also concerns **which political vocabulary organizes dissatisfaction**. Economic insecurity can be interpreted through employment relations and public services, or through immigration, national priority and distrust of governing elites. Digital communities help make one interpretation more immediately available than another.

Second, the relationship between the National Coalition Party and the Finns Party combines cooperation with substantial differences. Economic reform can provide common ground, while international recruitment, cultural questions and European integration produce friction. Coalition government joins political constituencies whose underlying understandings of society remain partly different.

This means that an apparent parliamentary bloc should not automatically be treated as a single intellectual community.

Think tanks and research organizations connect these milieus to policymaking. Lotta Lounasmeri's study of Finnish think tanks identifies a landscape shaped by established interest

organizations, research institutions and party-associated foundations. An important expansion followed the introduction of public support for party-related think tanks in 2005. Her research also shows that organizations can influence policy through background advice and professional relationships without receiving extensive public attention. Media visibility is therefore an incomplete measure of their importance. [Lounasmeri, “The Finnish Think Tank Landscape—A Mixture of Consensualism and Adversity?”](#)

Several organizations deserve particular attention:

- **EVA, the Finnish Business and Policy Forum**, explicitly promotes a market-oriented perspective and works closely with ETLA Economic Research. Its membership includes major business and industry organizations. Its role is to translate economic interests into proposals presented as contributing to Finland’s long-term success. [EVA’s institutional description](#).
- **The Kalevi Sorsa Foundation** operates within social democratic thought, connecting research, politics, the labour movement and civil society. Its current themes include inequality, taxation and a fair ecological transition. It also connects Finnish debate with European progressive networks. [Kalevi Sorsa Foundation](#).
- **Suomen Perusta** supplies intellectual material associated with the Finns Party, particularly concerning immigration, the economy and European questions. Its publication formats include reports and audiovisual material, illustrating how organized ideological production now circulates through several media forms. [Suomen Perusta](#).
- **Libera** advocates individual liberty, entrepreneurship and free markets. Its declared political independence should be distinguished from ideological neutrality: it openly promotes a particular understanding of society and economic organization. [Libera](#).
- **Demos Helsinki** works across research, policy development and institutional capacity building, with government, civil society and business partners. Its influence is best investigated through projects and policy relationships as well as public debate. [Demos Helsinki](#).

Other relevant institutions include the Left Forum, Green-associated Visio, National Coalition-associated Toivo, and the Swedish-language organizations Agenda and Magma. Lounasmeri also documents e2’s movement from a Centre Party background toward a more independent research identity. These distinctions matter when mapping affiliations: historical origins, present governance, funding and intellectual orientation are separate questions. [Lounasmeri’s institutional mapping](#).

Sitra occupies a different position as a public fund operating under Parliament. One particularly revealing activity is its economic policy leadership training, which brings decision-makers from different sectors together to work through shared policy problems. Its published programme describes two courses annually, with approximately thirty invited participants per course. [Sitra’s leadership training programme](#).

The sociological significance is that shared assumptions can emerge through repeated professional interaction. Participants learn a common vocabulary, encounter the same problem definitions and establish relationships that can later facilitate cooperation. This is a plausible mechanism of elite integration; demonstrating its influence on a particular decision would require tracing that decision.

A related issue is the distribution of policy expertise between public institutions and private consultants. Hanna Kuusela and Matti Ylönen's *Konsulttidemokratia* directs attention to outsourcing, expertise and democratic accountability. Anu Kantola and Kuusela's *Huipputuloiset* examines Finland's highest-income elite. These are complementary research directions: one concerns the organization of public knowledge, the other the social position of economic elites. Neither can be adequately studied through politicians' follower counts. [Kuusela and Ylönen, *Konsulttidemokratia*. Kantola and Kuusela, *Huipputuloiset*.](#)

The resulting analytical distinction is fundamental: **the capacity to define a public controversy and the capacity to shape a technically complex policy are different forms of power.** An online personality may possess the first; a research institute or organized economic interest may possess the second. Some actors combine both.

Finland's media transformation has proceeded without the wholesale disappearance of established journalism. Esa Reunanen's 2025 country analysis describes a strong public broadcaster, regional newspapers, a major national daily and widely used tabloids. Their digital services remain central to news consumption. Moving online therefore frequently means consuming journalism through a different device or distribution channel. It does not necessarily mean replacing journalists with influencers. [Reunanen, Finland, *Digital News Report 2025*.](#)

The 2026 report by Ville Manninen and Mikko Villi reinforces this qualification. Overall trust in news was **63%**, down from **67% in 2025**, but still comparatively high. Television news continued to reach a majority weekly, while **23%** reported paying for online news. The authors characterize news creators as not yet having entered the mainstream. They also describe substantial pressure on journalistic capacity, including cuts at Yle and the national news agency STT. [Manninen and Villi, Finland, *Digital News Report 2026*.](#)

The distinction between distribution and production changes the diagnosis. A newspaper article shared through Facebook is simultaneously evidence of platform dependence and the continuing relevance of professional journalism. A politician's response video may bypass editorial interviewing while relying on an issue originally investigated by journalists.

Consequently, much Finnish political communication takes the form of a continuing interaction:

1. An institution, journalist or activist introduces information.
2. Political actors select an interpretation.
3. Supporters circulate, criticize or modify that interpretation.
4. Journalists report the resulting controversy.
5. Parties face pressure to respond.

No participant completely controls this process. The balance depends on the issue, the platform and the actors' existing authority.

The political struggle over Yle demonstrates that digital change can increase the importance of institutional media policy. Reunanen documents both commercial complaints about Yle's online activities and political criticism, particularly from representatives of the Finns Party. Funding and remit become contested because the broadcaster continues to matter in the digital environment. [Reunanen's discussion of Yle.](#)

There is also considerable variation between platforms. “Social media” should not be treated as a single political arena.

Communication environment Particularly relevant political function

Blogs and discussion forums	Developing interpretations, collective memory and ideological communities
Facebook groups and messaging networks	Circulating information through social relationships and organizing activity
X	Rapid interaction among politicians, journalists, experts and highly engaged citizens
TikTok and short video	Introducing political figures and issues through personalized, frequently incidental exposure
Instagram	Combining political positioning with identity, everyday life and visual presentation
YouTube and podcasts	Sustaining attention through longer interviews, commentary and recurring personalities

This is a functional interpretation, rather than a claim that each platform has one fixed political constituency.

Finnish algorithm monitoring illustrates the differences. During the 2024 presidential election, Faktabaari and CheckFirst found that YouTube’s subsequent-video recommendations disproportionately directed their simulated users toward Finns Party material. Their TikTok analysis identified unusually prominent search visibility for an anonymous account supporting Jussi Halla-aho. Their Instagram monitoring, meanwhile, identified strong visibility for news media, Greens and left-wing actors. These were observations of particular systems and periods, not measurements of how many votes the platforms changed. [YouTube findings](#). [TikTok findings](#). [Instagram findings](#).

The Finns Party provides the most thoroughly documented example of political organization developing online and subsequently changing a party. Tuukka Ylä-Anttila traces a process beginning before the last decade. Halla-aho’s blog, established in 2003, and its discussion environment helped generate a community that developed into Hommaforum in 2008. Connections with Suomen Sisu and the movement of activists into party communication helped bridge online activity and formal politics.

Ylä-Anttila interprets this trajectory as the emergence, establishment and eventual transformation of the Finns Party through an online anti-immigration movement. Halla-aho’s leadership victory in 2017 was a major organizational culmination. The movement acquired influence through a party whose existence, electoral position and institutional resources mattered greatly. [Ylä-Anttila, “Social Media and the Emergence, Establishment and Transformation of the Right-Wing Populist Finns Party.”](#)

For the broader theory you are investigating, this case reveals a change in the sequence of political organization. Traditionally, a party could educate and socialize members into a political outlook. Here, a relatively coherent outlook and activist community developed partly outside the party, then entered and changed it.

The mechanism involves several cumulative developments:

- Repeated discussion establishes recognizable interpretations of social problems.
- Participants identify authoritative speakers and shared opponents.
- A community learns how to respond to criticism.
- Some participants become organizers, candidates or communication professionals.
- Electoral success makes the community increasingly important within the party.

This sequence is my reconstruction of the organizational mechanism. Its importance lies in showing how ideological formation can precede formal party attachment.

Niko Hatakka adds an essential qualification. His study of exchanges among Timo Soini, journalists and Hommaforum activists shows that autonomous online support creates problems of control. Party leaders gain communication resources, but they cannot fully determine what supporters say or how the party becomes associated with their statements. Controversial material generates reputational and political costs that leaders must manage. Hatakka, “When logics of party politics and online activism collide.”

Online support is therefore a relationship of mutual dependence. A party benefits from activists’ initiative, while those activists can challenge compromises, leadership decisions or attempts to moderate public language. The leadership must answer both to institutional partners and to a community whose approval may depend on resisting those partners.

This becomes particularly consequential in government. Supporters may continue to expect the communicative style of opposition, while ministers must defend concrete decisions, negotiate compromises and accept responsibility for outcomes. The same network that helped a party grow can become a source of criticism when governing behaviour diverges from the identity previously cultivated.

The conflict also concerns intellectual authority and the definition of knowledge. In “Populist knowledge,” Tuukka Ylä-Anttila identifies repertoires through which actors contest established expertise. Some participants in the studied environments present themselves as defenders of facts, statistics and rational argument against allegedly ideological institutions. Their position cannot be adequately described as an indiscriminate rejection of knowledge. They construct competing standards of credibility and alternative authorities. [Ylä-Anttila, “Populist knowledge: ‘Post-truth’ repertoires of contesting epistemic authorities.”](#)

This is especially relevant to the intellectual background of Finnish politics. Disagreement can occur over an empirical claim, but also over which institution is entitled to establish that claim. A statistical presentation may become persuasive because it comes from a trusted community interpreter, while an official assessment is rejected because its producer is considered politically compromised.

The same problem can be investigated across political orientations. The relevant questions are how communities establish credibility, handle contradictory evidence and distinguish expertise from advocacy. The Finnish research on populism supplies a particularly developed account of one part of that process.

Elina Noppari, Ilmari Hiltunen and Laura Ahva also demonstrate that audiences of populist counter-media are heterogeneous. Their qualitative study identifies system sceptics, critics of particular agendas and more casually discontented users. These categories were developed from twenty-four interviews; they are a typology, not population percentages. The findings caution

against interpreting every encounter with alternative media as membership in a single ideological bloc. Noppari, Hiltunen and Ahva, “User profiles for populist counter-media websites in Finland.”

Nor does anonymity eliminate social organization. Arttu Siltala, Ylä-Anttila and Eeva Luhtakallio’s research on Ylilauta shows users constructing boundaries, bonds, speech conventions and informal rules of belonging. Their work explains how global imageboard practices combine with Finnish cultural resources. The platform should not be equated with a party apparatus, but the study establishes that anonymous interaction can sustain recognizable collective cultures. [Siltala, Ylä-Anttila and Luhtakallio, “Culture in online anonymous interaction.”](#)

The larger implication is that political organization has become less dependent on formal membership while remaining thoroughly social. Moderators, recurring contributors, shared humour and reputational hierarchies can perform organizing functions without a membership register or elected executive.

Personal political visibility has also become easier to develop outside a conventional party career. Finnish reporting on the 2023 election identified Joakim Vigelius and Miko Bergbom of the Finns Party as successful examples of sustained social media activity. It also identified Ville Merinen of the SDP and Sofia Virta of the Greens. Researchers Essi Pöyry and Laura Junka-Aikio emphasized continuous activity, recognizable presentation and interaction with audiences. These examples establish that the change crosses party boundaries. [Yle’s interviews on political TikTok use.](#)

Merinen is particularly instructive as a type of political recruitment: authority developed through public-facing professional communication can become an electoral resource. More generally, followers may first encounter a future politician through professional advice, entertainment or everyday commentary. Political trust can subsequently grow from that relationship.

This changes candidate recruitment. Parties have an incentive to attract people who already command attention. Such candidates can enter with an independent resource that party officials did not create. Conversely, a party label, campaign organization and political programme can make an individual’s public visibility electorally usable.

Finland’s electoral system intensifies this interaction. Its open-list proportional representation requires candidates to win personal votes while competing within party lists as well as between parties. Personal recognition therefore mattered before social media.

Veikko Isotalo and Åsa von Schoultz’s research finds that political experience, incumbency and campaign spending remain important to candidate success. It also identifies the growing representation of local councillors among MPs. The implication is that online visibility enters an existing competition among several kinds of personal political capital. It does not erase advantages arising from officeholding and established local relationships. [Isotalo and von Schoultz, “What makes a successful candidate in the Finnish open-list proportional electoral system?”](#)

A further Finnish institution deserves attention: the **vaalikone**, or voting advice application. These applications allow citizens to compare their answers with candidates’ stated positions.

They can reduce the effort required to examine a large field of candidates, while giving questionnaire design and matching procedures political significance.

Isotalo's research examines the interdependence of these design choices. My interpretation is that voting advice applications introduce another form of mediation: citizens gain a route around inherited political loyalties, but their comparison is organized through selected questions, presentation choices and algorithms. [Isotalo, "Improving candidate-based voting advice application design: The case of Finland."](#)

This is a recurring feature of the Finnish transformation. Greater individual choice often comes with new intermediaries whose decisions are less visible than a newspaper editorial or a party programme.

The evidence for declining party importance is consequently mixed. The Finnish National Election Study 2023, edited by Elina Kestilä-Kekkonen, Lauri Rapeli and Peter Söderlund, contains important counterevidence. Söderlund identifies a recovery in party loyalty compared with 2011 and 2015. Theodora Helimäki and Åsa von Schoultz find increased importance of party choice relative to candidate choice, especially toward ideological extremes. These findings allow weakening organizational attachment and stronger electoral partisanship to coexist. [Finnish National Election Study 2023, published 2024.](#)

This apparent paradox becomes understandable once different relationships are separated. A citizen may avoid meetings, decline membership and distrust party officials, yet feel a strong attachment to the political side represented by a party. Social media can reinforce that attachment through repeated encounters with opponents.

The party may consequently lose some capacity to organize citizens' everyday activity while becoming a more emotionally charged electoral symbol.

Statistics Finland's municipal candidate data offer another valuable distinction. In 2025 there were **29,950 candidates**, a decline of **15.9%** from 2021. Nevertheless, parliamentary parties nominated **95.7%** of them. Furthermore, **162 serving MPs** stood in the municipal elections. These figures show reduced recruitment alongside continued party dominance and substantial overlap between national and local political careers. [Statistics Finland, municipal candidates in 2025.](#)

Thus, the organizational infrastructure is under strain, but its remaining role is substantial. A party with fewer active participants may depend more heavily on established officeholders. That can increase the importance of professional politicians even while communication becomes more open to outsiders.

Generational and gender differences further complicate the picture. The 2023 election study's chapter by Kim Strandberg, Tom Carlson and Wilma Snickars finds particularly strong importance of social media and voting advice applications among younger citizens. Veikko Isotalo, Josefina Sipinen and Jussi Westinen examine the associated generational and gender divisions. These are central authors for investigating how social backgrounds and communication environments interact. [The relevant chapters in the election study.](#)

The important analytical point is that different groups encounter different combinations of political concerns, styles and trusted speakers. Housing, employment, personal security, mental

health, gender relations and environmental responsibility need not be connected in the same way across communities.

A plausible feedback process develops: existing differences influence which content people select; platforms respond to those selections; political actors adapt to the resulting audiences; and those adaptations can strengthen group differences. Establishing the weight of each step requires evidence beyond a correlation between platform use and party preference.

Digital access also does not eliminate participation inequality. Statistics Finland's analysis of the 2023 election found markedly higher turnout among higher-income citizens. In the areas covered by complete electronic-register data, turnout was **85.1% in the highest income quintile and 58.4% in the lowest**. Those areas covered approximately half the resident electorate, so the figures should not be represented as a complete national register result. [Statistics Finland's voter analysis](#).

The practical consequence is that an intensely visible online grievance can coexist with weak electoral participation among some of the people affected. Attention, expression, voting and policy influence must be measured separately.

Recent electoral outcomes reveal the limits of communication power. In 2023, the National Coalition Party won 20.8% and 48 seats, the Finns Party 20.1% and 46 seats, and the SDP 19.9% and 43 seats. The closeness of these results made the subsequent construction of a parliamentary majority decisive. The election study accordingly emphasizes competition over government formation and the complications introduced by sociocultural divisions. [The election study's results and analysis](#).

Sanna Marin's prominence illustrates the conceptual distinction. A leader's national or international visibility cannot by itself determine which parties will govern together. Electoral support must pass through parliamentary arithmetic and negotiations concerning programmes, personnel and acceptable partners.

The 2025 local elections provide a different test. The SDP emerged strongly, while the Finns Party experienced a pronounced setback and fell below 8% in both municipal and county voting. The proper comparison is with previous elections of the same kind, since local elections differ from parliamentary elections in turnout, candidates and issues. [Yle's reporting on the 2025 results](#).

This outcome does not establish that the Finns Party's digital strategy ceased to work. It establishes that digital strength does not guarantee success across electoral settings. Service provision, local candidates, governing performance and participation can outweigh advantages in national online attention.

For your broader hypothesis, this is an important boundary condition: communication technology changes the opportunities available to actors, while the institutional setting determines which opportunities become politically valuable.

Polarization in Finland is real, but its structure varies by issue. Antti Gronow and Arttu Malkamäki's study of Finnish Twitter from 2015 to 2023 identifies conservative-right, moderate-right and liberal-left clusters. It finds differences in the timing and intensity of polarization across immigration, climate, the pandemic and security questions. Established

news sources continued to be shared across groups, although parts of the conservative-right cluster used different sources and distinctive negative framings. The authors explicitly caution that Twitter users are not representative of the population. [Gronow and Malkamäki, “Political polarisation in turbulent times.”](#)

Two different processes should therefore be distinguished. People can become separated because they encounter different information, or because they interpret shared information through different political identities. The latter can develop even where major news organizations retain broad reach.

A newspaper investigation might be read by one group as evidence that institutions are correcting a problem, and by another as confirmation that those institutions are fundamentally compromised. Shared sources do not necessarily produce shared meanings.

Finland’s NATO debate supplies unusually clear evidence that online divisions can also change rapidly. Yan Xia, Antti Gronow, Arttu Malkamäki, Tuomas Ylä-Anttila, Barbara Keller and Mikko Kivelä found that, after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a left-wing anti-NATO Twitter community developed more connections with the pro-NATO community. A separate community characterized by conspiratorial arguments remained more isolated. The authors also distinguish changes in expressed positions and interaction from proven changes in private beliefs. [Xia and colleagues, “The Russian invasion of Ukraine selectively depolarized the Finnish NATO discussion.”](#)

This matters because it demonstrates that platform environments do not determine political outcomes independently of events, institutions and shared norms. A major external threat can reorganize the relations between communities.

Security remains a powerful integrative dimension. The NATOpoll research programme’s spring 2026 survey found **73% support for Finland’s NATO membership**. Its authors include Hanna Wass, Juhana Aunesluoma, Tuomas Forsberg, Matti Pesu, Iro Särkkä and Johanna Vuorelma. Their work is particularly useful for examining how citizens’ views interact with elite choices as security conditions change. [NATOpoll, 2026 report.](#)

My interpretation is that Finnish politics can sustain sharp disagreement over domestic distribution and cultural questions while retaining substantial agreement on external security. A single scale running from “consensus” to “polarization” misses this coexistence.

The relationship between legal expertise and political authority is another particularly Finnish part of the picture. Finland’s constitutional system places an important anticipatory review function in Parliament’s Constitutional Law Committee. Section 74 assigns it responsibility for assessing constitutionality and compatibility with international human-rights treaties. Courts also have a role: under section 106, they must give priority to the Constitution where applying a statutory provision would produce a manifest conflict. Foreign policy, meanwhile, is directed by the President in cooperation with the Government, with parliamentary powers concerning international obligations. [Constitution of Finland.](#)

These arrangements distribute authority among institutions with different sources of legitimacy. Electoral success does not confer unrestricted control over constitutional interpretation, and public prominence does not itself confer legal competence.

Maija Dahlberg and Anu Kantola's 2024 study directly examines the interaction of law, politics and media. Based on forty-nine interviews, it identifies tensions associated with the expanding reach of constitutional rights, the public role of academic experts and journalists' growing interest in constitutional questions. Expert statements have been available online since 2015, making arguments previously associated with specialized parliamentary work more accessible to public scrutiny. [Dahlberg and Kantola, "Tensions in Finland's ex ante constitutional review."](#)

For the sociology of political and legal power, this is highly significant. Constitutional academics can act as institutional advisers and public interpreters. Their professional authority can affect the acceptable boundaries of policy, while publicity exposes their judgments to political challenge.

The resulting research question concerns how expertise is selected, how disagreements are handled and how institutional judgments acquire authority. Online communication makes these processes more publicly contestable, but the study does not establish that social media alone caused the underlying expansion of constitutional review.

Digital participation also develops through institutions designed to connect citizens with representative government. Finland's Constitution provides for citizens' initiatives supported by at least fifty thousand eligible Finnish citizens. Such initiatives create a route for introducing legislative proposals into Parliament; they do not automatically enact the proposed law. [Constitution, section 53.](#)

This arrangement illustrates a different relationship between digital activity and the state. Citizens can mobilize support outside a party, but parliamentary institutions still evaluate and decide the proposal. The effectiveness of such participation depends on campaign organization, legal preparation, public attention and institutional response.

Henrik Serup Christensen and Maija Setälä show why this should not simply be classified as populist politics. Their research finds little support for the proposition that populist attitudes strongly drive participation in Finland's citizens' initiative system. Anti-elitism was associated with lower satisfaction with the instrument, while anti-pluralism was associated with a lower likelihood of using it. [Christensen and Setälä, "Do populists want direct democracy?"](#)

Influencers can contribute to participation through another route. Hanna Reinikainen, Nils S. Borchers, Aleksi Suuronen and Kim Strandberg's 2025 study found associations between perceived exposure to political influencer content, increased political awareness and activities such as voting or boycotting. Because it used self-reported survey data, it establishes a plausible connection rather than a causal count of votes generated by influencers. ["Lighting the participatory spark?"](#)

The democratic effects consequently depend on what follows initial attention. A video may prompt further investigation, engagement with a campaign or sustained organization. It may also produce a brief emotional response with no subsequent activity. These possibilities should be investigated separately.

Finland's information-literacy institutions belong within this political map as well. Faktabaari combines fact-checking, educational work and research into platform influence, working through networks involving journalists, researchers, teachers and technical specialists. Such activities represent organized attempts to preserve citizens' capacity to evaluate information

under changing communication conditions. Their existence is evidence of institutional adaptation, rather than proof that misinformation has been overcome. [Faktabaari's work and networks](#).

For a continuing investigation, I would distinguish five forms of power and examine how Finnish actors move between them:

Form of power	Main question	Relevant Finnish evidence
Attention	Who can make an issue widely visible?	Candidate videos, platform recommendations, journalism
Interpretation	Who supplies the vocabulary through which an issue is understood?	Think tanks, experts, counter-media and online communities
Organization	Who can sustain activity, recruit people and coordinate action?	Parties, associations, forums and campaign networks
Institutional access	Who participates in preparing and negotiating decisions?	Administrative specialists, organized interests and policy advisers
Binding authority	Who can adopt, interpret and implement decisions?	Parliament, government, legal institutions and public administration

This framework is my synthesis of the research. It helps avoid treating every increase in online visibility as an equivalent increase in state power.

The most consequential development to watch is whether online communities acquire durable organizational capacities: candidate recruitment, policy preparation, funding, local presence and succession beyond a prominent individual. The Finnish anti-immigration movement demonstrates that such development is possible. Other forms of online popularity may remain much less institutionally durable.

A second issue is whether declining participation in formal organizations concentrates parties around established officeholders. Finland's candidate data suggest that organizational contraction can coexist with continuing institutional dominance. The relevant future may therefore involve parties that remain powerful while becoming socially narrower.

A third issue is the relationship between weakening journalistic capacity and growing platform dependence. If fewer journalists can investigate public institutions, political actors may gain greater freedom to define events. Strong public trust alone cannot replace the resources required to produce reliable information.

Finally, the decisive political competition concerns **who can connect public attention, credible interpretation and the practical capacity to govern**. Finnish research gives the strongest support to actors who can cross these boundaries: online communities that enter parties, experts who shape public debate, politicians who combine personal audiences with local organization, and institutions that translate new demands into workable policy. That is where the changing foundations of Finnish state power can be observed most clearly.

Great Britain

The British evidence supports a qualified version of your hypothesis: political parties have lost much of their control over the formation of political opinion, while retaining a decisive role in converting that opinion into state power. Political interpretation, identity formation and mobilisation increasingly occur through networks of commentators, campaign organisations, podcasts, social platforms and individual political personalities. These networks can pressure parties, supply their ideas, undermine their leaders and move supporters between them.

Britain's distinctive situation is therefore a growing separation between **the organisation of political attention, the organisation of electoral competition and the organisation of government**. Different actors dominate each activity. A commentator may reach a large audience but have little influence over legislative detail; a small policy institute may reach few voters but supply proposals and personnel to ministers.

I concentrate on England, Scotland and Wales, while referring to the United Kingdom where the relevant institution or dataset includes Northern Ireland. The contemporary reference point is **10 September 2026**. Andy Burnham became prime minister on 20 July 2026, following his election as Labour leader; accounts centred on Starmer consequently describe an earlier phase of the present government. [GOV.UK: Prime Minister](https://www.gov.uk/government/people/andy-burnham)

To understand the background processes beneath parliamentary politics, it helps to distinguish five forms of power:

Form of power	Principal holders	What it enables
Intellectual authority	Scholars, think tanks, policy specialists, influential writers	Defining problems and making particular solutions appear credible
Control over attention	Broadcasters, newspapers, platforms, podcasters, influencers	Determining which problems and personalities receive public attention
Mobilising capacity	Parties, unions, campaign organisations, online communities	Turning sympathy into donations, volunteering, demonstrations and votes
Electoral organisation	Candidate organisations, constituency parties, national campaign teams	Concentrating support where it can win representation
Governing capacity	Ministers, officials, Parliament, regulators and other public institutions	Translating political commitments into law, expenditure and administration

The transformation you identify is strongest in the second category and substantial in the third. Its effects on the fourth and fifth depend on Britain's institutional arrangements.

The weakening of the old party-centred order began before social media. The internet entered a political society already undergoing a long erosion of the institutions that connected everyday life to parties.

The Labour movement historically combined trade unions, workplaces, constituency organisations, local government, cooperative traditions and political education. Conservative politics drew on local associations, business networks, property ownership, professional groups and a powerful newspaper environment. Neither party ever monopolised its supporters' intellectual world, but each possessed relatively durable social connections.

Deindustrialisation, occupational change, declining collective identification, professionalised campaigning and the expansion of higher education weakened these arrangements. Political leadership became increasingly concentrated among people whose careers ran through universities, parliamentary research, journalism, policy organisations and professional politics. These changes altered both who was represented and which experiences counted as politically authoritative.

Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley make a particularly important argument in *The New Politics of Class* (2017): changes within political parties contributed to declining class voting and increased working-class abstention. Political withdrawal was partly produced by changes in the available political choices. It cannot simply be explained as the disappearance of class differences among voters. [Tilley's account of the research](#)

This reverses a common interpretation. If a social group ceases to identify with a party, one should investigate what the party has ceased to represent, as well as what has changed within the group.

The theories of **Colin Crouch**, especially *Post-Democracy* (2004), and **Peter Mair**, especially *Ruling the Void* (2013), provide an influential broader interpretation: democratic institutions persist while parties become less deeply embedded in popular social life and more closely connected to professional governing circles. Digital insurgencies subsequently exploit the resulting distance.

Nevertheless, the development is not an uninterrupted decline in membership. Labour's expansion during the Corbyn period demonstrates that digitally mediated enthusiasm can bring people into a party. Parliamentary research records a substantial membership recovery during the 2010s, followed by later changes. Digitalisation can therefore rebuild organisations as well as bypass them. [House of Commons Library: political party membership](#)

The social foundations of contemporary British conflict are multidimensional. Economic position, education, national identification, age, housing and place interact. Reducing the transformation to either economic deprivation or cultural resentment misses how these dimensions combine.

Maria Sobolewska and Robert Ford's *Brexitland: Identity, Diversity and the Reshaping of British Politics* (2020) is a central work here. Their framework directs attention to the long

development of divisions associated with education, diversity and identity, rather than treating the referendum as an isolated campaign event.

Will Jennings and Gerry Stoker identify a geographical counterpart in “The Bifurcation of Politics: Two Englands” (2016). Internationally connected, highly skilled centres and economically weaker provincial areas developed different political outlooks. Their analysis helps explain why the same national message can sound like an opportunity in one locality and a threat in another. Its specific subject is England; Scotland and Wales require additional explanation. [Jennings and Stoker’s article](#)

Several overlapping tensions consequently structure the political field:

Underlying division	Recurring political questions	Organisational consequence
Asset ownership and economic insecurity	Housing, rents, taxation, inheritance, public services	Competing understandings of who benefits from the economic order
Educational and occupational differences	Expertise, status, social liberalism, representation	Distrust between professional political cultures and groups feeling excluded from them
Metropolitan and provincial experience	Investment, transport, local decline, centralisation	Demand for territorial recognition and locally credible leadership
National identity and sovereignty	Immigration, Brexit, the Union, judicial authority	Political loyalties extending across conventional party boundaries
Generational experience	Housing access, climate, pensions, prospects	Different priorities and different routes into political information
Confidence in governing institutions	Competence, integrity, delivery, accountability	Electoral switching and withdrawal that need not imply ideological conversion

The housing dimension deserves particular weight. A graduate employed in a professional occupation may nevertheless face insecure housing and limited prospects of asset ownership. Conversely, a person with fewer formal qualifications may possess substantial housing wealth. Education and economic security cannot be treated as interchangeable.

Brett Christophers’s *Rentier Capitalism* (2020) offers an important material interpretation. He locates British economic power in ownership of scarce assets, including land, infrastructure, intellectual property and platforms. His account helps explain why political conflict concerns access to assets and the extraction of income through ownership, alongside wages and taxation. It is an interpretation of Britain’s political economy, rather than a sufficient explanation of any particular election. [Christophers: *Rentier Capitalism*](#)

My interpretation is that digital communication gives these different experiences readily available political languages. A housing grievance can be interpreted through landlord power, immigration, restrictive planning, intergenerational inequality or financialisation. The grievance does not determine which explanation will prevail. Intellectual production and communication networks perform that work.

Britain’s intellectual background consists of competing networks with different relationships to parties and government. Their influence comes through publications,

personnel, professional credibility, access to journalists, participation in policy debates and connections with organised interests.

The following map identifies broad formations. These are overlapping intellectual environments; they are not centrally directed blocs.

Formation	Illustrative institutions and figures	Characteristic political project
Market liberalism	Institute of Economic Affairs, Centre for Policy Studies, Adam Smith Institute	Competition, private enterprise, lower taxation and limits on state intervention
Conservative national and institutional renewal	Policy Exchange, Onward; David Goodhart, Nick Timothy	National cohesion, prosperity, territorial renewal and reform of governing institutions
Blue Labour and postliberal communitarianism	Maurice Glasman, Jonathan Rutherford, John Milbank, Adrian Pabst	Work, belonging, reciprocal obligation and institutions capable of restraining both market and administrative individualism
Social democratic policy reform	Fabian Society, IPPR, Resolution Foundation	Public investment, redistribution, labour-market reform and improvement of public services
Technocratic government reform	Tony Blair Institute; ThinkLabour, formerly Labour Together	Governing competence, electoral strategy, technological transformation and policy delivery
Democratic socialist and ecological reform	Common Wealth, New Economics Foundation, Compass; associated left intellectual and media environments	Ownership reform, economic democracy, ecological transition and stronger collective power
National constitutional projects	Scottish and Welsh intellectual, civic and party networks	Competing accounts of nationhood, self-government and the territorial organisation of the state

The **market-liberal network** has the longest-established example of organised intellectual preparation upstream of electoral victory. Richard Cockett's *Thinking the Unthinkable* (1994) and Daniel Stedman Jones's *Masters of the Universe* (2012) explain how ideas initially outside mainstream policy discussion acquired institutional support and political authority.

Their relevance to your question is substantial: the British right was already organising intellectual influence beyond the party before cyberspace. Digital platforms accelerated and diversified an existing process.

A more complicated historical account appears in Aled Davies, Ben Jackson and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite's edited volume *The Neoliberal Age? Britain since the 1970s* (2021). It cautions against a simple model in which think tanks invent a doctrine and governments implement it mechanically. Institutions, social change and policy adaptation also shape outcomes. [Open-access volume](#)

Within contemporary conservatism, market liberalism competes with more interventionist approaches. Onward explicitly combines support for markets with an active state and attention to neglected places. This differs from a programme primarily centred on shrinking government. The distinction helps explain recurring tensions between business-oriented conservatism, territorial development and the expectations of economically insecure voters. [Onward's account of its approach](#)

Policy Exchange occupies another important position. Its projects connect economic and administrative policy with national history, cultural controversy and constitutional argument. Its public description lists the Judicial Power Project alongside projects concerning history, biology and Islamism. Its account of alumni entering government also illustrates the connection between producing arguments and supplying personnel. Its claims about its own influence should, however, be read as institutional self-assessment. [Policy Exchange: About](#)

The **communitarian and postliberal current** cuts across ordinary party boundaries. David Goodhart's *The Road to Somewhere* (2017) distinguishes more mobile, achievement-based identities from more rooted identities. This influential typology explains conflicts over recognition and belonging, although it cannot classify the entire population into two internally uniform groups. [Goodhart's book](#)

Maurice Glasman's Blue Labour combines attachment to nation and community with criticism of the power of capital. John Milbank and Adrian Pabst's *The Politics of Virtue* (2016), and Pabst's *Postliberal Politics* (2021), develop related arguments about the limitations of liberal individualism.

Their distinctive position matters: they can criticise both unrestricted markets and progressive forms of bureaucratic administration. Blue Labour's own account presents the nation state as a potential instrument for constraining global capital and protecting social relationships. Sovereignty therefore has an economic and associational meaning, alongside its constitutional meaning. [Blue Labour's statement of principles](#)

These writers should be treated as **participants in political reconstruction**, as well as analysts of it.

The **social democratic and technocratic environments** also require differentiation. The Fabian Society remains a membership organisation and Labour affiliate, connecting research with local societies, political education and policy discussion. That differs organisationally from a specialist consultancy or a leadership strategy organisation. [Fabian Society: About](#)

ThinkLabour, formerly Labour Together, describes work integrating polling, research, policy and communications with ministers, MPs and mayors. It exemplifies the movement of some party functions into specialised adjacent organisations. [ThinkLabour](#)

The Tony Blair Institute advances a more explicitly technological conception of state transformation, including AI, digital identification and redesigned public services. Its influence operates through policy production and government advisory work. [Tony Blair Institute](#)

A significant tension follows. Social democratic politics may understand the problem as insufficient public resources or unequal economic power; technocratic reformers may emphasise organisational design, technology and delivery. These approaches can cooperate, but

agreement on electoral support does not resolve their differences over how government should work.

On the **democratic socialist and ecological left**, Common Wealth makes ownership central to economic reform, while the New Economics Foundation connects national policy with local institutional experiments. Compass explicitly organises across party boundaries. These organisations demonstrate that political organisation outside parties includes sustained research and practical institution-building, as well as online commentary. [Common Wealth](#), [New Economics Foundation](#), [Compass](#)

The associated intellectual environment includes disagreements over public ownership, workplace power, ecological limits, constitutional reform and the relationship between class and identity. Novara Media, *Tribune*, *New Left Review* and *Soundings* occupy different positions within this wider field. Treating them as one programme would conceal the debates through which the left develops.

The movement into cyberspace has transformed how these ideas become politically consequential. The strongest general framework is Andrew Chadwick's *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, especially its second edition of 2017.

Chadwick explains power through the interaction of older and newer media. A television appearance becomes a social-media clip; a newspaper investigation becomes a podcast discussion; an online controversy becomes a parliamentary question. Actors gain influence by moving information across these settings and affecting its interpretation. Chadwick's book

This framework is especially suitable for Britain because established journalism remains influential within digital distribution.

Ofcom's 2025 research found that 70% of UK adults used online news, 68% used television including on-demand services, and 51% used social media for news. BBC news reached 67% across platforms. These categories overlap. A person receiving BBC reporting through Facebook belongs to both the established-media and social-media environments. [Ofcom's 2025 findings](#)

The election-specific evidence is equally instructive. During the 2024 campaign, Ofcom found television election-news use at 49%, compared with 26% for social media. Among people whose primary news source was social media, 57% recalled material from traditional television or newspapers during the preceding week. These figures answer different questions from the general news survey and should not be mechanically compared with it. [Ofcom's election survey](#)

The Reuters Institute's 2026 UK report likewise finds continued dominance by established print and broadcast brands, alongside growing creator influence: 18% reported weekly use of news-focused creators or influencers. Overall trust in news stood at 30%, and half reported sometimes or often avoiding news. Its reach measures are self-reported use, not audience minutes or shares of political persuasion. [Digital News Report 2026: United Kingdom](#)

The resulting change is deeper than the migration of newspapers onto screens. **News production, distribution, interpretation and personal trust increasingly belong to different actors.** A journalist may establish the underlying facts, while a podcaster or influencer supplies the explanation that the audience remembers.

There are at least three distinguishable phases in Britain's recent digital development.

First, networked campaigning made it easier for supporters to find one another, circulate arguments and organise events. Second, parties and campaign professionals developed more systematic advertising, supporter databases and targeting. Third, recommendation systems and creator businesses increasingly organised political attention around recognisable personalities.

These phases coexist. Their relative importance differs across platforms, age groups and campaigns.

The most direct challenge to party control comes from organisations that own their own connections with supporters. Katharine Dommett and Luke Temple call these “satellite campaigns” in their 2018 study of digital campaigning.

Examples included Momentum, Campaign Together, crowdfunding initiatives and cultural campaigns around Corbyn. Their significance lay in independent lists, apps, messaging groups and mobilisation decisions. A party could benefit from their work without fully controlling it. Yet these campaigns also directed volunteers into existing constituency operations and often depended on party canvassing infrastructure. Dommett and Temple, “Digital Campaigning”

This identifies an organisational change more consequential than simply increasing the number of political posts. Whoever controls an enduring supporter relationship can potentially redirect it: towards another candidate, another campaign or criticism of the party leadership.

Corbynism demonstrated both the capacity and the limits of this arrangement. Digitally connected supporters helped renew Labour from outside its established leadership structures. Online communication was combined with meetings, campaigning and doorstep activity. [Chadwick's analysis of 2017](#)

But substantial online mobilisation did not prevent Labour's defeat in 2019. James Dennis and Susana Sampaio-Dias describe Momentum's campaign maps, WhatsApp coordination, crowdfunding and personal testimony, alongside tensions over internal participation. The case separates three outcomes that are often conflated: mobilising committed supporters, persuading less committed voters and winning strategically important constituencies. [Dennis and Sampaio-Dias](#)

Paolo Gerbaudo's *The Digital Party* provides a complementary theory. Online participation can expand the supporter base while strengthening direct relationships between leaders and followers, weakening intermediate organisational layers. Participation and concentration of leadership authority can therefore increase together. [Gerbaudo's book](#)

Farage represents a different organisational use of the same changing environment. His public identity has maintained continuity across UKIP, the Brexit Party and Reform. The political personality, the sovereignty narrative and the audience relationship have been more durable than any one organisational vehicle.

The analytical significance is the partial portability of political authority. A leader whose audience extends beyond a particular party possesses resources that ordinary party officeholders may lack.

Nevertheless, Farage's reach combines broadcasting, press attention, public appearances and digital media. He is an especially clear example of Chadwick's interaction between media systems.

Karin Wahl-Jorgensen's study of 52 Farage TikTok videos during the 2024 campaign found that 57.7% were campaign snapshots, while four directly addressed immigration as policy. Humour, travel, football and familiar social settings helped construct a political persona. The study establishes a communication style; it does not establish how many votes that style caused. [Wahl-Jorgensen's analysis](#)

Andrea Carson and Felix Simon found that Farage accounted for roughly 40% of the Facebook interactions in their dataset of major parties and candidates during the same campaign. Such interactions include hostile comments and repeated activity. They are evidence of attention, rather than a count of supporters. [Carson and Simon](#)

Nor does digital prominence remove financial dependence. Electoral Commission figures reported in September 2026 showed Reform receiving £5.3 million in donations during April–June, including £4 million from one donor. A political movement can combine mass online visibility with concentrated financial support. Reuters on the donation figures

Reform's wider significance is that it can affect the competitive environment beyond the seats it holds. Its presence changes the risks perceived by Conservative and Labour politicians, the issues they emphasise and the coalitions they try to assemble. That indirect influence must be distinguished from its ability to administer government.

The independent political commentator has also become a more important intellectual organiser. Alan Finlayson's concept of the "ideological entrepreneur" directly addresses your question.

In his 2023 article, Finlayson examines personalities who produce political explanations outside conventional party, academic and journalistic authorisation. Their organisational resources include attention, subscriptions and audiences' felt personal attachment. They circulate arguments across tendencies previously separated by organisational boundaries.

His study concerns reactionary digital politics and takes an explicitly critical position. Its wider organisational insight is that some political communication seeks to maintain an audience rather than obtain office or develop an implementable programme. [Finlayson, "This is Not a Critique"](#)

My extension of this argument is that audience-dependent incentives also deserve investigation among left and centrist commentators. Their political commitments differ, but recurring content, personal credibility and subscriber retention can matter across the spectrum.

Britain consequently contains several kinds of political audience relationship:

- A leader asks followers to support an electoral vehicle.
- An activist organisation asks supporters to participate in campaigns.
- A commentator supplies a continuing interpretation of events.
- A policy institution supplies authoritative proposals.
- A podcast offers explanation through familiarity with its presenters.

These relationships can overlap, but they create different obligations. Party members may have formal rights; subscribers generally purchase access or support editorial work. A large audience is not necessarily an organisation capable of collective decision.

James Dennis's preliminary study of the 2026 Scottish campaign suggests a further shift: greater prominence of influencers and high-profile personalities within Instagram and TikTok political communication, alongside less ordinary-user production of partisan material. His interpretation is a movement towards "parasocial media", where relationships with visible personalities become especially important. This is a qualitative campaign study, not a population-wide estimate. [Dennis's 2026 analysis](#)

The implication is important: the migration into cyberspace does not necessarily produce continually more participatory politics. It can also produce a new concentration of communicative authority.

Brexit created a particularly powerful bridge between social divisions and identities outside the parties. Leave and Remain became categories through which people understood themselves and judged others.

Sara Hobolt, Thomas Leeper and James Tilley's "Divided by the Vote" demonstrates that referendum identities crossed party boundaries and generated stereotyping, evaluative bias and emotional division comparable to partisan identities. The study does not establish that social media created those identities. It establishes that strong political attachment can form around an issue independently of inherited party loyalty. [Hobolt, Leeper and Tilley](#)

This altered the relationship between party and political community. Parties increasingly had to compete to represent already organised identities.

The process also helps explain why party switching can coexist with durable ideological division. A person can change party while retaining the same broad understanding of sovereignty, immigration, cultural authority or Britain's place in Europe.

British Election Study research published in June 2026 finds that the values and identities organised around Brexit continue to shape party preferences even when Brexit itself is no longer foremost in voters' minds. [Fieldhouse and Griffiths on Brexit's continuing effects](#)

However, polarisation should not be assumed to result automatically from every form of digital use. Hobolt, Katharina Lawall and Tilley's experimental research found that politically homogeneous online discussion groups increased policy and affective polarisation relative to mixed groups. This establishes a particular mechanism under studied conditions, rather than the total effect of Britain's platform environment. ["The Polarizing Effect of Partisan Echo Chambers"](#)

Parliamentary power can conceal the extent of fragmentation beneath it. The 2024 general election provides a particularly clear illustration.

Party	UK-wide vote share in 2024 Seats won in 2024	
Labour	33.7%	411
Conservative	23.7%	121

Party	UK-wide vote share in 2024	Seats won in 2024
Reform UK	14.3%	5
Liberal Democrats	12.2%	72
Green Party of England and Wales	6.4%	4
SNP	2.5%	9
Plaid Cymru	0.7%	4

These are election results, rather than present parliamentary strengths after subsequent changes. Shares use the UK total; the Scottish Greens are recorded separately. [Official parliamentary results](#)

Labour and the Conservatives together received 57.4% of votes. Labour nevertheless secured approximately 63% of seats. Reform received more votes than the Liberal Democrats but far fewer seats.

The contrast shows why the parliamentary surface alone is misleading. A large governing majority can rest on a fragmented and weakly attached electorate. Equally, a substantial national audience can remain poorly represented if its votes are dispersed.

First-past-the-post also makes perceptions of local viability politically valuable. Edward Fieldhouse and Justin Fisher’s work distinguishes voters’ preferences from the strategic options available to them. Their research reports increasing strategic voting across the elections from 2015 to 2024; the 2026 analysis shows that changing perceptions of party viability can alter who benefits. [Fieldhouse on strategic voting](#)

My inference is that digital communication can have opposing effects here. It can fragment preferences by supporting additional voices, while also coordinating voters around a locally viable candidate. Local organisation, credible constituency information and national audience power therefore interact.

The latest evidence also challenges an exclusively rightward account of fragmentation. James David Griffiths, Edward Fieldhouse and Stuart Perrett’s August 2026 analysis finds that the largest departure from Labour’s 2024 electorate was towards uncertainty or non-voting. Among those choosing another party, left-liberal alternatives received more than Reform. The data largely concern the period before Burnham’s leadership. [British Election Study: Labour support since 2024](#)

This creates a strategic dilemma. An issue that dominates public discussion may not correspond to the principal destination of a party’s departing voters. Parties can misread a highly visible competitor as the only important threat.

The British state is affected through several distinct routes. Public attention influences which matters ministers must address, but detailed state action also depends on expertise, legal authority, institutional relationships and material resources.

The first route is **agenda pressure**. Repeated attention to an issue raises the political cost of ignoring it. The pressure may arise from newspapers, social platforms, campaign organisations or interactions among them.

The second is **policy supply**. Ministers under pressure require proposals. Think tanks, officials, professional associations and campaign specialists can supply definitions, instruments and draft solutions. Here, relatively small organisations may exercise influence disproportionate to their public audience.

The third is **personnel circulation**. Researchers become advisers; advisers become candidates; former officials and politicians enter policy organisations and media. Such movement transfers knowledge, assumptions and relationships. It is more informative to trace specific career and institutional connections than to assume that ideological similarity proves coordinated direction.

The fourth is **conflict over institutional authority**. Britain's constitutional disputes concern who should make decisions, as well as which decisions should be made.

The Judicial Power Project offers a clear example. Richard Ekins and associated scholars argue for limits on judicial authority and stronger protection of parliamentary and lawful executive decision-making. These are substantive constitutional positions with direct policy implications. [Judicial Power Project](#)

The broader intellectual controversy includes J. A. G. Griffith's "The Political Constitution" (1979), Richard Bellamy's *Political Constitutionalism* (2007), Adam Tomkins's work, and competing accounts of legal constitutionalism. These traditions cannot be reduced to today's party alignments.

The 2019 *Miller/Cherry* judgment demonstrates the complexity. The Supreme Court held the prorogation unlawful because it frustrated Parliament's constitutional functions without reasonable justification. Its justification invoked parliamentary sovereignty and accountability. Thus, defenders and critics of judicial intervention could both appeal to democracy while disagreeing about the appropriate allocation of authority. Supreme Court press summary

The UK's institutional starting point also differs from systems with a general judicial power to invalidate parliamentary legislation. Parliament's own account states that courts generally cannot overrule its legislation. Political analysis must distinguish judicial review of executive action from the invalidation of Westminster statutes. [Parliament's authority](#)

Digital communication intensifies these disputes by making institutional arguments available as emotionally immediate narratives: executive overreach, unaccountable judges, obstructive bureaucracy or betrayed democratic decisions. Understanding their force requires examining both the underlying constitutional doctrines and their public presentation.

A fifth route is **material constraint**. Political authority does not eliminate dependence on investment, borrowing conditions, administrative capability or the functioning of essential systems. The 2022 gilt-market crisis exposed this sharply. The Bank of England intervened because market dysfunction threatened financial stability and credit conditions. [Bank of England's announcement](#)

A government may therefore possess a parliamentary majority and an assertive public narrative while lacking the practical conditions necessary to sustain its programme.

Finally, the state increasingly regulates the communication environment itself. The Online Safety Act assigns responsibilities to services used in Britain, including providers based abroad, with Ofcom overseeing compliance. This creates another arena of political conflict concerning safety, expression, privacy and private platform authority. [Ofcom's account of the framework](#)

There is a distinctive sovereignty problem here: national political movements increasingly depend on communication infrastructures whose ownership and principal operational decisions lie outside national party institutions.

Scotland and Wales make a single, England-centred account of British transformation inadequate. Their national identities, institutions and electoral arenas organise political interpretation differently.

Tom Nairn's *The Break-up of Britain* (1977) remains foundational for understanding the Union as a historically constructed multinational state. Michael Keating's *State and Nation in the United Kingdom: The Fractured Union* (2021) develops a more contemporary institutional account. Ailsa Henderson and Richard Wyn Jones's *Englishness: The Political Force Transforming Britain* (2021) examines the often insufficiently recognised English dimension.

The Scottish independence movement demonstrates how a constitutional cause can support civic and intellectual activity extending beyond its principal party. Such an environment can strengthen a party while retaining the capacity to criticise it. Independence support and support for the SNP consequently require separate analysis.

The Scottish election of May 2026 also illustrates a distinct competitive structure: the SNP won 58 seats, Labour and Reform 17 each, the Scottish Greens 15, Conservatives 12 and Liberal Democrats 10. This distribution cannot be read simply as the Scottish expression of Westminster's party hierarchy. [Scottish Parliament results](#)

In Wales, questions of language, national recognition, economic development and self-government similarly interact with wider British arguments. The existence of several political publics means that identical messages can acquire different meanings across the Union.

Digital communication can strengthen these national publics by lowering the costs of publishing and organising. It can simultaneously expose them to common British and international controversies. The relationship between territorial autonomy and communicative integration is therefore an ongoing source of political tension.

For sustained study, the following works provide the most useful complementary explanations:

Author or authors	Principal work	Main contribution to your question
Stuart Hall	<i>The Hard Road to Renewal</i> (1988)	How different grievances are combined into a political outlook that becomes popular common sense
Richard Cockett	<i>Thinking the Unthinkable</i> (1994)	Intellectual organisation preceding changes in government policy
Colin Crouch; Peter Mair	<i>Post-Democracy</i> (2004); <i>Ruling the Void</i> (2013)	The weakening of popular embeddedness and the

Author or authors	Principal work	Main contribution to your question
		professionalisation of political leadership
Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley	<i>The New Politics of Class</i> (2017)	How changes in parties contribute to exclusion and political withdrawal
Maria Sobolewska and Robert Ford	<i>Brexitland</i> (2020)	Education, diversity and identity as foundations of realignment
Will Jennings and Gerry Stoker	“The Bifurcation of Politics” (2016)	The geographical divergence of political experience within England
Andrew Chadwick	<i>The Hybrid Media System</i> , second edition (2017)	Power through interaction between established and digital media
Katharine Dommett and Luke Temple	“Digital Campaigning” (2018)	Campaign infrastructures and supporter relationships outside party control
Paolo Gerbaudo	<i>The Digital Party</i> (2018/2019)	Expanded online participation alongside concentrated leadership
James Dennis	<i>Beyond Slacktivism</i> (2018), and subsequent campaign studies	Connections between digital participation, organisation and political consumption
Alan Finlayson	“This is Not a Critique” (2023)	Independent ideological production organised around personalities and audiences
Sara Hobolt, Thomas Leeper and James Tilley	“Divided by the Vote” (2021)	Strong issue-based identities that cross party boundaries
Brett Christophers	<i>Rentier Capitalism</i> (2020)	The underlying distribution of ownership and economic power
Michael Keating; Ailsa Henderson and Richard Wyn Jones	<i>State and Nation in the United Kingdom; Englishness</i> (both 2021)	The multinational state and the political force of national identities

The most productive explanation combines these approaches. Hall helps explain the construction of political meaning; Evans and Tilley explain failures of representation; Sobolewska and Ford explain social realignment; Chadwick explains circulation; Dommett and Temple explain organisational change; Finlayson explains the growing autonomy of ideological personalities.

My central interpretation is that Britain is experiencing a redistribution of functions previously held together more closely by parties. Political education, belonging, campaigning, candidate selection, policy development and government now operate through organisations whose boundaries overlap only partially.

That arrangement creates several unresolved pressures. Parties need audiences they cannot fully control. Commentators can demand policies without bearing responsibility for implementation. Policy organisations may shape government without attracting mass attention. Leaders can gain direct public authority while becoming less dependent on the internal institutions that scrutinise them.

The decisive question for Britain's next political phase is therefore how these separate capacities are brought together. Durable power will depend on whether a political formation can connect a persuasive account of social experience with organised supporters, geographically effective electoral support, credible personnel and implementable policy. Digital reach changes the possibilities at every stage; the connections between those stages determine its consequences for the state.

France

France has undergone a redistribution of the political functions once concentrated in parties. Intellectuals and policy institutes formulate interpretations and programmes; broadcasters and online personalities organize attention; parties select candidates and negotiate alliances; administrative institutions supply governing expertise. Social media increasingly connects these activities without requiring citizens to pass through party membership.

Your hypothesis therefore identifies a major transformation. Its strongest application concerns **access to public attention and mobilization**. Its application to governing power is more limited: electoral organization, parliamentary bargaining and administrative competence remain decisive.

I have prepared a detailed, 17-page report with footnotes, 37 source entries and an annotated author guide: [French_Political_Organization.docx](#).

The following develops the principal findings.

The first distinction is between political visibility and political organization. France's digital transformation does not mean that established media have ceased to matter. The Reuters Institute's 2026 survey finds that 29% of French respondents obtain some news from creators, but only 3% say creators meet all their news needs. Television news use remained stable compared with the preceding year. These are consumption measures, not estimates of persuasion. [Reuters Institute, France 2026](#).

The underlying organization of French politics can be mapped as follows:

Political function	Important actors	What digital communication changes
Interpreting society	Scholars, essayists, journals, think tanks	Ideas can reach substantial audiences outside party education
Defining public priorities	Editors, broadcasters, commentators, pollsters	Online controversies increasingly influence editorial selection
Mobilizing supporters	Leaders, activists, creators, associations	Participation becomes easier and less dependent on membership
Selecting representatives	Party leaderships, candidates, local officials	Leaders can recruit through national visibility, while nominations remain controlled
Forming governing support	Parties and parliamentary groups	Public pressure intensifies, but bargaining remains necessary
Formulating and implementing policy	Ministries, experts, administrative and legal institutions	Public demands arrive faster, while implementation retains its institutional requirements

This is an analytical map, rather than a claim that these actors constitute a coordinated hierarchy. Shared vocabulary can result from intellectual influence, professional familiarity or common interests. Demonstrating organizational control requires stronger evidence.

France's presidential institutions made the country particularly receptive to personalized digital politics. A nationally prominent individual can build an electoral movement around the ambition to capture the presidency. Social media reduces the communication costs of this strategy.

Bernard Manin had already identified the preceding transformation in *Principes du gouvernement représentatif* (1995), translated as *The Principles of Representative Government* (1997). His concept of **audience democracy** describes the growing importance of candidates' public presentation and voters' judgments of personalities relative to inherited party attachments. Contemporary platforms intensify a development that began in the broadcasting era. [Manin's book and contents](#).

My interpretation is that platforms change this relationship in two directions. Leaders can address supporters continuously, while supporters can produce and distribute political material themselves. Yet the resulting communication can remain highly centralized: the leadership controls the principal account, supporter database, strategic announcements and access to candidacy.

The French presidency also encourages an organizational sequence in which national recognition precedes durable party construction. This can work effectively during an election while creating difficulties afterward. An audience assembled around a person does not automatically become an organization capable of negotiating disagreements, recruiting competent personnel and sustaining policy through setbacks.

Macronism illustrates the combination of organizational innovation and established elite resources. Its initial promise joined economic reform, European integration, innovation and managerial competence with an appeal to transcend the inherited left-right division.

The important sociological question is how a new electoral vehicle acquired access to resources already distributed across government, professional networks, business and public debate. Bernard Dolez, Julien Fretel and Rémi Lefebvre's *L'entreprise Macron* (2019) investigates the construction of this political enterprise. Lefebvre's subsequent comparison of LREM and LFI examines the concentration of authority within organizations presenting themselves as movements. [Lefebvre's comparative analysis](#).

The surrounding intellectual infrastructure contains several distinct institutions:

Institution	Intellectual orientation or function	Organizational significance
Institut Montaigne	Operational policy research involving business, experts and public actors	Supplies proposals and recognized policy expertise
Terra Nova	Independent progressive policy thinking	Connects research, public officials, social partners and public debate
Fondapol	Liberal and European intellectual orientation	Produces policy arguments and interpretations of public opinion
Fondation Jean-Jaurès	Socialist intellectual heritage, research and historical work	Preserves an intellectual milieu beyond the PS's electoral fluctuations
Institut La Boétie	Research and political education associated with LFI	Connects intellectual production, programmes and activist training
Institut Iliade	European identitarian cultural formation	Organizes training, publications and cultural transmission outside ordinary party structures

These relationships differ substantially. Institut La Boétie has an explicit connection to the insoumis political project; independent institutes such as Terra Nova should not be treated as departments of a party.

Bruno Amable and Stefano Palombarini offer a particularly relevant interpretation in *L'Illusion du bloc bourgeois* (2017). They understand Macron's project as an attempt to construct a new social coalition around European integration and market reform after the weakening of older governing coalitions. Their "bourgeois bloc" is an explanatory concept about social support for policy, rather than a claim that all elite actors coordinate their decisions. [Publisher's presentation](#).

The resulting organizational asymmetry is important: **a movement can possess extensive governing expertise and relatively weak institutions of everyday social attachment**. Digital communication helps distribute its programme, but cannot by itself create settings in which supporters influence policy or work through disagreements.

The nationalist right combines an established party with a broader struggle over cultural legitimacy. The RN predates contemporary platforms and brings accumulated electoral recognition, organizational continuity and activists into its digital strategy.

Jordan Bardella's online presentation illustrates the adaptation of this established organization to personal familiarity, short video and youth-cultural references. His digital prominence developed within the RN's division of political labour. It should therefore be interpreted as a

party's cultivation of a personal public brand. [Contemporary reporting on Bardella's TikTok strategy](#).

The wider intellectual field contains several traditions:

- National sovereignty and the authority of the state.
- Immigration restriction and assimilation.
- Social protection combined with national preference.
- Catholic social conservatism.
- Market-oriented conservatism.
- The Nouvelle Droite's cultural and metapolitical project.

Their differences matter. Alain de Benoist's intellectual tradition cannot simply be equated with Catholic conservatism, Gaullism or the RN's electoral programme.

The concept of **metapolitics** is especially relevant to your question. It concerns efforts to reshape cultural assumptions and the boundaries of legitimate discussion before, or independently of, winning elections. Jean-Yves Camus, Nicolas Lebourg, Tamir Bar-On and Stéphane François are important researchers of these intellectual environments.

Éric Zemmour represents another route: the conversion of a career in commentary into an electoral enterprise. Périne Schir and Marlène Laruelle's study argues that his limited electoral results should not obscure his influence on the ideological agenda. Their analysis helps distinguish success in changing public discussion from success in obtaining office. [Schir and Laruelle, 2022](#).

Media ownership and social platforms can reinforce one another. A broadcaster selects recurring subjects and speakers; extracts circulate online; reactions sustain controversy; politicians respond to the apparent importance of the issue.

Research by Julia Cagé, Moritz Hengel, Nicolas Hervé and Camille Urvoy identifies substantial effects of outlet-level editorial choices on French broadcasting. Their working paper also examines changes associated with Bolloré's takeover. This supports investigating ownership as a mechanism of political influence, while leaving the size of any electoral effect unresolved. [The authors' account of their research](#).

Influence also runs in the opposite direction. Cagé, Nicolas Hervé and Béatrice Mazoyer's working paper on French-language Twitter activity finds that social popularity increases mainstream coverage, particularly among outlets more dependent on advertising. Platforms therefore affect politics partly by influencing what established journalists cover. [Research abstract and publication status](#).

The implication is that the relevant unit of analysis is often an **interconnected media environment**. Counting a party's followers captures only part of the circulation of its arguments. Equally, counting television audiences misses the subsequent online life of broadcast material.

Creators themselves perform different roles. HugoDécrypte offers an informational gateway; openly partisan commentators seek ideological persuasion; sympathetic entertainment creators

may intervene only during elections. These actors should be distinguished from party employees and formally coordinated campaign networks.

La France insoumise combines digital mobilization with deliberate intellectual construction. Its project joins redistribution, republican language, ecological planning and a claim to represent the people against an oligarchic order.

The connection to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe is documented through Mélenchon's published discussion with them. Their approach treats the political "people" as something constructed by connecting heterogeneous demands through a common opposition. This helps interpret LFI's effort to unite social, ecological and democratic grievances. [Mélenchon's publication of the discussion](#).

Institut La Boétie adds an institutional dimension: research and political education accompany communication and campaigning. LFI consequently demonstrates that digital politics can generate renewed investment in doctrine and training.

Manuel Cervera-Marzal's *Le populisme de gauche. Sociologie de la France insoumise* (2021) and Lefebvre's organizational studies raise a different question: how much influence do activists possess over strategic decisions? Freedom to initiate local activity does not necessarily entail influence over leadership or nominations.

This distinction is central to the transformation of party organization. Removing intermediate structures can make participation easier while reducing the collective mechanisms through which members constrain leaders.

The left also faces difficulties that communication cannot resolve. Industrial workers, precarious metropolitan employees, students, public-sector workers and disadvantaged suburban populations may share concerns about inequality while differing over Europe, policing, secularism, international politics and environmental policy.

The conflict over republican universalism cuts across this wider reorganization. One tradition understands equal citizenship through common institutions that avoid organizing public life around racial or religious membership. Other approaches argue that formally universal arrangements can conceal persistent discrimination.

These positions have variants across party boundaries. They concern the French state's own categories of legitimacy: equality, citizenship, secularism and the general interest. Social media makes conflicts over these categories more immediately visible and more easily personalized.

Ecological thought introduces another organizing principle. Bruno Latour's *Où atterrir?* (2017), followed by his work with Nikolaj Schultz, asks how political interests change when dependence on conditions of habitation becomes central. The practical challenge is to connect ecological objectives with employment, transport, housing and living costs. An environmental proposal can be intellectually coherent while failing to construct a socially convincing coalition.

The Gilets jaunes reveal the strength and limits of mobilization outside parties. Digital communication helped coordinate action, while physical gathering places supported relationships and collective identities. Pierre Boyer, Thomas Delemotte, Germain Gauthier, Vincent Rollet and Benoît Schmutz find reciprocal reinforcement between online activity and

blockades, together with heterogeneous electoral consequences. [The Gilets jaunes: Offline and Online](#).

The broader organizational lesson is that mobilization and representation require different capacities. Participants can agree to protest without agreeing who may negotiate on their behalf. Informal spokespersons can acquire large audiences without acquiring a corresponding representative mandate.

Pierre Rosanvallon's *La contre-démocratie* (2006) helps explain the wider phenomenon. Political activity includes monitoring, obstructing and judging power alongside electoral authorization. Applied to contemporary France, his framework explains how intense participation can coexist with detachment from parties.

The governmental difficulty follows directly: widespread refusal may coexist with disagreement over an alternative. Digital communication can expose and coordinate dissatisfaction more rapidly than organizations can develop procedures for negotiating a settlement.

The social structure beneath these audiences remains essential. Julia Cagé and Thomas Piketty's *Une histoire du conflit politique* (2023) relates electoral divisions to wealth, education and geographical inequalities. Their work complicates a simple metropolitan–peripheral opposition: poor suburbs differ from wealthy suburbs, and rural areas also contain sharply different social positions. [Authors' account and accompanying data](#).

An Ipsos survey surrounding the 2024 legislative election illustrates the differentiation. RN and allied support was estimated at 57% among voting manual workers; NFP support reached 37% among voters with at least three years of higher education. These figures concern electoral participation categories, and should not be generalized to all workers or graduates. [Ipsos electoral sociology](#).

Digital audiences therefore develop within unequal social experiences. Similar pressures can be interpreted as unfair distribution, territorial abandonment, loss of sovereignty or ecological injustice. Intellectual and political competition helps determine which interpretation acquires authority.

Jérôme Fourquet's *L'Archipel français* (2019) emphasizes the fragmentation of shared social and cultural reference points. Vincent Tiberj's *La droitisation française* (2024) challenges the inference that the right's electoral advances demonstrate a uniform conservative transformation of citizens' values. He distinguishes public attitudes from political representation and media agendas. [Tiberj's explanation in an interview](#).

Florent Gougou's critical review adds that participation inequalities do not fully explain electoral outcomes. Issue priorities, available alternatives and perceived competence also matter. A population's values cannot be translated directly into a hypothetical parliamentary majority. [Gougou's review](#).

The administrative state remains a separate source of political intellectual power. Ministries and specialist institutions define problems through legal categories, budgetary procedures, eligibility rules and implementation routines. A proposal acquires a different form when translated into these instruments.

Pierre Bourdieu's *La noblesse d'État* explains the relationship between elite formation and different kinds of authority. Pierre Lascoumes and Patrick Le Galès' *Gouverner par les instruments* directs attention to the political choices embedded in apparently technical mechanisms.

The extension to digital politics is that a leader may acquire an audience rapidly while remaining dependent on established expertise to govern. Public communication can change the urgency of a demand; it cannot supply all the legal and administrative knowledge necessary to implement it.

Parliamentary institutions impose another conversion requirement. The 2024 election produced several substantial camps without an absolute majority. Constituency contests, alliances and withdrawals shaped the result alongside national campaigning. [Official 2024 legislative results](#).

The Constitution also distinguishes presidential authority from governmental responsibility before Parliament. Article 49.3 is a specified governmental procedure subject to the possibility of successful censure; it is not an unlimited personal presidential power. [French Constitution](#).

These arrangements help explain a characteristic instability: leaders compete through strongly personalized national promises, but governing requires accommodation among institutions and groups with different interests. Weak internal party mediation can make every compromise a crisis of personal credibility.

For a sustained investigation, the most useful authors can be organized by the question they answer:

Question

Principal authors and works

How did parties lose their exclusive representative role?

Bernard Manin, *Principes du gouvernement représentatif*; **Frédéric Sawicki and Rémi Lefebvre**, studies of partisan networks and organization

How can political activity expand outside elections?

Pierre Rosanvallon, *La contre-démocratie*

Why does participation remain socially unequal?

Daniel Gaxie, *Le cens caché*; **Julien Boyadjian**, *Jeunesses connectées*

How do platforms reorganize public expression?

Dominique Cardon, *La démocratie Internet and Culture numérique*

What professional work sustains digital campaigns?

Anaïs Theviot, *Big data électoral* and research on YouTube campaigning

How do formal parties relate to surrounding online activists?

Julien Boyadjian and Stéphanie Wojcik, comparative research on RN, Reconquête, LREM and LFI

How do participation and leadership concentration coexist?

Paolo Gerbaudo, *The Digital Party*; **Lefebvre**; **Manuel Cervera-Marzal**, *Le populisme de gauche*

What social coalition underlies Macronism?

Bruno Amable and Stefano Palombarini, *L'Illusion du bloc bourgeois*

How do class and territory structure voting?

Julia Cagé and Thomas Piketty, *Une histoire du conflit politique*

Question	Principal authors and works
How should fragmentation and rightward change be assessed?	Jérôme Fourquet, Vincent Tiberj, Florent Gougou
How are nationalist intellectual traditions organized?	Jean-Yves Camus, Nicolas Lebourg, Tamir Bar-On, Stéphane François
How does media prominence become political influence?	Cagé and collaborators; Cointet, Cardon and collaborators; Périne Schir and Marlène Laruelle
How do political projects become state action?	Pierre Bourdieu; Pierre Lascoumes and Patrick Le Galès

The synthesis I would draw from these literatures is that **France's parties have become less exclusive intermediaries while remaining indispensable points of conversion**. Intellectual authority, audience reach, activist participation, electoral representation and governing expertise increasingly develop in different settings. Successful political projects must reconnect them.

The decisive future questions are consequently organizational: whether the nationalist right can combine visibility with allies and governing competence; whether the left can sustain cooperation among constituencies with divergent priorities; and whether the governing centre can reproduce durable support beyond a presidential personality. Digital reach changes the conditions under which these tasks are attempted, but their accomplishment still requires institutions capable of turning attention into sustained collective action.

Germany

Germany's political transformation is best understood as a redistribution of power among parties, organised interests, intellectual networks, professional media, and digital platforms. Your hypothesis captures a major change: parties have lost much of their ability to determine which political voices reach the public. However, the German evidence supports a distinction between **control over political attention**, which has become much more dispersed, and **control over binding state decisions**, which remains strongly organised through parties, parliamentary coalitions, federal institutions, administration, and courts.

This distinction explains an apparent contradiction. A political movement can become highly influential in public debate while remaining excluded from government. Conversely, a relatively inconspicuous research institute, employer association, or legal network can exercise considerable influence over policy without attracting a mass following.

The electoral changes are substantial. In the February 2025 federal election, CDU/CSU received 28.5%, AfD 20.8%, SPD 16.4%, the Greens 11.6%, and Die Linke 8.8%. The resulting CDU/CSU–SPD majority initially comprised 328 of 630 seats. More recently, the provisional result of the September 2026 Saxony-Anhalt election put the AfD at 43.8%. These results demonstrate the scale of political realignment; they do not, by themselves, establish how much of it was caused by social media. [Federal election results](#), [Saxony-Anhalt provisional results](#).

To examine the processes beneath these electoral outcomes, I would distinguish five forms of political power:

Form of power	Central question	Principal holders in Germany
Intellectual power	Who supplies the concepts through which problems are understood?	Scholars, foundations, policy institutes, journalists, movement intellectuals
Communicative power	Who makes particular problems, interpretations, and personalities publicly prominent?	Broadcasters, publishers, platforms, influencers, party communicators
Mobilising power	Who converts attention into participation, donations, membership, or votes?	Parties, movements, campaign organisations, local and digital networks
Decision-making power	Who assembles majorities and determines policy?	Parliamentary parties, coalition leaderships, governments
Implementation and constraint	Who determines what decisions actually accomplish?	Ministries, Länder, municipalities, courts, EU institutions, organised economic actors

The transformation is uneven across these levels. Much of the confusion surrounding “digital politics” arises from treating success at one level as proof of dominance at all the others.

The older German system rested on relatively durable connections between social environments and political organisations. Christian democracy drew strength from churches, local associations, business communities, and conservative social milieus. Social democracy developed through industrial employment, trade unions, municipal politics, and working-class organisations. Liberalism had support among professionals, entrepreneurs, and sections of the educated middle class. The Greens subsequently institutionalised parts of the environmental, feminist, peace, and alternative movements.

These connections were never complete or mechanically determining. Nevertheless, they created repeated contact between citizens and political organisations outside election campaigns. Political preferences developed through workplaces, associations, newspapers, families, and local activities.

M. Rainer Lepsius’s concept of *social-moral milieus* provides an important historical starting point. Otto Kirchheimer’s analysis of the *catch-all party* explains the subsequent effort to loosen narrow social attachments and appeal to broader electorates. Richard Katz and Peter Mair’s *cartel-party* thesis addresses a further possibility: parties can become less deeply rooted in society while remaining strongly embedded in state resources and institutions. These are earlier theoretical frameworks, rather than empirical studies of today’s platforms, but they identify the organisational changes upon which digital communication operates.

The long decline of party membership is real, yet its recent development is more complicated than uninterrupted organisational collapse. Oskar Niedermayer’s compilation shows that membership across the parties covered more than halved between 1990 and 2024, but increased overall by 3.2% during 2024. The Greens, Die Linke, and AfD all grew substantially that year. Digital mobilisation can therefore contribute to renewed party recruitment. It does not necessarily eliminate membership organisation. [Niedermayer, *Parteimitglieder in Deutschland: Version 2025*](#).

The underlying change is that party membership and inherited party identification have become less necessary for sustained political involvement. Someone can now participate daily in a political environment—following commentators, sharing interpretations, donating, attending demonstrations—without belonging to a party. Parties consequently compete with other organisations for the loyalty and activity of politically engaged citizens.

The shift into cyberspace is pronounced, but Germany has retained a substantial common news infrastructure. This matters when assessing the proposition that social media have already largely replaced previous channels.

The German component of the 2025 Reuters Institute study reported:

News-use measure	German adult internet users
Used online news at least weekly	66%
Used television news at least weekly	61%
Used social media for news at least weekly	33%

News-use measure	German adult internet users
Considered television their most important news source	43%
Considered internet sources their most important news source	42%
Among 18–24-year-olds: encountered news only through social media	17%

The weekly categories overlap. These figures concern news use, not all political communication. The researchers also found that professional news organisations and journalists attracted the most attention for news on social platforms, including among younger respondents. [Hans-Bredow-Institut, German findings for 2025](#).

The 2026 report reinforces this qualification: television and online news reach had remained broadly stable in recent years, social news showed a slight upward trend, and print continued to decline. Public-service news and local or regional newspapers remained particularly trusted among the sources surveyed. [Hölig, Behre and Möller, *Digital News Report 2026: Germany*](#).

Thus three different transformations must be distinguished: the decline of printed distribution; the migration of established journalism onto digital channels; and the emergence of political communicators who operate independently of journalism. They coexist, but have different consequences for power.

The social foundations of political conflict have also changed independently of communication technology. Germany's digital transformation interacts with differences in education, occupation, property ownership, region, generation, and experience of cultural recognition.

Andreas Reckwitz offers one influential interpretation. In *Das Ende der Illusionen* (2019), he connects postindustrial change to tensions among a new, highly educated middle class, an older middle class, and precarious social groups. The conflict involves both material resources and the social valuation of ways of life. Qualifications, mobility, cultural openness, and distinctive lifestyles acquire prestige, while other occupational and cultural identities experience relative devaluation. [Reckwitz, *Das Ende der Illusionen*](#).

Applied to German politics, this helps explain why an argument about energy, migration, or language can become an argument about social standing. A dispute over heating regulations may involve household expenditure, ownership, trust in expertise, and resentment at perceived moral instruction. A dispute over migration may combine labour-market considerations, municipal capacity, cultural identity, and the question of whose concerns receive legitimate recognition.

My interpretation is that digital communication makes these different dimensions easier to compress into a recognisable conflict. A complex distributional problem can become a confrontation between ordinary households and supposedly detached elites; alternatively, opposition to a policy can be presented as evidence of selfishness or hostility to progress. Both compressions make communication easier while obscuring differences within each side.

However, Germany should not be imagined as two internally uniform populations separated by an all-encompassing cultural divide. Steffen Mau, Thomas Lux, and Linus

Westheuser's *Triggerpunkte* (2023) supplies an empirical corrective. Across inequality, migration, diversity and gender, and climate policy, they identify considerable agreement on broad objectives alongside sharp disagreements at particular points. Conflict intensifies around perceived unfairness, interference, loss of control, or violations of normal expectations. [Mau, Lux and Westheuser, *Triggerpunkte*](#).

This suggests a mechanism especially relevant to your question: political entrepreneurs need not manufacture an entirely new worldview. They can repeatedly activate selected points of conflict and assemble an audience around them. The loudness of the resulting confrontation may exceed the underlying ideological distance across the population.

Eastern Germany gives these processes a distinctive institutional and historical setting. Applying a national social-media explanation uniformly across Germany would miss much of what requires explanation.

Steffen Mau's *Lütten Klein* (2019) examines the interaction between the GDR inheritance and the post-1989 transformation: changes in employment, status, ownership, demography, and the composition of elites. His later *Ungleich vereint* (2024) challenges the expectation that eastern society will simply converge toward western patterns. [Mau, Lütten Klein, *Mau discussing Ungleich vereint*](#).

Party organisation is one measurable difference. Niedermayer's 2024 figures put party membership at approximately 0.94% of the eligible population in the East, compared with 1.77% in the West. The organisational channels through which discontent might be negotiated are therefore differently developed.

A plausible inference is that digital counterpublics have greater room to become primary political environments where established institutions possess weaker everyday roots. Yet the successful combination is often digital communication with territorial presence: local activists, demonstrations, municipal candidates, and recognisable regional personalities.

This also explains why economic deprivation alone is insufficient. Political dissatisfaction can concern control, dignity, representation, or the perception that authoritative interpretations of one's experience are produced elsewhere. At the same time, eastern Germany contains large differences between cities, smaller towns, regions, and generations. It is an internally differentiated political space.

Germany's foundations and policy organisations remain a major infrastructure for producing political ideas and recruiting personnel. Their importance is easily missed when analysis concentrates on prominent politicians or viral videos.

The principal party-associated foundations form a recognisable institutional map:

Political tradition	Associated foundation	Main contribution to the wider political environment
CDU Christian democracy	Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung	Political education, research, scholarships, international relationships
CSU Christian democracy	Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung	Political education and policy work within a distinct Christian-social tradition

Political tradition	Associated foundation	Main contribution to the wider political environment
SPD social democracy	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung	Social-democratic research, training, public debate, international networks
FDP liberalism	Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung	Liberal political education and policy debate
Green politics	Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung	Ecological, democratic, feminist, and international-policy work
Democratic socialism	Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung	Research and education concerning capitalism, inequality, and social movements

These organisations possess institutional identities distinct from the parties. Their work sustains intellectual continuity across elections through publications, scholarships, conferences, archives, and relationships between scholars and practitioners. The foundations' joint declaration explicitly describes these functions. [Joint declaration of the political foundations](#).

The sociological significance extends beyond individual policy recommendations. These institutions help establish what counts as a relevant problem, a credible expert, a plausible reform, or a promising political career. Their influence accumulates over time.

Digital communication changes how this work circulates. A foundation's lengthy study may reach a relatively specialised readership, while a graphic, podcast appearance, or short explanatory video distributes its central argument much more widely. The public may encounter the argument without recognising the institution that developed or financed it.

Organised economic interests have adapted to this environment. The Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft, or INSM, provides a particularly clear example. Its own account describes it as both a think tank and a campaign organisation. It combines commissioned research, economic arguments, graphics, social media, conventional media, and events. It states that its financing comes from metal and electrical industry employers through Gesamtmetall. [INSM's institutional account](#).

This is a direct challenge to any assumption that digital communication necessarily transfers power from established organisations to independent individuals. An established interest can finance expertise, translate it into accessible content, and distribute it through the same channels used by challengers.

On the labour side, the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung supplies research, scholarships, and expertise concerning codetermination, employment, and macroeconomic policy. Its WSI and IMK sustain arguments that can enter trade-union negotiations, parliamentary debate, journalism, and digital campaigning. [Hans-Böckler-Stiftung](#).

The relevant conflict therefore includes competition between organised producers of knowledge. A debate about competitiveness or public investment is also a struggle over which economic model supplies the accepted baseline.

Other institutions cross party boundaries. Agora Energiewende translates climate and energy expertise into policy proposals and convenes actors from politics, business, science, and civil society. Its ecological orientation overlaps with Green concerns, but its institutional identity

cannot simply be reduced to the Greens. Bertelsmann Stiftung similarly advances reform projects through studies, comparisons, and public discussion without functioning as an electoral party. [Agora Energiewende](#), [Bertelsmann Stiftung](#).

For mapping these environments, three relationships require separate evidence: formal affiliation, documented financing or ownership, and overlapping ideas or personnel. Shared vocabulary establishes intellectual proximity; it does not automatically establish central coordination.

The New Right has developed a particularly explicit strategy for influencing the intellectual environment before securing governmental authority. Its concept of *metapolitics* concerns the cultural conditions under which political claims become acceptable: understandings of nationhood, historical memory, belonging, sovereignty, and legitimate opposition.

The historical Schnellroda environment around the Institut für Staatspolitik, Antaios, and *Sezession* illustrates this strategy. Götz Kubitschek, Karlheinz Weißmann, Erik Lehnert, and Martin Lichtmesz have occupied different positions within the broader publishing and intellectual milieu. Dieter Stein's *Junge Freiheit* represents a partly different approach to gaining influence and respectability.

Helmut Kellershohn's work is valuable because it reconstructs actual relationships rather than treating "the right" as a single actor. His analysis follows connections among publishing, political education, PEGIDA, and conflicts inside the AfD, including the interaction between Kubitschek and Björn Höcke. [Kellershohn, "Es geht um Einfluss auf die Köpfe"](#).

Volker Weiß's *Die autoritäre Revolte* (2017) supplies the historical genealogy of this intellectual field, including its uses of earlier ant liberal and authoritarian traditions. His more recent work examines political reinterpretations of German history. These are critical interpretations whose arguments should be assessed alongside the actors' own texts. [Körber-Stiftung interview and bibliography](#).

Digital platforms enlarge the possible audience for these projects, but intellectual influence does not require most voters to read theoretical books. Concepts can travel through intermediaries: a book influences an activist; the activist supplies a slogan or frame; a politician or commentator popularises it; repeated circulation makes it familiar.

The process also operates in reverse. Audience responses select which ideological themes receive further investment. Intellectual production and platform feedback increasingly interact.

The wider alternative-media environment is heterogeneous and extends beyond Germany's territorial boundaries. German-language publishing and video markets connect audiences in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. They contain conventional conservative commentary, strongly partisan journalism, movement media, conspiracy-oriented channels, and more explicitly radical outlets.

Annett Heft, Eva Mayerhöffer, Susanne Reinhardt, and Curd Knüpfer's *Beyond Breitbart* compares right-wing digital news infrastructures across six countries. Its value lies in distinguishing organisational forms, financing, journalistic presentation, and national contexts.

It discourages treating every outlet as interchangeable or assuming an American model applies unchanged to Germany. [Heft and colleagues, *Beyond Breitbart*](#).

The organisational innovation is that an outlet can simultaneously provide news interpretation, identity, community, donations, merchandise, events, and political mobilisation. Its audience becomes a resource that can persist across different controversies.

Josef Holnburger's research on Telegram traces this continuity within conspiracy-oriented and far-right environments. Channels and local groups formed during pandemic protests could later circulate material about Russia, Ukraine, energy, or other grievances. The durable element was partly the network and its relationship to distrusted institutions, even as the immediate issue changed. [Holnburger, *Chronology of a Radicalization*](#).

This helps explain political alignment that appears inconsistent when judged only by conventional party programmes. Different grievances can be integrated through a common account of who supposedly exercises illegitimate power.

Pandemic mobilisation revealed a form of opposition that cannot be understood entirely through older class or party categories. Carolin Amlinger and Oliver Nachtwey's *Gekränkte Freiheit* (2022) develops the concept of *libertarian authoritarianism*. They examine how strong expectations of individual autonomy can coexist with powerlessness, resentment, and hostility toward collective obligations.

Their argument is that some forms of authoritarian opposition arise from frustrated promises of self-determination rather than straightforward attachment to traditional obedience. It is a case-based interpretation, especially relevant to particular pandemic protest environments; it should not be applied indiscriminately to everyone who criticised pandemic restrictions. [Amlinger and Nachtwey, *Gekränkte Freiheit*](#).

For the present analysis, the important implication is that digital political communities can assemble people with quite different previous identities. Their cohesion may depend more on common distrust and repeated interaction than on a consistent inherited ideology.

Nor does such cohesion require every communication to contain fabricated information. Svenja Boberg, Thorsten Quandt, Tim Schatto-Eckrodt, and Lena Frischlich's research on alternative media during the early pandemic emphasises selective and threatening interpretations of events. Political worldview formation depends on selection, emphasis, and attribution of responsibility as well as factual accuracy. [Boberg and colleagues, *Pandemic Populism*](#).

The AfD's organisational significance lies in combining a parliamentary party with a much larger surrounding communication environment. It is simultaneously an electoral organisation, a collection of regional and local structures, a producer of digital content, and a reference point for supportive actors it does not necessarily control.

CeMAS documented approximately 5,700 AfD TikTok videos and 44,000 X posts between November 2024 and February 2025, together with amplification by parts of the Telegram milieu. These figures establish substantial production and circulation, not a quantified electoral effect. [CeMAS, *Authoritarian Strategies Online*](#).

Several mechanisms help explain the organisational advantages of this arrangement.

First, sympathetic communicators can repeat or intensify themes while presenting themselves as independent voices. Second, supporters become distributors, allowing material to circulate beyond official followers. Third, controversy can bring material into established journalism. Fourth, parliamentary speeches provide a recurring supply of recognisable settings, confrontations, and short video extracts.

This produces a feedback process: parliamentary presence supplies material for digital mobilisation; digital visibility can improve the prominence of particular politicians; that prominence can influence internal party competition. The party's internal hierarchy and its external attention hierarchy need not coincide.

Yet digital success also creates vulnerabilities. Personal brands may compete with collective strategy. Provocation that strengthens loyalty within an audience can make cooperation outside it more difficult. High visibility therefore can contribute simultaneously to electoral mobilisation and coalition isolation.

Digital mobilisation is not an exclusive advantage of the right. Die Linke's 2025 revival, including Heidi Reichinnek's prominence, demonstrates that forceful left communication can also gain substantial visibility. Its appeal connected anti-AfD mobilisation with distributive issues such as housing, wealth, and social provision.

A working paper by Kirill Solovev, Chiara Drolsbach, Emma Demirel, and Nicolas Pröllochs analysed 25,292 political TikTok videos from the period preceding the 2025 election. Negative emotion and hostility toward opposing groups were associated with higher engagement, and both AfD and Die Linke performed strongly. The study also found substantial mainstream-party activity: the SPD published more videos overall than the AfD in its dataset. [Solovev and colleagues, *TikTok Rewards Divisive Political Messaging*](#).

The implication is narrower than the claim that a platform inherently belongs to one ideology. Its communication environment can favour clear conflict, recognisable personalities, and emotionally forceful presentation. Different political projects can adapt to those conditions.

The study is observational, however. Engagement does not establish persuasion, and shared communication features do not make different parties ideologically or democratically equivalent.

For Die Linke, the larger organisational question is whether attention becomes sustained recruitment and local activity. An audience becomes a durable political resource when people take responsibility for canvassing, meetings, mutual assistance, and organisational work. This conversion is more consequential than the success of an individual video.

The ecological and progressive environment also combines digital communication with substantial offline organisation. Fridays for Future, environmental associations, scientific networks, feminist initiatives, tenant movements, and antiracist organisations can bring pressure to bear independently of party leaderships.

The Greens consequently occupy a difficult intermediate position. They benefit when ecological and progressive concerns become publicly prominent, but they do not control the movements expressing those concerns. Participation in government exposes them to criticism

from activists who regard compromise as inadequate and from opponents who regard their proposals as intrusive.

Research by Moritz Sommer, Dieter Rucht, Sebastian Haunss, and Sabrina Zajak on Fridays for Future provides an important corrective to purely digital explanations. Their 2019 survey found that personal contacts were central to mobilisation. Digital communication operated through friendship, school, and other social relationships. Sommer and colleagues, German Fridays for Future study.

The analytical lesson is that cyberspace can accelerate and extend organisation whose foundations remain interpersonal. It also enables movements to scrutinise parties continuously, reducing leaderships' ability to manage external expectations through occasional consultation.

CDU/CSU and SPD face the problem of maintaining broad coalitions of supporters under conditions that reward sharper distinctions. Their inherited advantage is organisational breadth: local officeholders, experienced personnel, policy expertise, and the ability to negotiate government. Their communication problem is that governing requires agreements whose rationale may be difficult to express through a short confrontation.

For the Union, this creates tension between recovering voters attracted by the AfD and retaining credibility as a broad governing force. Adopting an opponent's themes may demonstrate responsiveness, but can also strengthen that opponent's interpretation of the political agenda. Refusing those themes may preserve differentiation while leaving some voters feeling unheard.

For the SPD, labour interests, public-service concerns, and socially liberal commitments do not always align neatly. Economic claims must compete for attention with migration, identity, security, and geopolitical disputes. The party's remaining organisational strength does not guarantee that its preferred interpretation of economic problems will structure public debate.

These are strategic dilemmas rather than fixed laws. A party can communicate effectively while governing, and opposition actors can lose credibility. The deeper change is that party leaders must negotiate with multiple partially autonomous audiences whose priorities cannot simply be settled inside party committees.

The FDP illustrates another separation: **the electoral fortunes of a party and the influence of its intellectual tradition can diverge.** Its 4.3% result in 2025 excluded it from the Bundestag, but arguments favouring competition, private enterprise, deregulation, and fiscal restraint retained institutional carriers beyond the party. Employer organisations, campaign bodies, economic commentators, and politicians in other parties can sustain those arguments.

BSW's formation in 2024 provides a different organisational case. A highly recognisable political personality helped assemble a new party around a combination of economic protection, cultural criticism, migration restriction, and opposition to prevailing Ukraine policy. Yet BSW narrowly missed Bundestag representation in 2025, with 4.981%. Personal prominence can lower the cost of launching an organisation while leaving electoral thresholds, recruitment, internal discipline, and governing competence unresolved. [Official 2025 results.](#)

The different platforms perform different organisational functions. Treating "social media" as one homogeneous arena obscures the mechanisms.

Short-video recommendation feeds can expose users to unfamiliar politicians. YouTube and podcasts allow longer interpretive narratives and repeated relationships with speakers. Facebook groups and messaging services can sustain local or issue-based interaction. X can connect politicians, journalists, activists, and commentators in rapid exchanges that influence other media.

These are characteristic uses, not exclusive properties or fixed audience boundaries. The same material can move among several platforms and then appear on television.

Andreas Jungherr, Oliver Posegga, and Jisun An conceptualise the relevant power as the ability to introduce, amplify, and sustain topics, interpretations, and speakers across interconnected communication spaces. Their approach asks who influences whom, rather than assigning a single quantity of power to “the internet.” [Jungherr, Posegga and An, *Discursive Power in Contemporary Media Systems*](#).

This approach also helps identify indirect influence. A small outlet may originate an interpretation, but its wider impact may depend on a major broadcaster taking it up. Both actors exercise power at different points in the process.

Direct communication introduces new intermediaries. Citizens may bypass a party office or newspaper editor, but encounter recommendation systems, moderation rules, platform ownership, advertising structures, and commercially successful personalities.

Philipp Staab and Thorsten Thiel’s work on the digital transformation of the public sphere brings this political economy into the analysis. The public arena is organised partly through privately controlled infrastructures whose objectives do not coincide with democratic representation. [Staab and Thiel’s contribution to the public-sphere debate](#).

My inference is that Germany is experiencing both decentralisation and concentration. More actors can publish, while a smaller number of infrastructure owners acquire considerable influence over discoverability and circulation. Within platforms, attention may itself concentrate around a limited number of successful speakers.

Personalisation consequently changes political authority. A communicator’s credibility can rest on perceived authenticity, familiarity, and loyalty to an audience. Such authority differs from an elected mandate, professional qualification, or organisational office, yet can challenge all three.

Foreign influence enters this environment as an additional layer. CeMAS documented several Russian operations around the 2025 election, including fabricated sites, manipulated content, and coordinated accounts. Their existence should be distinguished from claims about decisive electoral effects. Domestic grievances and domestic political organisation remain necessary parts of the explanation.

The consequences for state functioning arise especially from the gap between rapid mobilisation and slower institutional decision-making. Germany’s constitutional architecture imposes several conversion stages between audience support and government action.

Article 21 of the Basic Law recognises parties' participation in political will formation without giving them a monopoly over public communication. The chancellor ordinarily requires a Bundestag majority. The Länder participate through the Bundesrat and ordinarily administer federal legislation. [Basic Law, Article 21](#), [Article 63](#), [Article 50](#), [Article 83](#).

Fritz W. Scharpf's *joint-decision trap* remains relevant here. His analysis explains how interdependent institutions can preserve arrangements that participants find unsatisfactory because changing them requires agreement among actors with divergent interests. It predates digital platforms, but identifies why political demands can encounter persistent constraints after an election. [Scharpf, "The Joint-Decision Trap"](#).

Combining this with the digital evidence suggests a recurrent tension: promises and accusations circulate quickly, whereas policy requires negotiation, legal preparation, financing, and implementation. Delays become further material for accusations of incompetence, obstruction, or betrayal.

In Luhmannian terms, publicity and collectively binding decision-making remain different operations. Increased communication does not remove the organisational requirements of decision. This is an application of the theoretical distinction, rather than a claim that Luhmann empirically analysed today's platform environment.

Courts and constitutional expertise form another important layer of political influence. Public mobilisation can change which demands become urgent, while legal doctrine, litigation, and judicial interpretation affect which responses are permissible. Lawyers, constitutional scholars, professional associations, and specialist publications therefore participate in political development through channels whose influence is not measured by audience size.

This also makes the constitutional framework itself a subject of political struggle. The December 2024 reform entrenching important structural features of the Federal Constitutional Court in the Basic Law illustrates how actors seek to shape the conditions under which future majorities operate. [Bundestag account of the reform](#).

Analytically, this is a second-order conflict: competition concerns both particular policies and the institutions authorised to limit political change. Arguments about constitutional protection and arguments about excessive insulation from electoral choice should be examined in relation to the specific power and rule at issue.

The regulation of platforms adds a further institutional dimension. Germany's Digital Services Coordinator is located in the Bundesnetzagentur, while enforcement responsibilities are shared with the European Commission under the Digital Services Act. The framework includes transparency, complaints, user protections, and supervision of platform obligations. [German Digital Services Coordinator](#), [European Commission explanation](#).

The state is consequently involved in shaping the infrastructure through which criticism of the state circulates. This creates enduring questions about accountability, freedom of expression, procedural fairness, and the independence of enforcement. Regulation itself becomes a political mobilisation issue.

The scholarly literature is most useful when its competing explanations are brought into dialogue. No single author provides the entire map.

Jürgen Habermas's *Ein neuer Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit und die deliberative Politik* (2022) directly addresses your central concern. He examines whether platform communication weakens the shared public arena needed for democratic opinion and will formation. His distinctive question is how citizens can understand themselves as participants in a common political discussion when communication becomes fragmented. [Habermas, *Ein neuer Strukturwandel*](#).

Its strength is to connect media structure with democratic legitimacy. Its limitation for the present task is that a normative account of a functioning public sphere cannot establish, by itself, which German groups encounter which information or how their votes change. It needs to be combined with audience research and organisational analysis.

Jungherr, Gonzalo Rivero, and Daniel Gayo-Avello's *Retooling Politics* (2020), together with Jungherr and Ralph Schroeder's *Digital Transformations of the Public Arena* (2022), offers a more differentiated account of information, mobilisation, organisation, and infrastructure. Germany is an explicit case in the latter work. [*Retooling Politics*, *Digital Transformations of the Public Arena*](#).

For a focused research programme, the following division of labour among authors is especially productive:

Research problem	Authors and works	What their approach helps establish
Erosion and renewal of party organisation	Oskar Niedermayer, <i>Parteimitglieder in Deutschland</i>	Whether organisational decline is occurring, where, and among which parties
Class, cultural prestige, and political realignment	Andreas Reckwitz, <i>Das Ende der Illusionen</i>	Why material and cultural conflicts intersect
Actual distributions of disagreement	Mau, Lux and Westheuser, <i>Triggerpunkte</i>	Whether visible polarisation reflects population-wide divisions
Eastern political development	Steffen Mau, <i>Lütten Klein; Ungleich vereint</i>	How transformation history and institutional rootedness affect present mobilisation
Digital changes to democratic publicity	Habermas; Jungherr and Schroeder	How access, visibility, and a shared political arena are reorganised
Ownership and infrastructure	Philipp Staab and Thorsten Thiel	How commercial control shapes the conditions of public communication
New Right intellectual organisation	Helmut Kellershohn; Volker Weiß	How publishing, ideological education, activism, and party struggles connect
Alternative-media organisation	Heft, Mayerhöffer, Reinhardt and Knüpfer	How outlets differ in resources, practices, audiences, and political relationships
Protest and movement development	Dieter Rucht, Sebastian Haunss, Sabrina Zajak, Moritz Sommer	How participation depends on social relationships and organisational work

Research problem	Authors and works	What their approach helps establish
Anti-establishment subjectivity	Carolin Amlinger and Oliver Nachtwey	How autonomy claims and perceived powerlessness can generate new oppositional identities
Institutional limits on political change	Fritz W. Scharpf	Why electoral shifts do not automatically yield coherent policy change

For your broader theoretical question, the most consequential German development is **the loosening of the connection between the institutions that form political identities and the institutions that exercise public authority**. A person's political identity may increasingly develop through a commentator, movement, or platform community, while their demands must still pass through parties and state institutions to acquire binding force.

This creates opportunities for participation and for new voices, but also repeated friction over representation: who speaks for an audience, who is accountable for a promise, and who can negotiate a compromise that the audience will accept?

A rigorous continuing map of Germany would therefore follow particular demands across these stages—for example, migration restrictions, housing policy, energy costs, or defence expenditure—and identify who originates the interpretation, who gives it reach, who recruits participants, who incorporates it into a programme, and who ultimately determines implementation. **The actors capable of connecting these stages possess the strongest durable political power; visibility alone reveals only part of their position.**

Italy

Italy's political transformation is best understood as a redistribution of functions that were once concentrated inside mass parties. Intellectual formation, public communication, collective identity, candidate recruitment, interest representation, and government preparation increasingly take place in different organizations and networks. Political leaders connect these activities, with varying success, through television, social platforms, personal followings, and the remaining party apparatuses.

Your hypothesis therefore identifies a major change, but the Italian evidence calls for an important qualification: **digital communication has weakened parties' control over political access much more decisively than it has replaced their role in organizing and exercising state power.** Italy also shows that the decline of traditional parties can strengthen highly centralized leadership.

The account below incorporates developments available through **10 September 2026**. I distinguish the authors' findings from my own interpretation of how the different processes fit together.

The historical starting point is the dissolution of political societies, extending well beyond the decline of particular parties. For much of the postwar period, Christian Democracy and the Communist Party connected citizens to encompassing social environments. Political affiliation was reinforced through associations, newspapers, educational activities, unions, local administration, and relatively stable understandings of national and international conflict.

The Catholic environment included parishes, religious associations, welfare institutions, cooperatives, professional networks, and different traditions of Christian social thought. The communist environment connected workplace organization, municipalities, cooperatives, cultural associations, publishing, and intellectual debate. These environments were internally diverse, but they supplied continuity between everyday experience and national political interpretation.

Ilvo Diamanti's political geography is fundamental here. His *Mappe dell'Italia politica* reconstructs the transformation of Catholic "white" territories, communist "red" territories, the League's territorial mobilization, and Berlusconi's more geographically diffuse appeal. The weakening of these political environments preceded the recent expansion of social media. Digital platforms subsequently entered a society whose inherited political connections were already changing. [Diamanti, *Mappe dell'Italia politica*.](#)

The distinction matters causally. If we start with Facebook, we risk attributing to technology changes also produced by secularization, occupational restructuring, the end of the Cold War, corruption scandals, changing patterns of association, and dissatisfaction with government.

Italy's early-1990s upheaval accelerated the process. The disappearance or transformation of major parties disrupted the organizations through which social interests had been aggregated. Yet their associated institutions and personnel did not simply disappear.

The **Istituto Luigi Sturzo**, for example, continues historical research, education, publication, and debate associated with the Catholic political tradition. The **Fondazione Gramsci**, historically a central cultural and research institution of the PCI, now maintains archives and conducts scholarly activities. These illustrate the survival of intellectual institutions after the dissolution of their former party setting. Their current roles should be distinguished from their historical relationships with parties. [Istituto Luigi Sturzo](#); [Fondazione Gramsci](#).

My interpretation is that this produced a lasting separation: **political cultures can survive without a party capable of unifying them, while parties can acquire substantial support without possessing a comparably developed political culture.**

Berlusconi established the decisive bridge between the older party system and contemporary digital leadership. His importance lies in the organizational model as much as in his policies.

Forza Italia demonstrated that commercial communication, managerial resources, a recognizable personal identity, and a national electoral operation could be assembled rapidly around a leader. Political visibility no longer had to emerge primarily from prolonged advancement through a mass party.

Mauro Calise's *Il partito personale*, first published in 2000 and expanded in 2010, provides the essential concept. The leader increasingly becomes the organizing centre of the party, while collective structures lose some of their capacity to constrain or outlast that leader. This is a change in authority and accountability, extending beyond campaign style. [Calise, *Il partito personale*](#).

Social media subsequently made versions of personalized political access available to actors without ownership of a television empire. However, the underlying aspiration—to establish a direct relationship between a public figure and a national audience—was already well established.

The intellectual content of Berlusconiism also mattered: entrepreneurial competence, individual advancement, consumer aspiration, anti-communism, tax resistance, and distrust of institutions portrayed as obstructing elected leadership. These elements did not form a completely consistent doctrine. Their coherence came partly from the leader's persona.

This provides a useful distinction between three organizational forms:

Form	Principal relationship with citizens	Main source of continuity
Mass party embedded in a political subculture	Membership, associations, collective identity	Institutions and organized communities

Form	Principal relationship with citizens	Main source of continuity
Personal party organized around a media leader	Identification with the leader	Leadership, resources, electoral organization
Party operating through digital platforms	Following, sharing, online participation, personalized contact	A variable combination of leadership, platform control, and surviving organization

These forms overlap in contemporary Italy. They should not be treated as successive stages in which each completely eliminates its predecessor.

The measurable digital shift is substantial, but it has produced a mixed information system. AGCOM's study of the March 2026 constitutional referendum offers particularly relevant evidence because it examines political information rather than general internet use.

Information channel	Share of adults using it for referendum information
Television	58.7%
Internet	46.2%
Family and friends	25.1%
Social networks and video-sharing platforms, within internet use	20.4%

These categories overlap. Among people using social and video platforms, journalists' accounts were the most frequently identified source, at 49%; generalist influencers played a comparatively marginal role. Younger adults relied more heavily on digital channels. This is campaign-specific evidence, rather than a measure of everyday news consumption. [AGCOM, referendum information study, August 2026](#).

The analytical implication is that a change in the **channel of distribution** does not necessarily mean an equivalent change in the **producer of political information**. A person watching a journalist's video on Instagram has moved away from scheduled television viewing while still relying on professional journalism.

Cristopher Cepernich and Roberta Bracciale's research on the 2018 election similarly identifies the interaction of traditional and digital media. They found that skillful, conversational platform use was associated with greater engagement, whether the account belonged to a party or a leader. Their outcome was engagement, however, not a demonstrated number of votes caused by social-media activity. [Cepernich and Bracciale, "Hybrid 2018 campaigning"](#).

For your investigation, five political functions should therefore be examined separately:

Function	What digital communication changes	What still requires organization
Gaining attention	Makes national visibility available outside established party careers	Maintaining visibility and credibility

Function	What digital communication changes	What still requires organization
Creating identification	Connects followers through leaders, narratives, and shared grievances	Sustaining commitments through disagreement
Mobilizing participation	Reduces the cost of sharing, joining, donating, and attending	Coordinating durable collective action
Selecting representatives	Permits online applications and consultations	Eligibility rules, scrutiny, nominations, dispute resolution
Governing	Creates pressure and rapid public feedback	Legislative expertise, administration, bargaining, implementation

Italy's parties differ substantially in how they combine these functions.

The Five Star Movement is the clearest Italian experiment in reorganizing politics around digital participation. Its original intellectual background combined several elements: rejection of the professional political class, environmental concerns, local activism, expectations of technological progress, and the belief that citizens could participate without the mediation of conventional parties.

Beppe Grillo supplied public recognition, expressive force, and a language of moral denunciation. Gianroberto Casaleggio supplied a vision in which networked communication would transform political organization. The movement's promise was therefore institutional as well as electoral: the internet would make a different relationship between citizens and representatives possible.

Yet three different processes operated beneath that promise.

First, **online communication helped create offline organization.** Francesco Bailo's research examines more than 45,000 Meetup events between 2005 and 2013. Early activity drew on areas with existing civic associations. Around 2012, greater news attention accompanied expansion into places with weaker associational resources. Bailo calls the additional mobilizing resource "Internet capital," while emphasizing that digital ties could be fragile and benefited from validation through established media. [Bailo, "Breaking out of legacy mobilization networks"](#).

This supports your hypothesis in a precise form: digital communication can activate people whom established organizations have failed to connect to politics. It also shows that online mobilization can depend on the interaction between new networks, existing civic resources, and mass-media recognition.

Second, **the promise of horizontal participation coexisted with control over the participation process.** Marco Deseriis and Davide Vittori found that online platforms produced only modest improvements in internal democracy when leaders retained control over the subjects, framing, and timing of consultations. The decisive power was partly the ability to determine what members could decide. [Deseriis and Vittori, study of Podemos and M5S participation platforms](#).

This is an organizational mechanism with wider relevance. Eliminating intermediate party bodies may enable more direct participation, but it can also remove institutions capable of questioning leadership proposals before they reach the membership.

Third, **participation in a platform did not necessarily become control over legislation**. Filippo Tronconi and Francesco Bailo examined 516 draft bills and related activity between 2013 and 2020. Their study of Lex Eletti found limited interaction, declining engagement, and little substantive alteration between many online drafts and their parliamentary versions. [Tronconi and Bailo, “The other side of platform politics”](#).

The limitation is specific: this does not establish that every M5S consultation was inconsequential. It does undermine the assumption that providing an online legislative forum automatically transfers lawmaking power to citizens.

The movement’s later development further complicates the original model. It broke with the Rousseau platform in April 2021 while maintaining a commitment to online participation through other arrangements. It should therefore no longer be described as though the original Casaleggio–Rousseau structure still governs it unchanged. [Reuters, April 2021](#).

Under Giuseppe Conte, welfare protection, social insecurity, and competition within the broader opposition have become central to its political identity. My interpretation is that M5S illustrates the difficulty of maintaining an organization whose founding legitimacy depends on overcoming precisely the compromises that participation in government requires.

Its trajectory also shows why electoral success and organizational consolidation must be distinguished. Winning public support rapidly can precede the development of shared policy expectations, stable internal procedures, and an agreed account of what compromise means.

Salvini’s League represents a different combination: digital personalization built upon territorial organization. The original Northern League drew strength from regional identities, small-business environments, local administration, and opposition to the national political centre. Salvini broadened its appeal around national sovereignty, immigration, security, and cultural conflict.

This transformation changed the definition of the political community being defended. The earlier contrast between northern taxpayers and Rome was increasingly supplemented or displaced by a contrast between Italians and external or internal threats.

Nevertheless, northern local and regional networks retained interests that cannot be reduced to national online rhetoric. Exporting businesses, municipal administrators, regional political elites, and small proprietors confront concrete questions about European markets, public services, infrastructure, taxation, and administrative autonomy.

Gianluca Passarelli and Dario Tuorto’s *La Lega di Salvini* is an important account of this relationship between leadership change, ideology, and territorial foundations.

The much-discussed “**La Bestia**” should be understood through documented communication practices. Roberta Bracciale, Francesco Grisolia, Antonio Martella, and Maurizio Tesconi describe staff and analytical tools operating within a strategy connecting television, internet communication, and territorial campaigning. Their study of the *Vinci Salvini!* competition

shows how small, rewarded acts of amplification could recruit campaign labour from supporters with different levels of commitment. It demonstrates faster and more intensive circulation, rather than an autonomous mechanism capable of manufacturing electoral outcomes. [Bracciale and colleagues, “Vinci Salvini!”](#).

My interpretation is that the organizational innovation lies partly in turning an audience into a distributed campaign workforce. Supporters can contribute without attending meetings or joining a local branch. Yet their activity remains coordinated around a highly centralized public personality.

This produces a vulnerability: a leader whose legitimacy depends heavily on continuous public attention must compete with new figures offering sharper or more novel expressions of similar grievances.

Roberto Vannacci’s emergence makes that vulnerability especially visible in 2026. After leaving the League in February, he established Futuro Nazionale. An SWG poll reported on 1 September placed it at 7.5%. That is a dated polling result, not an election outcome, but it establishes that his independent challenge had become significant enough to affect coalition calculations. [Reuters, September 2026](#).

His trajectory—from a controversial book and public prominence to a political organization—illustrates the possibility of acquiring national political recognition before building a conventional party career. His appearance at the September TEHA business forum also shows the subsequent conversion of public visibility into access to influential discussion venues. Participation in such a forum establishes access; it does not prove collective endorsement by business elites. [Reuters, TEHA appearance](#).

The broader mechanism is circular: public prominence attracts organizational opportunities, those opportunities reinforce perceived importance, and greater importance generates further coverage.

Brothers of Italy demonstrates how inherited organization can strengthen leadership in the digital environment. FdI cannot adequately be understood as an online audience that subsequently acquired parliamentary representation.

Its development incorporates the organizational lineage of the Italian Social Movement and National Alliance, political socialization through youth organizations, personal relationships among cadres, and a continuing concern with historical identity. Salvatore Vassallo and Rinaldo Vignati’s *Fratelli di Giorgia* examines this genealogy alongside organization, national conservatism, international connections, social-media communication, and changing voters. [Vassallo and Vignati, *Fratelli di Giorgia*](#).

Davide Vampa likewise analyzes the combination of Meloni’s dominant leadership with territorial structures, party rules, and financing. This supplies a stronger explanation than a model based exclusively on personal popularity. [Vampa, “Organisation and Leadership”](#).

My interpretation is that three resources reinforce one another:

- A recognizable leader makes a complex political tradition accessible to a broad audience.

- An inherited cadre network supplies trust, recruitment, and organizational memory.
- Government participation offers opportunities to demonstrate competence and establish new institutional relationships.

The associated intellectual field extends beyond the party. **Nazione Futura**, founded in 2017, combines a printed journal, online publication, conferences, book presentations, and territorial activity. Its published organization connects figures such as Francesco Giubilei, Corrado Ocone, Eugenio Capozzi, and Alessandro Campi with responsibilities spanning scholarship, communication, and local organization. [Nazione Futura's activities](#); [published organizational structure](#).

This is a concrete example of how political ideas are developed and circulated through interconnected institutions. Books and conferences can establish intellectual legitimacy; journalism translates arguments for broader publics; social platforms increase circulation; political organizations select themes compatible with their electoral strategy.

The conservative field nevertheless contains real differences. National identity, Catholic social thought, market liberalism, protectionism, historical revision, Atlanticism, and skepticism toward European integration do not necessarily imply the same policies.

Its internal disputes become consequential in government:

- Does national sovereignty require economic protection or stronger competitiveness within European markets?
- Should the state defend established producers or promote market entry?
- How can national unity be reconciled with demands for regional autonomy?
- How far can cultural confrontation coexist with international reassurance?

Meloni's durability should also temper a theory of unavoidable digital instability. In September 2026, her government surpassed the previous postwar longevity record. That does not establish policy success across all fields, but it shows that personalized communication can coexist with sustained coalition government. [Reuters, government longevity](#).

The centre-left's difficulty is the incomplete integration of several political and intellectual environments. The Democratic Party combines inheritances from communist and postcommunist politics, democratic Catholicism, liberal reformism, municipal government, organized labour, and newer progressive movements.

These traditions answer fundamental questions differently. One emphasizes social protection and bargaining; another stresses administrative competence and European integration; another prioritizes civil rights, cultural inclusion, and environmental transformation. These positions can support a common coalition, but they do not automatically generate a common hierarchy of priorities.

The corresponding intellectual inheritances are also heterogeneous. Gramsci's account of hegemony and civil society, Bobbio's liberal and democratic concerns, Catholic personalism, and workerist or postworkerist traditions associated with Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri cannot be treated as a single contemporary party doctrine.

This fragmentation helps explain why cultural visibility and electoral effectiveness may diverge. A milieu can be influential in publishing, universities, journalism, or artistic life while having difficulty constructing a stable relationship with particular occupational or territorial groups.

Digital communication offers opportunities to reconnect these environments, but it also makes their disagreements more publicly visible. Party leaders face pressure simultaneously from elected administrators, organized members, unions, issue activists, public intellectuals, and online audiences.

Renzi's leadership represented one attempt to reorganize the centre-left around personal authority, generational renewal, and reformist competence. Schlein's leadership operates with a different emphasis on social and civil-rights concerns, while still confronting the problem of connecting national communication with a varied party organization.

The relevant analytical question is therefore not simply whether the PD has sufficiently effective social-media accounts. It is whether its different constituencies recognize the same political project.

Mazzoleni and Bracciale's research adds another complication: elements of populist communication circulate beyond parties conventionally classified as populist. Appeals to "the people" and attacks on obstructive elites can become part of mainstream leaders' repertoires, although their intensity and ideological combinations differ. [Mazzoleni and Bracciale, "Socially mediated populism"](#).

Autonomous organizations also matter. Trade unions, civic associations, environmental networks, feminist mobilizations, and antifascist associations can contribute expertise, mobilization, and legitimacy while maintaining their own priorities. The broader opposition is consequently a field of negotiation rather than a single communication apparatus.

Catholic institutions and economic expertise retain influence through channels that follower counts barely capture. These two environments deserve separate treatment because their power often comes from organizational presence and recognized competence.

Catholic political society has become more dispersed since Christian Democracy's disappearance. Its constituent institutions remain involved in education, welfare, community organization, and public argument. Different Catholic traditions can support different political conclusions: subsidiarity, social solidarity, family protection, hospitality toward migrants, and European integration do not produce one automatic party alignment.

The intellectual histories of Luigi Sturzo, Alcide De Gasperi, and Giuseppe Dossetti help explain this diversity. Their contemporary significance often lies in the repertoire of arguments and institutional practices they left, rather than in a unified electoral constituency.

Economic and policy expertise works differently again. Universities, ministries, the Bank of Italy, professional associations, research organizations, and policy forums help define which proposals appear feasible and credible.

The **Istituto Bruno Leoni**, for example, develops a recognizably market-liberal repertoire through research, books, journalism, seminars, and podcasts. Figures such as Alberto Mingardi

connect scholarship, public debate, and international liberal networks. This repertoire can conflict with protectionist or interventionist positions within the political right. [Istituto Bruno Leoni](#); [Mingardi's institutional biography](#).

Aspen Institute Italia illustrates another type of institution: a forum in which political, business, and expert participants discuss matters such as economic security, technology, energy, and transatlantic relations. Its influence should be investigated through participants, agendas, proposals, and subsequent decisions, rather than inferred from the existence of elite meetings alone. [Aspen Institute Italia](#).

A useful general distinction follows: **electoral influence changes who can govern; expert influence changes the range of policies governing actors consider available**. The two can support one another, but they can also pull in different directions.

Christopher Bickerton and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti's *Technopopulism* explains why appeals to popular unity and technical competence can coexist. Both can challenge ideological party mediation by claiming to serve society as a whole. Their "techno" refers principally to technocratic competence, rather than simply to internet technology. [Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, *Technopopulism*](#).

Applied to Italy, this helps interpret the apparent oscillation between outsider mobilization and expert government. Citizens may reject established politicians while welcoming individuals presented as competent, independent, and capable of overcoming party conflict.

The media system now contains several interacting centres of political selection. Established broadcasters, newspapers, digital publications, individual journalists, political leaders, and creators compete for attention while frequently supplying material to one another.

The familiar actors—RAI, Mediaset, Sky, La7, major newspapers, ANSA—remain relevant. Their influence must now be examined alongside publications and formats developed for online audiences.

Alessio Cornia's 2026 Reuters Institute account identifies Fanpage as the leading online news brand in its survey rankings and records particular reach among younger audiences for Il Post and Will Media. It also describes the rising importance of creators and newsletters. Meloni's appearance on *Pulp Podcast* during the referendum campaign exemplifies politicians entering entertainment-associated settings to reach audiences beyond conventional political programming. [Reuters Institute, Italy 2026](#).

Several different mechanisms are involved:

1. **Journalists can become independently recognizable political interpreters.** Their authority may travel across newspapers, television, newsletters, and social accounts.
2. **Digital publications can organize attention around issues neglected by established schedules.**
3. **Entertainment personalities can introduce political questions to audiences with limited prior interest.**
4. **Politicians can adopt creators' formats**, including informal conversation and personal disclosure.

5. **Supporters can recirculate all these materials**, adding interpretations that their social contacts may find more persuasive than the original presentation.

Laura Iannelli's *Hybrid Politics: Media and Participation* is useful for understanding these combinations of older and newer practices. [Iannelli, Hybrid Politics](#).

Ownership remains relevant as well. For example, the March 2026 acquisition of GEDI by Antenna, and the separate sale of *La Stampa*, mean that an ownership map based on the previous configuration is already outdated. [Reuters Institute, ownership changes](#).

My interpretation is that the central change is **a multiplication of entry points combined with continuing concentration at particular stages**. More actors can publish, but visibility, financing, credibility, and access to decision-makers remain unequally distributed.

Follower counts alone cannot establish those relationships. Audiences overlap; some followers are opponents or observers; engagement can reflect controversy; platform populations differ from the electorate. A defensible analysis therefore distinguishes visibility, persuasion, mobilization, and institutional access.

The transformation of state power becomes clearest when we examine how votes are converted into office. Digital communication affects that process, but electoral institutions and coalition organization strongly condition the outcome.

The 2022 Chamber election provides a useful baseline:

Party	Approximate domestic vote share
Brothers of Italy	26.0%
Democratic Party list	19.1%
Five Star Movement	15.4%
League	8.8%
Forza Italia	8.1%
Action–Italia Viva	7.8%
Greens and Left Alliance	3.6%

The centre-right coalition received approximately **43.8% of votes and won 237 of 400 Chamber seats**, or 59.25%. These are election results, not current parliamentary-group totals. [UK Commons Library, election analysis](#); [IPU, 2022 election](#).

The electoral system combined 147 constituency seats, 245 domestic proportional seats, and eight overseas seats. Coordination behind common constituency candidates helped translate the centre-right's vote into a parliamentary majority against divided competitors. [International IDEA, electoral system](#).

Thus coalition negotiation and candidate placement were part of the causal explanation of government formation. No analysis of social-media reach can substitute for them.

Electoral rules themselves remain contested. Reporting on 1 September 2026 described a new electoral-law proposal as having passed the lower house, with Senate consideration still

relevant. The rules used in 2022 should therefore not be assumed to determine the next election unchanged. [Reuters, electoral reform context](#).

Once in office, leaders encounter another set of institutions. Italy's constitutional structure requires parliamentary confidence and provides distinct roles for the president, courts, and territorial authorities. Administrative implementation also depends on professional knowledge and organizational capacity. [Presidency of the Republic, constitutional text](#).

There is nevertheless evidence of executive predominance within legislative activity. The European Commission reported that, from October 2022 through May 2026, 244 of 325 enacted laws originated with government; 112 converted emergency decrees, and 67 involved confidence procedures. It also recorded that the proposed direct election of the prime minister remained under parliamentary consideration. [European Commission, 2026 Italy chapter](#).

My interpretation is that digital personalization can reinforce these tendencies by making the leader the principal bearer of the electoral mandate. But it is not their sole cause. Parliamentary procedure, coalition discipline, legislative complexity, and longstanding institutional practices also matter.

Judicial and constitutional conflict constitutes a separate political-intellectual arena. Italy has a particularly important history of disputes about the relationship between electoral legitimacy, legal accountability, prosecutorial authority, and constitutional guarantees.

Alessandro Pizzorno's *Il potere dei giudici. Stato democratico e controllo della virtù* is especially relevant. It provides a sociological route into the relationship between democratic politics and the authority to judge public conduct. [Pizzorno, *Il potere dei giudici*](#).

For the present inquiry, three questions should remain distinct:

- Whether a judicial decision is legally justified.
- Whether judicial institutions possess appropriate powers and accountability.
- How political actors and media present the conflict to the public.

Social media can compress these questions into competing claims that judges are obstructing the people or that elected leaders are attacking constitutional government. Such framing can mobilize support while concealing important differences among legal issues.

The rejection of the judicial constitutional reform in the referendum of 22–23 March 2026 demonstrates that executive durability does not guarantee acceptance of institutional redesign. The proposed separation of judicial and prosecutorial careers did not take effect. [European Commission, referendum outcome](#).

This is particularly significant for your question about state functioning. A government may be strong in leadership, communication, and parliamentary coordination while encountering a different alignment of institutions and citizens over a constitutional proposal.

The underlying conflicts remain social and territorial, even when their public expression becomes national and digital. Several overlapping divisions should structure a deeper Italian map.

The first concerns **economic security**: protected and insecure employment, established businesses and new entrants, pensioners and younger workers, homeowners and people facing housing insecurity. Different parties compete to interpret these problems through taxation, welfare, migration, public services, or economic modernization.

The second concerns **territory**. Metropolitan centres, industrial districts, peripheral towns, and southern regions confront different combinations of economic opportunity, administrative capacity, and dependence on public expenditure. Digital communication can nationalize their grievances without eliminating these differences.

The third concerns **authority and identity**: national belonging, immigration, religious inheritance, family norms, European integration, and the meaning of antifascism.

The fourth concerns **representation itself**. Some citizens seek a stronger leader, others more participation, others competent administration, and others protection from concentrated power. These preferences can coexist within the same electorate.

The fifth concerns **participation versus withdrawal**. Turnout fell from approximately 73% in 2018 to approximately 64% in 2022. A political system can become more communicatively active while a growing share of citizens remains electorally disengaged. [IPU, 2018](#); [IPU, 2022](#).

My interpretation is that digital platforms facilitate the rapid recombination of these conflicts. A leader can connect economic frustration to cultural insecurity, or administrative failure to corruption, without first negotiating a comprehensive programme through a party organization. Whether that combination survives government is a separate question.

The most useful authors form several complementary research traditions. Some explain the historical weakening of parties; others study communication; others examine the institutional consequences. No single tradition captures the entire process.

Authors and works	Main contribution to your inquiry
Ilvo Diamanti , <i>Mappe dell'Italia politica</i> (2009), <i>Democrazia ibrida</i> (2014)	Connects territorial political identities with changing forms of representation and communication.
Mauro Calise , <i>Il partito personale</i> (2000; expanded 2010)	Explains the relocation of party authority around individual leaders.
Calise and Fortunato Musella , <i>Il Principe digitale</i> (2019)	Directly addresses the relationship between digital connectivity, leadership, party organization, and popular power.
Ilvo Diamanti and Marc Lazar , <i>Popolocrazia</i> (2018)	Examines the spread of populist ways of competing across the wider political system.
Marco Tarchi , <i>Italia populista</i>	Places Italian populism within a longer history, preventing a purely technological explanation.
Piero Ignazi , <i>Party and Democracy</i> (2017); with Paola Bordandini , <i>I muscoli del partito</i> (2018)	Keeps party legitimacy, organization, and intermediate cadres within the analysis.
Salvatore Vassallo and Rinaldo Vignati , <i>Fratelli di Giorgia</i> (2023)	Integrates ideological genealogy, cadres, communication, and voters in the study of FdI.

Authors and works	Main contribution to your inquiry
Davide Vampa , <i>Brothers of Italy</i> (2023)	Examines leadership and organization within a changing party system.
Gianluca Passarelli and Dario Tuorto , <i>La Lega di Salvini</i> (2018)	Explains the League's national transformation against its territorial background.
Paolo Gerbaudo , <i>The Digital Party</i> (2019)	Provides a general framework for understanding digitally organized parties and the tensions of online democracy.
Marco Deseriis and Davide Vittori	Show how rules and platform design determine whether participation changes internal power.
Francesco Bailo ; with Filippo Tronconi	Supplies empirical evidence distinguishing digital mobilization from influence over legislation.
Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Roberta Bracciale, Cristopher Cepernich	Investigate populist communication, hybrid campaigns, engagement, and personalized visibility.
Laura Iannelli , <i>Hybrid Politics</i> (2016)	Explains the interaction of media environments and forms of participation.
Christopher Bickerton and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti , <i>Technopopulism</i> (2021)	Connects appeals to popular unity with claims of expert competence.
Alessandro Pizzorno , <i>Il potere dei giudici</i> (1998)	Brings judicial authority and public moral judgment into political sociology.

For your particular theoretical interest, **Calise and Musella's *Il Principe digitale*** is especially close to the central question. It explicitly considers how new networks alter inherited actors and hierarchies while retaining the problem of constructing political organization. [Calise and Musella, publisher's account](#).

It should be read alongside the empirical qualifications supplied by Deseriis, Bailo, and Tronconi. Deseriis's distinction between a centralized **platform party** and a more decentralized **networked party** is useful precisely because it avoids treating digital technology as the cause of one inevitable organizational form. [Deseriis, "Two Variants of the Digital Party"](#).

For the earlier history of distrust, Tarchi's *Italia populista* traces repertoires of antiparty mobilization across very different movements and periods. That historical perspective prevents the recent communication environment from being mistaken for the origin of every contemporary grievance. [Tarchi, *Italia populista*](#).

My proposed synthesis is that Italian political power now depends on connecting resources whose distribution has become increasingly uneven. These resources include public attention, intellectual legitimacy, organized supporters, trusted cadres, coalition partners, legal authority, and administrative expertise.

Five Star demonstrated that new communication networks could overcome substantial barriers to political entry. Its experience also exposed the distance between participation, internal control, and lawmaking. Salvini demonstrated how an established territorial party could be reorganized around continuous personal communication. Meloni demonstrated how inherited

cadres and political identity could support a leader with broad media appeal. Vannacci's emergence illustrates the continuing possibility of new entry through public prominence.

The resulting system contains two pressures operating simultaneously. **Competition for public attention makes political entry easier and loyalties more contestable; the difficulty of converting attention into sustained government preserves the value of organization.**

To investigate these processes systematically, I would track six relationships for each political camp:

1. **Who produces its arguments**, and through which publications, institutions, and events?
2. **Who translates those arguments for broader audiences**—leaders, journalists, creators, associations?
3. **Who controls the means of circulation**, including accounts, databases, funding, and access to broadcasting?
4. **Who selects and disciplines representatives?**
5. **Which organizations supply governing personnel and policy expertise?**
6. **Where does public mobilization produce a traceable change in decisions?**

This approach makes the displacement thesis testable. It allows us to identify where party mediation has weakened, which actors have acquired its former functions, and where the exercise of Italian state power continues to depend on institutions that public visibility alone cannot replace.

Spanien

Spain has undergone a substantial redistribution of political power at the level of communication, identity formation and mobilisation. Parties have lost part of their former control over these processes, while retaining a strong position in converting public support into legislation, appointments and government. The distinctive Spanish development is the interaction of this digital transformation with a decentralised state, competing national identities, an enduring struggle over the meaning of the democratic transition, and a political economy strongly shaped by housing and generational inequality.

Your hypothesis therefore identifies an important transformation, but its different components need to be separated. Reaching a mass audience, creating a politically committed community, winning parliamentary representation and exercising state power have become more distinct

activities. An influencer can excel at the first two; a territorially concentrated party can exercise disproportionate influence over the last two.

The analysis below follows these underlying processes, including developments documented in 2026. Where I connect findings into a broader explanation, that connection is my synthesis rather than a thesis attributable to one author.

The first distinction concerns the different kinds of power operating beneath party competition. Spain's political background can be mapped through six overlapping layers:

Layer	Principal actors	Political function
Production of ideas	Academics, essayists, foundations, policy institutes, cultural organisations	Define legitimate problems, political identities and possible solutions
Public interpretation	Newspapers, broadcasters, digital publications, commentators and creators	Select events and explain their political meaning
Social mobilisation	Associations, unions, activist networks, neighbourhood organisations and online communities	Turn individual dissatisfaction into coordinated action
Electoral organisation	Parties, coalitions, electoral groupings and campaign professionals	Select candidates and convert support into seats
Government and administration	National, autonomous and municipal governments; civil servants; organised interests	Allocate resources and implement decisions
Legal authorisation and constraint	Ordinary courts, Constitutional Court, judicial governing bodies and European institutions	Determine permissible action and resolve institutional disputes

Digital communication has altered the connections between these layers. It has also enabled some actors to operate across several of them. Nevertheless, influence at one level does not automatically produce influence at the others.

The inherited political order matters because Spain's digital transformation began within an already distinctive system. After the transition from dictatorship, national competition became organised principally around the PSOE and the PP, alongside strong territorial parties. These organisations combined electoral activity with parliamentary careers, local government, regional administrations and access to policy expertise. Their social reach was broader than their formal membership.

Richard Gunther, José Ramón Montero and Joan Botella's *Democracy in Modern Spain* provides an important baseline for understanding this arrangement. Their work connects democratic consolidation with institutions, party competition and political behaviour. It helps explain why declining confidence in politicians need not destroy the organisations through which government is formed. [*Democracy in Modern Spain*](#).

The intellectual legitimacy of this order rested partly on a widely shared account of the transition: compromise, constitutionalism, European integration and the avoidance of renewed

civil conflict represented political maturity. That account did not eliminate disagreement. It established boundaries within which disagreement was generally recognised as responsible.

Guillem Martínez's edited volume *CT o la cultura de la transición*—published in 2012—challenged precisely those boundaries. Its contributors argued that a vertical culture of consensus had narrowed the range of publicly credible alternatives. From this perspective, 15-M challenged the authority to define political reality itself. This is an influential critical interpretation; it should not be confused with evidence that all established institutions followed a centrally coordinated strategy. Martínez, *CT o la cultura de la transición*.

A different foundation of political consent was material. Isidro López and Emmanuel Rodríguez's *Fin de ciclo* examines the relationship between finance, construction, territorial development and a society of property owners. Their explanation is particularly useful because it connects support for the economic order to household wealth and access to housing. When rising property values appeared to compensate for precarious employment, many households could identify with the prevailing model. Its breakdown exposed conflicts that had been partly concealed by expanding credit and asset wealth. [López and Rodríguez, *Fin de ciclo*](#).

Thus, the crisis that preceded digital political insurgency had at least three dimensions: declining confidence in political intermediaries, weakening confidence in established accounts of democratic success, and deteriorating expectations of social advancement.

Spain's digital political transformation has roots earlier than the last ten years. The SMS mobilisation immediately before the March 2004 election was an important precursor. Víctor Sampedro's *13-M: Multitudes online* examined how existing relationships of trust could support rapid mobilisation outside established party and media channels. The relevant innovation was the ability of citizens to circulate information and organise action through their own communication networks. [Sampedro's account of 13-M](#).

The decisive expansion came with the indignados movement beginning on 15 May 2011. Its importance went beyond demonstrations against austerity. It established that large numbers of people could recognise one another as a political public before agreeing on a party, leadership structure or comprehensive programme.

Digital communication helped connect otherwise dispersed grievances: unemployment, evictions, political corruption, insecurity and the belief that established representatives were unresponsive. Physical assemblies and occupied squares then gave those connections visibility and social substance.

There is empirical research on this process. Sandra González-Bailón, Javier Borge-Holthoefer, Alejandro Rivero and Yamir Moreno analysed the Twitter networks surrounding the May 2011 mobilisation. They found evidence consistent with social influence and complex contagion, while distinguishing early participants from centrally positioned information spreaders. Their findings show why the person who initiates participation and the person who spreads information most widely need not be the same. [“The Dynamics of Protest Recruitment through an Online Network,” 2011](#).

Javier Toret and collaborators developed the concept of **technopolitics** to interpret these combinations of digital communication, collective emotion, physical presence and distributed coordination. Manuel Castells's concepts of mass self-communication and networked social

movements supply a broader theoretical vocabulary. Their shared contribution is to explain how collective action can emerge without being fully organised in advance by a conventional organisation.

However, 15-M did not produce one organisational successor. Its consequences included electoral initiatives, housing activism, municipal platforms, participatory experiments and continuing autonomous movements. Treating all of this as the prehistory of Podemos would obscure a substantial part of the transformation.

Podemos was the most consequential attempt to convert the new political public into national electoral power. Its founders included political scientists and activists who treated communication as constitutive of political identity. Pablo Iglesias, Íñigo Errejón and Juan Carlos Monedero were intellectual participants in this process, as well as political actors.

The influence of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe was especially visible in the attempt to construct a broad political subject around opposition between ordinary people and a privileged establishment. This approach assumed that grievances do not spontaneously combine into a coherent political force. They must be connected through language, symbols, leadership and a shared interpretation of conflict.

The strategic importance of this argument was considerable. Traditional left organisations often began with an established ideological identity and sought additional adherents. Podemos initially sought to articulate a more encompassing identity capable of reaching people who did not regard themselves as members of the traditional radical left.

Its emergence also illustrates the interaction of television and digital communication. Iglesias's recognisability, broadcast appearances, online circulation and organisational work reinforced one another. The political scientist, television debater and party leader became partially fused roles.

Víctor Sampedro's edited *Comunicación política digital en España: Del «Pásalo» a Podemos y de Podemos a Vox* is particularly close to your question. It traces the movement from citizen-led digital mobilisation towards professional electoral communication within a system still shaped by corporations and public institutions. Its account of the period 2004–2019 also explains how techniques associated with an insurgent left became available to the right. [Sampedro, ed., 2021.](#)

Podemos exposed a fundamental organisational problem: **extensive online participation can coexist with strong leadership control.** Members may vote frequently while having less influence over which questions are asked, which alternatives are available or when a decision occurs.

The distinction is between participating in a decision and controlling the agenda of decision-making. Digital systems can broaden the former without distributing the latter equally. When a leadership team controls public visibility, organisational information and the timing of consultations, direct participation can strengthen its position.

Paolo Gerbaudo's *The Digital Party* is an important comparative work on this relationship. For Spain, the relevant question is whether online participation builds autonomous organisational capacity or primarily connects a large supporter base to a central leadership.

César Rendueles offers a complementary critique in *Sociophobia*. He questions the assumption that easier communication automatically creates durable cooperation. Sharing preferences and reacting to events require different commitments from maintaining organisations, resolving disagreements and accepting collective obligations. Applied to Podemos, his argument helps explain why rapid mobilisation and organisational fragility can coexist. [Rendueles, *Sociophobia*](#).

The broader lesson is that digital communication lowers some costs of political entry while leaving the difficult work of institutional continuity largely intact.

Municipalism developed a different response to the same problem. In the political environment associated with Barcelona en Comú, housing activism and other municipal initiatives, the central objective was to connect mobilisation with practical participation in urban government.

Joan Subirats's work on the commons, technological change and new forms of politics is important here. His approach directs attention towards cooperation, shared public goods and the relationship between civic networks and institutions. It provides an alternative measure of political success: the capacity of citizens to shape their collective environment. [Subirats's research and publications](#).

Decidim provides a concrete institutional example. Developed through the Barcelona participation context, it supports proposals, participatory processes, assemblies and the monitoring of decisions. Its significance lies in making digital participation part of an organised decision process, including the possibility of following what happens after a proposal receives support. Its existence does not by itself establish the effectiveness or representativeness of every process using it. [Decidim's platform and documented uses](#).

Amador Fernández-Savater's *Habitar y gobernar* supplies a further distinction: the capacity to transform social relationships and the capacity to occupy governmental office are different achievements. A movement can gain representatives while losing autonomous social energy; it can also influence everyday practices without becoming an electorally successful party. [Fernández-Savater's presentation of the book](#).

The established parties have adapted to these changes, with different resources and vulnerabilities. Their continuing strength is visible in the July 2023 election: the PP won 137 Congress seats and the PSOE 121, together 258 of 350. This was a substantial concentration of representation in the two established parties, despite the preceding decade of fragmentation. Yet neither could govern through its own parliamentary strength alone. [2023 election results](#).

The PSOE combines several political languages: social protection, European integration, equality, administrative competence and territorial accommodation. Its intellectual environment extends beyond official party structures into academic policy work, progressive cultural institutions and foundations. Fundación Alternativas, for example, explicitly identifies its purpose with progressive ideas and proposals for political, social and cultural change. Such a connection of outlook should be distinguished from organisational subordination. [Fundación Alternativas](#).

The PSOE's organisational advantage is the ability to connect national leadership with territorial institutions and an experienced political workforce. Its difficulty is that the audiences

supporting these different elements are not always aligned. A message that satisfies a national progressive public may create problems for a regional party organisation, while an agreement needed for parliamentary survival can alienate voters elsewhere.

Under personalised leadership, the party can also become identified with the defence or rejection of its leader. This makes public interpretation of individual controversies exceptionally consequential. Political loyalty becomes attached to a person who embodies a wider coalition, even when supporters disagree over particular policies.

The PP has a comparable combination of organisational depth and ideological diversity. Its environment contains managerial conservatism, economic liberalism, Catholic conservatism and different understandings of Spanish national unity. These currents overlap without being interchangeable.

FAES, associated with José María Aznar, remains a significant liberal-conservative intellectual meeting place closely connected with PP political circles. Its relationship with the party should be described through documented cooperation rather than assumed formal control. The joint appearance of Alberto Núñez Feijóo, Aznar and Javier Zarzalejos at the 2025 FAES campus illustrates that continuing connection. [PP's account of the FAES campus](#).

Isabel Díaz Ayuso illustrates how a regional political leader can acquire national symbolic importance. Her language of freedom connects taxation, private choice and opposition to intervention with everyday social life. My interpretation is that this makes an ideological outlook available as an accessible identity. Regional office, a conventional party organisation and a highly personalised communication operation support one another. [Profile of Ayuso's political and communication operation](#).

Ciudadanos supplies a cautionary case. It combined constitutional opposition to Catalan nationalism, reformist language and strong leadership visibility, but its national expansion did not secure a durable position between the larger parties. Its trajectory suggests that media recognition is insufficient when strategic choices leave an organisation without a distinctive and sustainable electoral role.

The Spanish right's intellectual transformation also predates social media. Javier Muñoz Soro's "Sin complejos: las nuevas derechas españolas y sus intelectuales" traced the reconstruction of liberal-conservative cultural authority from the late 1980s. He examined, among other developments, the movement of some intellectuals from the left towards positions shaped by the national question.

Especially relevant to your inquiry, Muñoz Soro already discussed the increasing role of media organisations as relatively autonomous producers of political interpretation. Newspapers, radio, television and the internet could exercise functions previously associated more closely with party intellectuals. Digital platforms accelerated this redistribution of authority. [Muñoz Soro, 2007](#).

Vox then gave a more sharply defined electoral expression to several currents: Spanish national sovereignty, opposition to territorial fragmentation, cultural conservatism, criticism of established political elites and opposition to progressive gender and migration policies.

The territorial component is indispensable. Stuart J. Turnbull-Dugarte's analysis of Vox's breakthrough in the 2018 Andalusian election found a strong association between opposition to devolution and Vox support. Immigration concerns did not have an independent statistically significant association in that particular model. This finding concerns a specific election; it cannot establish that migration is unimportant in later Spanish politics. It does show why an explanation imported wholesale from other European countries would miss something central. [Turnbull-Dugarte, "Explaining the end of Spanish exceptionalism and electoral support for Vox," 2019.](#)

Vox's surrounding intellectual work also concerns the definition of the political community. In the DENAES environment, the Spanish nation is presented as a historical community extending across generations. That understanding challenges the proposition that a territorially bounded electorate can unilaterally redefine sovereignty. Santiago Abascal and Gustavo Bueno Sánchez's *En defensa de España* expresses this argument. The coauthor should not be confused with his father, the philosopher Gustavo Bueno Martínez. *En defensa de España*.

More recently, Fundación Disenso has built an explicit infrastructure linking ideas, training, media and international relationships. Its projects include Foro Madrid, an Instituto de Cultura, *La Gaceta de la Iberosfera* and streaming initiatives. Its named intellectual network includes figures such as Miguel Ángel Quintana Paz, Enrique García-Máiquez and Agustín Laje. These are documented organisational connections. [Fundación Disenso.](#)

The foundation's Bipartidismo Stream is revealing because its stated criticism encompasses both PSOE and PP. It seeks an audience through programmes, interviews and commentary while challenging the broader conservative media environment as insufficiently independent of established politics. This demonstrates competition within the right over who defines legitimate opposition. [Bipartidismo Stream's own description.](#)

The liberal economic and influencer environments form another, partly overlapping current. Instituto Juan de Mariana identifies itself with individual liberty, markets, private property and limited government. Its activities include research, education and public communication. This outlook differs in emphasis from a project that gives primacy to national sovereignty and cultural conservatism. [Instituto Juan de Mariana.](#)

Juan Ramón Rallo, Wall Street Wolverine, Pedro Buerbaum and Infovlogger are examples of a broader digital environment in which political discussion intersects with economics, entrepreneurship, cultural conflict and personal aspiration. Their inclusion in this environment does not establish common party control or a unified electorate. [Reporting on these digital actors.](#)

The organisational implication is that political socialisation can begin through content that audiences initially understand as financial advice, entertainment or discussion of everyday life. A person may acquire views about taxation, state competence or cultural authority before developing any party identification.

This also changes the intellectual's public role. Academic standing and editorial endorsement remain sources of authority, but sustained familiarity, recognisable presentation and perceived authenticity have become additional sources. Some creators combine all of these; others possess large audiences without conventional intellectual credentials.

Alvise Pérez and Se Acabó La Fiesta provide Spain's clearest example of an online community becoming an electoral vehicle. In the 2024 European election, SALF obtained approximately 4.6% of the vote and three seats. It entered that election as an electoral grouping. Reporting documents a Telegram community, a collective identity and supporting communication and legal work. Raúl Magallón interpreted the case as the construction of a political collective through social media. [Account of SALF's 2024 breakthrough](#).

Its significance is organisational: a public assembled around a communicator can precede and generate an electoral structure. Nevertheless, audience maintenance, candidate registration, legal work and campaign production still require organisation. What diminishes is reliance on a particular inherited organisational form.

Electoral rules also matter. Spain uses a nationwide constituency for European elections, while Congress elections distribute seats through provincial constituencies. A dispersed national audience therefore encounters different barriers in the two contests. The same percentage of national support does not imply equivalent parliamentary representation. [Spain's electoral law](#).

Territorial politics makes Spain's transformation especially complex. The country contains overlapping communication spaces structured by language, institutions, political memory and national identification. Catalonia and the Basque Country cannot be understood simply as smaller geographical sections of a single national online audience.

Luis Moreno's *The Federalization of Spain* is useful here because it connects democratisation with territorial accommodation and overlapping identities. Sebastian Balfour and Alejandro Quiroga's *The Reinvention of Spain* complements it by examining the reconstruction of national identities under democracy, including Spanish nationalism. [Moreno, The Federalization of Spain](#).

Digital communication allows territorial movements to communicate rapidly, maintain communities across physical distance and address international audiences. Yet regional institutions, associations, educational environments and established media continue to sustain those communities.

The Catalan independence process demonstrated the interaction of these resources. Online mobilisation operated alongside parties, organised civil society and regional institutions. Rival camps could observe the same event through very different historical and constitutional frameworks.

The underlying disagreement concerns who possesses the authority to decide. One position begins with a common Spanish citizenry and constitutional equality; another begins with recognition of a distinct national community entitled to determine its political future. These premises cannot be resolved solely by more efficient communication.

Neither position defines a homogeneous social bloc. Within Catalonia, views differ over independence, constitutional reform, language, class and the practical value of confrontation. ERC and Junts have different political traditions; PNV and EH Bildu also represent distinct projects. Agreement on one territorial question does not eliminate competition over government or social policy.

Digital mobilisation can intensify that competition. A party may face pressure from its own online supporters to reject a compromise that its negotiators consider advantageous. Conversely, leaders can invoke an active supporter community to strengthen their bargaining position.

The result is a recurring tension between **public demonstrations of firmness and the negotiated accommodation required for governing**. This affects both relations with Madrid and competition within territorial political communities.

Spain's media system has consequently become more interdependent and more fragmented. Andrew Chadwick's *The Hybrid Media System* provides the most useful general framework: political advantage often belongs to actors able to combine established and newer media practices. His principal cases are not Spanish, but the framework applies well to the Spanish interaction of broadcasting, parliamentary confrontation, digital publications and social platforms. [Chadwick, second edition, 2017](#).

A parliamentary intervention can supply a television segment; the segment becomes a short video; online reactions become a subsequent news story. At each stage, different actors select and interpret the material. A digital controversy can therefore acquire greater importance through broadcast coverage, while a broadcast intervention can reach additional audiences through platforms.

The older media organisations remain substantial. PRISA's news brands, the Atresmedia and Mediaset broadcasting environments, major newspapers and regional media continue to possess resources for reporting, production and agenda-setting. Ownership concentration and dependence on advertising or public support remain relevant even when audiences encounter their material online. The Reuters Institute's 2025 Spain report describes these continuing economic and political pressures. [Digital News Report 2025: Spain](#).

Different digital channels also support different political relationships:

Channel or format	Particularly relevant political function	Main limitation when measuring influence
X	Interaction among politicians, journalists and highly active political users	Visibility can exaggerate representativeness
Instagram and TikTok	Personal presentation, short video and incidental exposure	Viewing does not demonstrate political conversion
YouTube and podcasts	Extended explanation and sustained attachment to presenters	Audiences may span countries and political positions
WhatsApp	Circulation through personal relationships and trusted groups	Much communication is inaccessible to outside observation
Telegram channels	Repeated contact with an assembled community	Subscriber totals do not measure active electoral support
Participatory platforms	Proposals, discussion and organised decision processes	Participation depends on institutional design and follow-through

These are analytical distinctions, not exclusive uses of each platform.

The latest Reuters Institute country report provides another qualification: in 2026, 33% of Spanish respondents reported overall trust in news, 37% sometimes or often avoided it, and 9% paid for online news. The report described use of the major news sources as stable that year. These survey measures indicate a difficult information environment; they do not demonstrate the disappearance of traditional media. [Digital News Report 2026: Spain](#).

Political polarisation increasingly connects public conflict with everyday identity. Mariano Torcal's distinction between ideological and affective polarisation is essential. People can disagree strongly about policy while accepting opponents as legitimate citizens. Affective polarisation concerns hostility towards those opponents as people.

Torcal's *De votantes a hooligans* and Luis Miller's *Polarizados* direct attention towards this social dimension. Political disagreement can become associated with friendship, cultural preferences and judgments about personal character. The organisational implication is that party membership may weaken while attachment to a political camp remains intense. [Discussion of Torcal and Miller's research](#).

Digital communication can support this development by making political recognition continuous. People repeatedly encounter accounts of what their camp values and what the opposing camp supposedly threatens. Humour, indignation and moral judgment can become practices through which membership in the camp is expressed.

This relationship should not be reduced to an algorithmic explanation. Party strategy, media incentives, social experience and pre-existing political identities also shape what people seek and circulate. Online networks may strengthen divisions that arise elsewhere; in other circumstances, they can expose participants to unfamiliar views.

Manuel Arias Maldonado's *La democracia sentimental* explains why political judgment cannot be understood through an exclusively rational model of the citizen. His later *(Pos)verdad y democracia* explicitly questions automatic acceptance of the claim that social networks necessarily destroy public deliberation. Together, the books provide a framework for analysing emotion without treating every political disagreement as manipulation. [La democracia sentimental, 2016](#); [\(Pos\)verdad y democracia, 2024](#).

Gender, sexuality, religion, historical memory and national belonging are particularly consequential because they connect public policy with personal recognition. These conflicts also divide political families internally. Feminist disagreement, for example, cannot always be mapped onto a simple left–right opposition. Similarly, secular economic liberalism and Catholic cultural conservatism may cooperate electorally while retaining different understandings of individual freedom.

The material foundations of political dissatisfaction remain indispensable. Spain's housing problem is especially important because it connects class, generation, territory and expectations of adulthood.

The Banco de España's 2025 Annual Report, published in June 2026, identifies serious affordability difficulties concentrated among younger people, lower-income households and people born abroad, particularly in major urban areas. It connects these pressures with demand growth and a weak housing supply response, while emphasising coordination among levels of government. [Banco de España, Annual Report digest](#). Such conditions do not generate one

predetermined political response. Housing insecurity can be interpreted through criticism of landlords and financialisation, demands for more construction and regulatory reform, opposition to tourist accommodation, or arguments about migration and access to public resources. The intellectual struggle concerns which causal explanation becomes credible. Political communication connects an experience—such as being unable to leave the parental home—to an account of responsibility and a proposed remedy.

Economic influence also operates through channels that attract less public attention. Employer organisations, unions, professional associations and policy specialists possess negotiating access and technical knowledge. FEDEA's research on taxation, pensions, labour markets and regional finance illustrates this continuing production of policy expertise. A widely circulated slogan and a technical fiscal proposal exercise different kinds of influence over the same political process. [FEDEA's research programme](#).

It would therefore be misleading to explain Spanish economic policy through one unified business bloc. Banks, construction firms, tourism businesses, exporters, small enterprises and different groups of property owners have interests that sometimes converge and sometimes conflict. Their capacity to organise and negotiate remains relevant even when public debate is dominated by personalised confrontation.

The effects on state functioning become clearest at the point where public mobilisation encounters institutional procedure. Five mechanisms deserve particular attention.

First, parties retain substantial control over candidate selection and parliamentary coordination. Digital popularity can help someone enter politics, but continuing legislative influence requires cooperation with an organisation or the creation of an effective substitute. The provincial electoral system further increases the value of territorially organised support.

Second, coalition acceptability matters independently of audience size. A party can command a large electorate while being unable to assemble sufficient parliamentary partners. Conversely, a smaller territorial party can become decisive because its support is necessary for investiture or legislation.

Third, executive survival and legislative effectiveness are different. Spain's constructive vote of no confidence requires an alternative prime minister backed by an absolute majority. Existing budgets can be extended, and decree-laws require congressional validation or repeal within thirty days. These rules help explain how intense public controversy and difficult legislative bargaining can coexist with continuity in office. [Spanish Constitution, Articles 86, 113 and 134](#).

Fourth, disputes over judicial institutions can preserve or redistribute influence independently of an election. The CGPJ, which governs important aspects of the judiciary, must be distinguished from the Constitutional Court. The prolonged CGPJ renewal blockage ended through a PSOE–PP agreement in June 2024; it should not be described as the same unresolved blockage continuing into 2026. [Reuters on the 2024 agreement](#).

The broader organisational mechanism is a feedback process. Political conflict generates litigation; procedural developments generate news; publicity changes political incentives and perceptions of institutional legitimacy. The term *lawfare* is one contested interpretation of this process. Neither an investigation nor an adverse judgment establishes it by itself. Equally,

litigation can have strategic political effects without every participating judge acting as a partisan delegate.

The Catalan amnesty illustrates how several layers interact: territorial conflict, parliamentary bargaining, legislation, constitutional argument and competing public narratives. Its enactment as Organic Law 1/2024 was an institutional consequence of negotiations that digital mobilisation alone could neither authorise nor implement. [Official amnesty law](#).

Fifth, control of communication has itself become a policy conflict. The Reuters Institute's 2026 report describes HODIO, announced to monitor online hate and polarisation, alongside proposals concerning public advertising and digital rights of reply. Supporters invoke accountability and transparency; opponents raise concerns about selective enforcement. The report identifies these as initiatives with differing legal statuses, rather than one completed regulatory settlement. [Digital News Report 2026: Spain](#).

These controversies reveal a further struggle: who may legitimately classify information, demand correction, allocate public support and establish the boundaries of acceptable communication?

The relevant scholarship is best read as a set of complementary explanations. The following works provide a particularly useful research map; some analyse Spain directly, while others supply concepts applicable to the Spanish case.

Author or authors	Principal work	Contribution to your inquiry
Gunther, Montero and Botella	<i>Democracy in Modern Spain</i> (2004)	Establishes the institutional and party-system baseline
Guillem Martínez, editor	<i>CT o la cultura de la transición</i> (2012)	Examines the cultural boundaries of legitimate politics inherited from the transition
Isidro López and Emmanuel Rodríguez	<i>Fin de ciclo</i> (2010)	Connects political consent and crisis with property, finance and territorial development
Manuel Castells	<i>Communication Power</i> (2009); <i>Networks of Outrage and Hope</i> (2012)	Explains communication power and networked collective action
Javier Toret and collaborators	<i>Tecnopolítica y 15M</i> (2015), following the 2013 report	Analyses distributed mobilisation across digital networks and physical spaces
González-Bailón and collaborators	"The Dynamics of Protest Recruitment through an Online Network" (2011)	Provides empirical evidence on recruitment and information diffusion
Víctor Sampedro, editor	<i>Comunicación política digital en España</i> (2021)	Traces the Spanish trajectory from citizen mobilisation to professional digital competition
Cristina Flesher Fominaya	<i>Democracy Reloaded</i> (2020)	Studies the relationship between Spain's movements, democratic experimentation and party politics

Author or authors	Principal work	Contribution to your inquiry
Paolo Gerbaudo	<i>The Digital Party</i> (2019)	Examines online participation and centralised political leadership
César Rendueles	<i>Sociofobia</i> (2013)	Challenges the equation of digital connectivity with durable cooperation
Joan Subirats	<i>Otra sociedad. ¿Otra política?</i>	Connects technological change with commons, cooperation and institutional participation
Javier Muñoz Soro	“Sin complejos” (2007)	Reconstructs the intellectual and media development of the Spanish right
Stuart J. Turnbull-Dugarte	“Explaining the end of Spanish exceptionalism...” (2019)	Identifies the importance of territorial attitudes in Vox’s initial breakthrough
Carles Ferreira	“Vox como representante de la derecha radical en España” (2019)	Provides a systematic ideological analysis of Vox
Luis Moreno	<i>The Federalization of Spain</i> (2001)	Explains territorial accommodation and overlapping identities
Mariano Torcal; Luis Miller	<i>De votantes a hooligans; Polarizados</i> (both 2023)	Explain political hostility and its extension into social relationships
Manuel Arias Maldonado	<i>La democracia sentimental</i> (2016); <i>(Pos)verdad y democracia</i> (2024)	Analyses emotion, truth and digital public debate
Daniel Innerarity	<i>Una teoría de la democracia compleja</i> (2020)	Explains the institutional demands of governing a complex society

Ferreira’s bibliography also identifies a 2026 study of Vox and Aliança Catalana in a plurinational context. Its subject is especially relevant to the interaction between radical-right politics and competing nationalisms, although its detailed findings should be assessed separately. [Ferreira’s publications](#).

Innerarity provides a useful final theoretical test. If governing requires the coordination of specialised knowledge, conflicting interests and multiple levels of authority, increased immediacy of public expression cannot by itself perform that coordination. Democratic institutions must develop the capacity to process social complexity. [Innerarity, *Una teoría de la democracia compleja*](#).

For your comparative project, Spain therefore suggests three propositions worth testing separately: **the production of political attention has become more dispersed; control over electoral and governmental decisions remains substantially organisational; and territorial concentration continues to create political leverage that national audience figures cannot measure.**

The decisive future question is how effectively each political camp connects these forms of power. An online community may generate a new electoral challenger, become attached to an established party, sustain an autonomous movement or disappear after a cycle of mobilisation. Which path it follows depends on the intellectual interpretation it offers, the social relationships it builds, the resources it can maintain and the institutional agreements it can secure.

Portugal

Portugal illustrates a substantial transformation in how political support is organised, while also showing the continuing strength of parties, television and established state institutions. Political leaders can now assemble large audiences with much less dependence on local party branches, membership organisations or newspaper editors. But converting those audiences into parliamentary influence, government and implemented policy still requires organisational resources that social media alone cannot provide.

Your hypothesis therefore captures an important part of the Portuguese transformation: political communication increasingly reaches citizens outside traditional party channels. The qualification concerns the extent of displacement. Portugal remains unusually dependent on television news, even as younger citizens increasingly encounter politics through creators, short videos and social platforms. The emerging arrangement combines these channels and gives particular advantages to politicians who can move effectively between them.

The account below distinguishes documented developments from my interpretation of their underlying mechanisms. Its current institutional reference point is **September 2026**.

The parliamentary transformation is substantial, but power is distributed unevenly across national elections, municipalities and the presidency. The present Assembly has the following composition:

Political force	Seats	Position in the political landscape
Democratic Alliance: PSD and CDS-PP	91	Governing centre-right; 89 PSD and 2 CDS-PP deputies
Chega	60	Largest opposition parliamentary group
Socialist Party, PS	58	Established centre-left
Liberal Initiative, IL	9	Market-liberal challenger
Livre	6	Green, progressive and pro-European left
Portuguese Communist Party, PCP	3	Communist and organised-labour tradition
Left Bloc, BE	1	Radical and progressive left
PAN	1	Animal welfare and environmental politics
JPP	1	Political organisation originating in Madeira

These figures come from the [Assembly's current parliamentary composition](#). Chega's ascent—from one deputy in 2019 to twelve in 2022, fifty in 2024 and sixty in 2025—has broken the previous assumption that national competition would remain centred overwhelmingly on PS and PSD. Nevertheless, PS narrowly received more votes than Chega in 2025; Chega obtained more seats through their geographical distribution.

Luís Montenegro continues to head the centre-right government. However, the presidential election produced a different alignment: António José Seguro defeated André Ventura in February 2026 with **66.84%**, demonstrating the capacity of a candidate with a conventional political career to attract a broad electorate. This presidential result cannot be translated directly into legislative party preferences. It does show that Ventura's mobilisation encounters limits when the electoral task becomes assembling a majority across political camps. [Official government biography](#); [official presidential biography](#).

Local government supplies another revealing contrast. Chega won its first three municipal presidencies in October 2025—Albufeira, Entroncamento and São Vicente. Its national breakthrough therefore preceded the construction of a comparable municipal governing network. Different candidates, incumbency advantages and electoral contexts also matter, so this contrast is evidence of uneven organisational development rather than a measurement of social media's independent effect. [RTP's municipal-election report](#).

The starting point is Portugal's particular history of party formation after 1974. It would be misleading to imagine that Portugal first developed the same deeply rooted mass-party society as some northern European countries, which the internet subsequently dismantled.

Portuguese democracy emerged from dictatorship, revolution and rapid institutional reconstruction. Parties helped organise the new political order while simultaneously competing to occupy it. Consequently, their relationship with the state became especially important: parliamentary representation, public resources, municipal government, political appointments and professional careers supported organisations whose links to everyday associational life were uneven.

The relevant distinction is between a party's **social rootedness** and its **institutional rootedness**. A party can possess limited capacity to organise citizens continuously in neighbourhoods and workplaces while retaining considerable strength in candidate recruitment, local administration and government formation. This is why weakening party identification does not automatically imply organisational collapse.

Carlos Jalali's work on Portuguese parties, Marco Lisi's comparative research on party change, and Ingrid van Biezen's analysis of publicly supported parties provide the principal foundations for understanding this pattern. Van Biezen's concept of parties as "public utilities" draws attention to their growing dependence on public financing and regulation. Lisi examines Portuguese party change through organisation, programmes, campaigns, social bases and leadership selection. [Van Biezen, "Political Parties as Public Utilities"](#); [Lisi, *Party Change, Recent Democracies, and Portugal*](#).

Within this arrangement, PS and PSD became broad organisations capable of connecting national leadership with municipal politicians, lawyers, economists, administrators and professional associations. Their ideological differences remained meaningful, but both acquired the practical ability to manage the state and negotiate European integration.

The PCP represented a different organisational tradition: a stronger emphasis on durable membership, organised labour, collective political education and inherited movement identity. The later Left Bloc combined several radical-left traditions with newer movements and a strong public presence. These differences matter because digital communication affects each organisational model differently. It can supplement a dense organisation, expose its declining reach, or allow a newer competitor to grow without first reproducing it.

The intellectual background of the governing centre also contains shared networks that preceded contemporary party competition. SEDES, founded in 1970, is particularly revealing. Its founders came from academic, Christian, trade-union and opposition backgrounds; its declared common commitments included democracy, development and humanism. Participants subsequently entered different parties and governments.

Figures associated with its formation included Adérito Sedas Nunes, João Salgueiro, Jorge Miranda, Vítor Constâncio, João Cravinho and Gonçalo Ribeiro Teles. The significance lies in the formation of a common language of modernisation, expertise and European orientation across otherwise competing political trajectories. [SEDES's institutional history](#).

My interpretation is that Portugal's governing centre has long benefited from this overlap between political and professional worlds. Competition between PS and PSD takes place partly within a shared understanding of competent government. Challengers can attack that shared understanding as evidence of an insulated establishment; the established parties can present it as the experience needed to govern responsibly. Digital communication intensifies this conflict over the meaning of expertise.

The movement into cyberspace has produced a pronounced generational division, without removing television from the centre of national political communication. The 2026 Portuguese Digital News Report provides an unusually clear picture:

Indicator	Reported result
Used television for news during the previous week	71%
Identified television as the main news source	59%
Consumed news through creators or influencers	40%
Creator/influencer news exposure among ages 18–24	71%
Creator/influencer news exposure among ages 65+	24%
Creator exposure among respondents identifying with the right / centre / left	51% / 40% / 37%

The survey covered 2,024 Portuguese internet users, with fieldwork during January–February 2026, overlapping the presidential election. These are self-reported and overlapping usage measures, not market shares or estimates of persuasion. Paisana, Pinto-Martinho and Cardoso, *Digital News Report Portugal 2026*.

Two consequences follow. First, national political communication must still reach citizens through television. Second, a growing part of the next electorate is developing political familiarity through people whose authority comes from online recognition, entertainment, accessibility or perceived authenticity.

This creates different routes into political judgement. A television viewer may encounter politics through a scheduled news programme and its recurring commentators. A younger platform user may encounter a parliamentary confrontation between comedy, sport, lifestyle content and a creator's personal commentary. Political information becomes embedded in a relationship with a recognisable person.

The organisational significance is considerable: **political attachment can develop before party membership, detailed programme knowledge or participation in a political association.**

Portugal's digital political history initially included substantial mobilisation around precarious employment and austerity. The 2011 *Geração à Rasca* protests used Facebook and blogging to assemble participation beyond established party and union leadership. This was an early demonstration that dissatisfaction could become publicly organised without first passing through conventional political organisations. [Contemporary protest chronology and sources](#).

The subsequent anti-austerity cycle also showed the continuing importance of older organisations. New activists, established unions, left parties and inherited symbols of the 1974 revolution interacted rather than simply succeeding one another.

Guya Accornero and Pedro Ramos Pinto's study, **"Mild mannered"? Protest and mobilisation in Portugal under austerity, 2010–2013"**, is a central reference for this period. Its subject is especially relevant to your question because it directs attention beneath parliamentary competition to the changing organisation of contention.

The political consequences were initially absorbed substantially through existing parties. António Costa's minority Socialist government, formed in 2015 with parliamentary support from the Left Bloc and the Communist-led alliance, demonstrated the capacity of established organisations to construct a new governing arrangement. Those supporting parties remained outside the cabinet.

This sequence matters for causal explanation. Internet access and economic grievance were already present before Chega's breakthrough. They did not automatically produce a powerful radical right.

Indeed, Marco Lisi and Enrico Borghetto's analysis of party manifestos covering **1995–2015** found no significant general increase in populist rhetoric after the economic crisis. Their comparative work with other scholars also emphasises ideological legacies, leadership strategies and the structure of party competition. The timing of Portugal's later rupture therefore requires an explanation involving changed political supply and opportunities. [Lisi and Borghetto's manifesto study](#); [Lisi, Llamazares and Tsakatika's comparative study](#).

One of the most perceptive early findings concerned a discrepancy between established public discourse and what was already visible online. Susana Salgado's article **"Where's populism? Online media and the diffusion of populist discourses and styles in Portugal"**, published online in 2018, examined material from 2016.

Comparing newspaper content, readers' comments and party Facebook communication on immigration and corruption, she found that populist discourse had greater visibility in some

online spaces than in mainstream political and journalistic output. She also cautioned against treating commenters as representative of the population. [Salgado's article](#).

The finding helps explain a process that electoral analysis alone can miss. An opinion can circulate repeatedly, acquire a vocabulary and develop a community of recognition before a successful party offers it national representation. An entrepreneurial leader can then connect dispersed expressions of dissatisfaction and give them a common political identity.

That interpretation does not establish that online discourse created the underlying attitudes. It identifies a mechanism through which attitudes previously lacking effective organisation could become more visible and politically usable.

Chega's importance lies partly in its ability to connect personal leadership, political provocation and circulation across different media. André Ventura entered national politics with advantages acquired outside a newly built party apparatus: previous PSD involvement and public recognition as a football commentator. His career illustrates the transfer of recognition between entertainment, television commentary and electoral politics.

The plausible organisational sequence is that familiarity reduces the initial cost of attracting attention; controversial political interventions distinguish the individual; supporters circulate selected moments; parliamentary entry provides further opportunities for exposure; and growing recognition attracts additional supporters and candidates.

This is an interpretation of interacting mechanisms, not an estimate of how many votes each stage produced. Ventura's previous mainstream-party connection also fits Mariana S. Mendes and James Dennison's explanation of radical-right emergence: a credible new political vehicle can occupy an opening on the right while reducing some of the stigma attached to older extremist organisations. [Mendes and Dennison, "Explaining the emergence of the radical right in Spain and Portugal"](#).

Chega's political language connects several grievances that need not have identical social origins:

- Distrust of politicians and allegations of privilege or corruption.
- Anxiety about crime and demands for stronger punishment.
- Concern over immigration, national belonging and access to public resources.
- Frustration with economic insecurity and public-service performance.
- Opposition to cultural changes presented as imposed by influential elites.

The organisational achievement consists in making these concerns appear to share an antagonist and a representative. The antagonist is an unresponsive establishment; the representative is a leader claiming the willingness to confront it.

This also helps explain why policy inconsistency need not immediately dissolve support. Different followers may agree about whom they distrust while disagreeing about taxation, welfare or the appropriate economic role of the state. The leader and the shared conflict can hold together an audience whose programme preferences remain heterogeneous.

Digital formats are well suited to sustaining such relationships. A short intervention can signal determination, loyalty or defiance without resolving the policy tensions within the supporting

coalition. The same mechanism can operate elsewhere on the political spectrum, although its content and intensity differ.

The apparently direct relationship between leader and citizen creates new intermediaries. Platforms determine visibility through recommendation and moderation; creators select and interpret political material; supporters decide what to circulate; and commercial media respond to what becomes controversial.

Andrew Chadwick's **hybrid media system** is useful here. His argument directs attention to power exercised through interactions between older and newer media, including the ability to initiate and steer information flows. Applied to Portugal, it suggests examining who can move a message from television to social media, into journalistic controversy, and back into parliamentary debate. [Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System*](#).

This arrangement can combine decentralised distribution with concentrated leadership. Thousands of supporters may independently share material while the leader remains the dominant source of political meaning. Participation becomes easier, but influence over candidate selection or programme formation need not become equally dispersed.

The distinction between **participating in circulation** and **participating in decisions** is therefore essential. An active online following does not, by itself, establish internal party democracy.

Established media remain powerful participants in this process, despite their economic difficulties. The Reuters Institute identifies Impresa, Medialivre, Media Capital and Global Media, alongside public broadcaster RTP, as major centres in Portugal's media structure. Its 2026 report records overall news trust of 51%, while only 8% report paying for online news.

It also documents ownership concentration, foreign investment and changes involving Lusa and RTP. These developments mean that media finance, ownership and public-service governance remain relevant to political power. [Reuters Institute's Portugal report, 2026](#).

Financially weakened journalism can still provide the investigations, interviews and controversies around which online debate develops. Conversely, strong online circulation can influence what news organisations consider unavoidable.

Smaller publications such as **Fumaça, Divergente and Shifter** provide additional routes for investigative and interpretive journalism. Podcasts also involve established publishers, including Observador, Impresa and the Renascença group. Digital expansion therefore includes the adaptation of existing institutions and the emergence of smaller organisations with distinctive editorial identities. [Reuters Institute's Portugal report, 2025](#).

The different political camps face different organisational problems. The following interpretations concern their strategic positions rather than measured causal effects.

For **PS**, the central tension is between its identity as a defender of social provision and its accumulated responsibility for governing outcomes. Its municipal and administrative experience remains a resource. Yet younger citizens experiencing expensive housing, precarious employment or difficulty accessing services may evaluate that experience as

insufficient evidence of future improvement. Digital communication makes this judgement less dependent on inherited family loyalties or established political commentators.

PS also faces competition over the interpretation of dissatisfaction. The same frustrated citizen may be offered a progressive explanation centred on inequality, a liberal explanation centred on blocked opportunity, or a Chega explanation centred on establishment betrayal. The contest concerns who defines the cause of the problem before a specific policy solution is evaluated.

For **PSD**, the problem is managing a broad governing electorate while facing competitors that can communicate more sharply defined identities. IL challenges it over economic reform and the size or operation of the state. Chega challenges it over national identity, authority and willingness to confront established interests.

PSD's organisational advantage is its capacity to recruit governing personnel and sustain local networks. Its communicative difficulty is that governing requires qualifications, negotiated compromises and delayed results, whereas challengers can present a more immediate promise of rupture.

For **IL**, digital communication helps turn a relatively distinct economic interpretation into a recognisable political identity. Taxation, bureaucracy, competition and professional opportunity can be presented through concise comparisons and explanations. Its appeal is particularly understandable among people who believe their advancement is obstructed by institutions and protected interests.

The distinction between IL and Chega is consequential. Their supporters may share dissatisfaction with PS–PSD alternation, but their diagnoses can diverge substantially. One places greater weight on individual choice and competitive markets; the other on national preference, punitive authority and a leader's confrontation with the establishment.

For the **PCP**, the challenge is the changing relationship between political identity and the institutions that historically sustained it. Workplace organisation, collective memory and continuous activism cultivate a different form of attachment from episodic digital attention. These resources retain value, but their existence does not guarantee access to younger citizens whose employment and social lives are organised differently.

For **BE**, media visibility and engagement with progressive causes do not automatically generate a durable electoral coalition. A party can be prominent in public controversies while losing citizens who prioritise other issues or doubt its ability to influence government.

Livre occupies another position: progressive, green and pro-European politics with an emphasis on public reasoning and institutional reform. Its growth alongside BE's decline warns against treating the Portuguese left as a single audience undergoing one uniform digital trajectory.

Behind these camps are competing intellectual explanations of Portugal's difficulties. The most useful map concerns the organisations that produce these explanations and translate them into public debate.

Intellectual and organisational setting	Main contribution to political interpretation	Route into wider influence
SEDES	Development, institutional reform, expertise and European orientation	Policy papers, professional networks, district activity and public discussion
Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos	Research on Portuguese society, economy and institutions	Books, studies, statistics, conferences, videos and podcasts
Instituto +Liberdade	Individual freedom, liberal democracy, competition and criticism of state dependence	Statistical graphics, courses, interviews and political education
Instituto Francisco Sá Carneiro	Centre-right political thought and preparation of political personnel	Training, publications, summer universities and municipal preparation
Institute of Public Policy–Lisbon	Evaluation of public policy, budgets and institutional reform	Research, budget scrutiny and accessible public-policy information
Centre for Social Studies, Coimbra	Inequality, democracy, labour, colonial legacies and peripheral economic development	Academic research, public interventions and engagement with social questions

The **Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos**, created in 2009 by Alexandre Soares dos Santos and his family, is particularly significant as an institution connecting private philanthropic resources, academic research and public discussion. Its influence operates partly through deciding which questions receive sustained investigation and making findings available beyond universities. This is a form of agenda formation distinct from electoral campaigning. [Foundation description](#).

Instituto +Liberdade provides an especially clear example of an explicit intellectual programme adapted to digital circulation. Its mission identifies corporatism, clientelism, state dependence and weak institutions as obstacles to Portuguese development. It disseminates its interpretation through graphics, educational projects, reading resources and interviews. Its declared commitments also include opposition to illiberalism and populism on both left and right. [Mission statement](#).

Carlos Guimarães Pinto's involvement illustrates a personal connection between political entrepreneurship and organised intellectual activity. However, the institute's own organisational identity should be distinguished from that of IL. Its broader importance is the production of arguments that can circulate through several political and professional settings. [Institutional leadership](#).

The **Instituto Francisco Sá Carneiro** demonstrates how established political organisations reproduce expertise and personnel. Its activities include policy development, political training and preparation for municipal responsibilities. These are capacities whose value becomes particularly visible after an election, when a party must supply candidates, advisers and administrators. [Institute presentation](#).

The **Institute of Public Policy–Lisbon** contributes through budget analysis, electoral and municipal reform, intergenerational questions and the digital transition. Such organisations can influence the terms in which proposals are judged even without attracting mass personal followings. [IPP’s programmes](#).

The **Coimbra Centre for Social Studies** supplies a contrasting intellectual environment. Its research on peripheral capitalism, labour, inequality and democracy connects dissatisfaction to economic structures and development models. Relevant authors include **José Reis, João Rodrigues, Elísio Estanque and Hermes Augusto Costa**, alongside the historical importance of **Boaventura de Sousa Santos**. This is a diverse scholarly environment, with different approaches and political relationships. [CES institutional description](#); [research on peripheral capitalism](#).

The deeper conflict can therefore be formulated as three rival explanations of frustrated expectations:

1. Portugal needs stronger public provision, labour protection and a less unequal development model.
2. Portugal needs less protection of established interests, more competition and greater individual opportunity.
3. Portugal needs a political rupture restoring accountability, authority and priority for the national community.

Digital communication gives these explanations more accessible messengers. It does not eliminate their intellectual differences.

Religion remains an additional source of organisation and moral interpretation, although its political connections are plural. Catholic institutions and social organisations have historically contributed to public debate and civic recruitment. Their relationships with contemporary parties cannot be reduced to one bloc.

Francisco Batista’s 2024 study of Christianity and Chega makes a useful distinction: it finds no formal endorsement of Chega by the Portuguese Catholic Church or Episcopal Conference, while identifying support within some Christian movements. This helps explain how conservative moral themes can circulate through particular networks without implying a uniform institutional alignment. [Batista’s study](#).

Analytically, the relevant question is which actors translate moral concern into political mobilisation: clergy, lay organisations, campaigners, commentators or party figures. Their authority comes from different sources, and agreement on one issue need not imply comprehensive political loyalty.

Material conditions remain indispensable to explaining why particular messages become persuasive. Portugal’s political reorganisation cannot be adequately explained by changes in communication technology alone.

The OECD’s 2026 assessment identifies persistent productivity weaknesses, pressures associated with ageing, labour shortages and housing affordability. These problems coexist with recent economic growth and declining public debt. Citizens can therefore hear encouraging

aggregate economic news while experiencing limited improvement in their own circumstances. [OECD assessment of Portugal](#).

Housing is especially important because it joins together several conflicts: generations, property ownership, tourism, investment, wages, migration and state capacity. The same unaffordable rent can support very different political explanations. Political organisations compete to establish which explanation appears most convincing.

Migration has also become more visible in the country's social structure. AIMA's report records approximately **1.54 million foreign residents at the end of 2024**, while noting statistical revisions affecting comparisons. The political consequences depend on where people live and work, the capacity of services and administration, and how change is publicly interpreted. [AIMA's migration report](#).

One tension is particularly revealing: restrictive immigration politics can conflict with employers' demand for labour. Reuters documented this conflict in Portuguese construction in July 2026, where firms facing housing-development demands also reported difficulties securing workers. This illustrates the difference between mobilising an electoral message and reconciling the interests involved in implementing policy. [Reuters's construction-sector report](#).

Organised interests retain routes into state decisions that are largely invisible in measurements of online popularity. Portugal's Permanent Commission for Social Concertation brings together government, trade unions and employer organisations. Its remit includes employment, training, social security, taxation and public administration.

Participants include **CGTP-IN and UGT**, together with employer confederations **CIP, CCP, CAP and CTP**. These organisations possess information, negotiating capacity and continuing institutional access. A political creator may attract more attention to an issue while a sectoral association has greater influence over the detailed rules eventually adopted. [Official mandate](#); [official composition](#).

This distinction is fundamental to mapping the “background processes” you identify. Public communication determines visibility and pressure; organised bargaining helps determine feasible agreements; administrative organisations determine whether those agreements work.

Portugal's constitutional arrangements further separate communicative success from control of the state. Parliamentary candidates must be presented through parties or coalitions, although their lists can include non-members. Seats are allocated through constituency-based proportional representation using d'Hondt. Consequently, a large personal audience must still acquire a party vehicle and an effective geographical distribution. [Official electoral-system explanation](#); [Constitution, Article 151](#).

Research by **Enrico Borghetto and Marco Lisi** reinforces the importance of this organisational gateway. Their study of parliamentary activity in 2007–2015 found that productivity was associated with reselection, but did not determine list position. The findings direct attention to the party-controlled conditions under which an individual can maintain a viable parliamentary career. [Study of candidate reselection](#).

The president also retains consequential powers, including appointment of the prime minister, legislative veto, requests for constitutional review and dissolution under constitutional

conditions. Constitutional amendment requires a two-thirds parliamentary majority. These arrangements create additional thresholds between winning public attention and restructuring state authority. [Official constitutional text](#).

Minority government provides the clearest practical example. AD's 91 deputies fall short of an absolute majority, and adding IL would produce only 100. Nevertheless, ordinary parliamentary decisions can pass through abstentions. The **2026 budget passed with Socialist abstention and Chega opposition**. The largest opposition party was therefore not indispensable to that decision. [Reuters's budget report](#).

The continuing importance of PS–PSD negotiation was visible again on 9 September 2026, when PS leader José Luís Carneiro set out conditions for dialogue over the 2027 budget. Whatever one thinks of those conditions, the episode illustrates the persistence of conventional bargaining within the transformed public sphere. PS's statement.

Electoral success also helps newer parties acquire conventional organisational resources. Public financing linked to votes and parliamentary representation can support staff, expertise and continuing activity. The likely trajectory is therefore not permanent virtual organisation: an initially media-dependent party can gradually acquire institutional foundations. [Official party-finance legislation](#).

The scholarship is strongest when several research traditions are read together. No single author identified here supplies a complete explanation encompassing intellectual production, online mobilisation, party organisation and state implementation.

Authors and works

Carlos Jalali; Patrícia Silva; Diogo Moreira — “Party Patronage in Portugal: Treading in Shallow Water” (2012)

Marco Lisi — *Party Change, Recent Democracies, and Portugal* (2015)

André Freire

Marina Costa Lobo, with John Curtice — *Personality Politics?* (2015)

Guya Accornero and Pedro Ramos Pinto — “‘Mild mannered’?” (2015)

Susana Salgado

Principal contribution to this inquiry

A central reference for investigating appointments and the relationship between parties and the state. The chapter is listed in the [Oxford volume on party patronage](#).

A broad framework connecting programmes, leadership, organisation, campaigns and social support.

Research on ideological divisions, representation and the relationship between voters, candidates and political elites. His work supplies an empirical alternative to inferring ideology from online visibility. [Institutional bibliography](#).

Examines when evaluations of leaders affect voting. It helps distinguish personalisation from the disappearance of ideological and partisan judgement. [Publisher-supplied book description](#).

A principal study of Portuguese protest and mobilisation during austerity.

Particularly valuable for connecting established media structures, online discourse, populism and political communication.

Authors and works	Principal contribution to this inquiry
Gustavo Cardoso, Miguel Paisana and Ana Pinto-Martinho	Provide the audience evidence needed to assess the actual balance between television, platforms and creators.
Mariana S. Mendes and James Dennison (2021)	Explain radical-right emergence through the interaction of issue salience, political supply and historical stigma.
Rodrigo Quintas da Silva — “A Portuguese exception to right-wing populism” (2018)	Identifies conditions behind earlier radical-right weakness and explicitly recognises that changes could destabilise that balance. Article .
Riccardo Marchi — <i>A nova direita anti-sistema: o caso do Chega</i> (2020)	An early book-length investigation of Chega, relevant to its origins, political identity and organisation.
João Carvalho , editor — <i>Chega: The New Portuguese Far Right</i> (2026)	A recent collection including A. Biscaia and Susana Salgado’s chapter on Chega’s social-media presence during 2018–2023. The chapter’s publication is verified in Salgado’s bibliography ; I have not attributed detailed findings from its inaccessible text.
Jorge M. Fernandes, Pedro C. Magalhães and António Costa Pinto , editors — <i>The Oxford Handbook of Portuguese Politics</i> (2023)	The broad institutional and historical context within which the newer communication research should be situated.

These approaches also expose an important methodological issue. Studies explaining the earlier absence of a successful radical right should be read as accounts of a particular configuration, not as claims about an unchanging Portuguese national character. Conversely, studies of current growth should not retrospectively assume that the outcome was inevitable once social media appeared.

My interpretation is that Portugal’s transformation involves a change in the sequence through which political organisations become powerful. An established party typically accumulated personnel, local relationships and institutional experience while building an electorate. A contemporary challenger can first assemble a national audience around a leader and a set of conflicts, then use electoral success to acquire organisational depth.

That altered sequence has several consequences. Leadership may become powerful before internal institutions mature. Candidate recruitment can accelerate faster than organisational supervision. Supporters may share a political identity before agreeing on a programme. Parliamentary success can then generate pressure to acquire expertise and negotiate compromises that the original public message made difficult.

At the same time, established organisations can adapt. SEDES now circulates policy arguments through podcasts; foundations translate research into accessible visual formats; newspapers publish video; and parties train politicians to communicate through platforms. The new communication environment therefore redistributes opportunities across organisations with different capacities to respond.

For further investigation, the most consequential questions are concrete: **whether Chega can turn national recognition into durable local organisation; whether PS and PSD can**

reconnect governing competence with convincing accounts of everyday improvement; whether liberal and progressive challengers can retain distinct audiences beyond individual campaigns; and whether citizens' increased participation in political communication will translate into greater influence over political decisions. Those developments will determine how deeply the change in public communication reorganises the Portuguese state itself.

Greece

Greece supports your hypothesis most strongly in the formation of political attention, public grievances, and personal leadership. The displacement of parties is much less complete in electoral organization, access to public resources, and the exercise of state power. The resulting system combines increasingly autonomous online publics with durable party networks, concentrated media ownership, and a strongly personalized executive.

This combination explains an apparent contradiction: Greek society can produce enormous mobilizations against the political establishment while the governing party retains a substantial parliamentary advantage. Public discontent, electoral alternatives, and governing capacity develop through different organizational processes.

The account below distinguishes established research findings from my own synthesis and incorporates developments verified up to **10 September 2026**.

The parliamentary surface already illustrates the underlying fragmentation. The Hellenic Parliament's current register gives the following composition:

Parliamentary group	MPs
New Democracy	156
PASOK–KINAL	33
Communist Party of Greece, KKE	21
Greek Solution	11
SYRIZA	10
Niki	8
Course of Freedom	5
Independents	53

These are parliamentary-group memberships, which differ from party affiliations and current electoral support. The 53 independents do not constitute a common political force. The total of 297 reflects the invalidation of three Spartans MPs' elections in 2025. [Hellenic Parliament's current register](#), AP on the annulled seats.

The contrast with the June 2023 election is striking: New Democracy then obtained 158 seats and SYRIZA 47. Much of the subsequent transformation has therefore occurred through the disintegration and reorganization of the opposition within the parliamentary term. It cannot be understood simply as a movement of voters from one established party to another. [Inter-Parliamentary Union, June 2023 election](#).

The historical starting point is Greece's distinctive relationship between political incorporation and access to the state. The older parties performed several functions simultaneously: they represented ideological traditions, incorporated previously excluded groups, recruited political personnel, mediated local interests, and provided channels through which citizens sought administrative assistance or material opportunities.

Nicos Mouzelis supplies an essential theoretical foundation. In *Politics in the Semi-Periphery* (1986), he treats clientelism and populism as historically specific forms of political incorporation. Parliamentary participation can expand through personalized relationships and centralized leadership without producing the same autonomous organizations found in some other European societies. His framework cautions against assuming that Greece first possessed a fully developed organizational order which social media subsequently dissolved. [Mouzelis, Politics in the Semi-Periphery](#).

After the restoration of democracy in 1974—the *Metapolitefsi*—New Democracy and PASOK became the principal vehicles of political integration. Their competition carried memories of the Civil War, exclusion of the Left, the dictatorship, national independence, and competing interpretations of European integration.

PASOK's development was particularly consequential. It combined the political recognition of previously marginalized social groups with extensive organizational penetration and a powerful personal leadership. New Democracy combined conservative and liberal traditions with local political networks and its claim to governmental competence. These were broad political worlds, extending into families, professional associations, student politics, municipalities, and public employment.

The distinction between democratic incorporation and clientelism matters. Clientelism involves selective access conditioned on political loyalty. Universal social rights and programmatic redistribution operate according to a different principle. Greek parties could expand the latter while also reproducing the former.

My interpretation is that digital communication has weakened the parties' control over the interpretation of experience more rapidly than it has weakened their capacity to mediate practical opportunities. A citizen may reject a party's national narrative online while still relying on established local relationships to navigate an administrative problem. Expressive independence and practical dependence can coexist.

Dimitri Sotiropoulos's study, *Formal Weakness and Informal Strength: Civil Society in Contemporary Greece* (2004), provides a related correction. A low level of participation in

formal associations does not establish that society lacks networks, mutual assistance, or mobilizing capacity. This is particularly relevant when interpreting the rapid emergence of online campaigns: some apparently new networks activate relationships and solidarities that already existed. [LSE's scholarly catalogue](#).

The principal intellectual conflict concerns how Greece's persistent institutional problems should be explained. Several competing traditions supply the concepts through which political events acquire meaning.

Nikiforos Diamandouros's influential *Cultural Dualism and Political Change in Postauthoritarian Greece* (1994) distinguishes a Western-oriented modernizing culture from a defensive "underdog" culture. This captures a recurring conflict over Europe, modernization, collective protection, and national identity. However, these categories should be treated as contested ideal types. Actual political identities combine positions drawn from both, and the framework can obscure material interests when used as a hierarchy between supposedly advanced and backward Greeks. Diamandouros's original study.

A more institutionally focused modernization argument appears in *From Stagnation to Forced Adjustment: Reforms in Greece, 1974–2010*, edited by **Stathis Kalyvas, George Pagoulatos, and Haridimos Tsoukas**. Its central problem is the repeated interruption of reform by domestic political arrangements and organized interests. This perspective directs attention toward administrative performance, credible institutions, implementation, and the capacity to overcome entrenched resistance. [Kalyvas, Pagoulatos, and Tsoukas, 2012](#).

The radical-left political-economy tradition assigns greater explanatory weight to capitalism, class power, austerity, and the architecture of European monetary integration. **Christos Laskos and Euclid Tsakalotos**, in *Crucible of Resistance: Greece, the Eurozone and the World Economic Crisis* (2013), challenge explanations that isolate Greek exceptionalism from wider economic structures. Their intervention also demonstrates how intellectual production can connect directly to political organization and governmental personnel. [Laskos and Tsakalotos, Crucible of Resistance](#).

These approaches identify different objects of reform. For the first, the central obstacle is often the domestic organization of interests and public administration. For the second, institutional reform may itself reproduce unequal power unless the economic relationships it serves also change.

A further intellectual tradition interprets Greece through its historical and civilizational identity. **Christos Yannaras's** *Orthodoxy and the West* examines the encounter between Orthodox traditions and imported Western religious and institutional forms. Its importance lies in providing a developed language for questioning whether modernization necessarily entails cultural self-displacement. This intellectual tradition cannot simply be assigned to one contemporary nationalist party. [Yannaras, Orthodoxy and the West](#).

Digital political discourse frequently compresses these substantial disagreements into shorter moral oppositions: competence against patronage, ordinary people against privileged elites, national dignity against external dependency, or constitutional accountability against impunity. The underlying intellectual traditions remain relevant even when participants encounter their arguments through videos and commentary rather than books.

There is also a major scholarly disagreement about **populism**. In *Populism and Crisis Politics in Greece* (2014), **Takis Pappas** argues that the debt crisis intensified dysfunctions rooted in earlier populist politics. His analysis connects polarized competition, patronage, claims of popular sovereignty, and the failure of reform. [Pappas, *Populism and Crisis Politics in Greece*](#).

Yannis Stavrakakis and Giorgos Katsambekis insist that anti-populism must be studied alongside populism. Political and media actors jointly construct the distinction between the responsible political centre and allegedly irresponsible challengers. Anti-populist discourse therefore participates in political struggle rather than simply describing it from outside. Their work is particularly useful for understanding how intellectual categories become partisan identities and media narratives. [Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, “The populism/anti-populism frontier,” 2019](#).

Applied to contemporary Greece, this means investigating both the claim that entrenched elites exclude citizens and the opposing claim that anti-establishment mobilization threatens responsible government. Each can reveal real problems; each can also become a means of disqualifying opponents without addressing their substantive arguments.

The intellectual infrastructure producing these interpretations is distributed across universities, research institutes, policy organizations, publishers, and media. Some particularly relevant institutions are:

Institution	Principal intellectual orientation or activity	Route into political life
ELIAMEP	European and international affairs, democratic institutions, foreign-policy analysis	Research, policy dialogue, expert networks, public commentary. Institutional profile
diaNEOsis	Surveys and research supporting proposals for Greece’s modernization	Connections among researchers, business, cultural institutions, policymakers, and accessible digital publication. Institutional profile
KEFiM	Explicit advocacy of liberal ideas and public-policy reform	Policy studies, public debate, and media dissemination. Official website
Nikos Poulantzas Institute	Democratic-left theory, political economy, social movements, democracy	Publications, seminars, intellectual exchange, and public discussion. Institute
ENA Institute	Inequality, democratic institutions, ecological sustainability, progressive policy	Research groups, surveys, seminars, and policy proposals. Institutional profile

These organizations have different institutional relationships. Intellectual proximity, shared participants, funding, and formal party control are distinct connections.

For example, diaNEOsis states that its operating costs are covered by its founder, Dimitris Daskalopoulos, and that it has no party affiliation. Its boards connect academics, businesspeople, and cultural figures. This is evidence of an organized capacity to commission research and bring it into public debate. It does not establish a unified command structure over political parties. [diaNEOsis, organization and funding](#).

The relevant sociological questions are therefore concrete: who commissions research, selects problems, finances dissemination, recruits experts, and translates proposals into legislation? Online communication changes the reach and speed of these activities, while their organization continues to require resources.

The debt crisis created the decisive opening for new political communication. It undermined the credibility of the existing representatives at the same time that digital platforms made alternative interpretations easier to circulate.

The anti-austerity mobilizations of the early 2010s joined economic grievances to questions about democratic representation. The experience of wage reductions, unemployment, taxation, and external conditionality could be interpreted as evidence that the established parties had ceased to represent the population.

The 2011 squares movement was consequently more than a protest against particular economic measures. It made representation itself an object of conflict: who could speak for society, what counted as a legitimate mandate, and how citizens could intervene between elections.

Vasiliki Triga's study of the Greek "I don't pay" movement is especially relevant here. Her analysis of Facebook groups found that mobilization drew on ordinary understandings of representative democracy as well as economic hardship. Facebook helped circulate interpretations of civic obligation and legitimate disobedience. [Triga, "Social protest through Facebook in the Greek context," 2011.](#)

Research by **Maria Rovisco, Anastasia Veneti, and Stamatis Poulakidakos** adds an organizational dimension. Their study of the same movement examines practical solidarity, everyday resistance, and an identifiable organizing core. Their evidence shows why digital visibility should not be equated with organizational spontaneity. Activism involved people maintaining continuity, coordinating interventions, and developing a shared interpretation of political conditions. [Rovisco, Veneti, and Poulakidakos, author manuscript.](#)

SYRIZA's rise involved the interaction of these movements with an existing party and intellectual tradition. Its electoral expansion therefore cannot be adequately described as an internet audience becoming a government. Established cadres, recognizable leadership, parliamentary experience, and networks within the Left helped convert diffuse rejection into an electoral alternative.

The events of 2015 exposed the limits of that conversion. The referendum rejected the creditors' proposed terms by more than 61%, yet the government subsequently accepted a new bailout agreement. SYRIZA split and then won the September election. [Inter-Parliamentary Union, September 2015 election background.](#)

The broader implication is that the ability to articulate a popular refusal differs from the capacity to implement an alternative economic order. Electoral authorization operated within banking, fiscal, monetary, and international relationships that public mobilization alone could not transform.

This experience also changed the meaning of political promises. A challenger claiming that determination and popular support would overcome institutional constraints faced the memory of 2015. Conversely, a government presenting itself as competent and predictable could appeal

to fatigue with confrontation. Digital communication subsequently developed within that altered field of expectations.

The scale of the media transition is substantial, but the available measures must be interpreted carefully. Antonis Kalogeropoulos's Reuters Institute country studies provide the clearest recurring evidence.

Indicator	Finding Year	
Social media used for news	64%	2025
YouTube used for news	30%	2025
Instagram used for news	21%	2025
TikTok used for news	17%	2025
Trust in news overall	18%	2026
Sometimes or often avoiding news	60%	2026

These are survey findings concerning online respondents. Platform use overlaps, and the percentages do not measure political allegiance or the proportion of votes caused by a platform. [Reuters Institute, Greece 2025](#), [Greece 2026](#).

The combination of extensive use and low trust is politically significant. Citizens may encounter large quantities of political material while doubting the credibility of the institutions producing it. This creates opportunities for people who offer an alternative basis of trust: personal testimony, professional independence, apparent authenticity, or a shared experience of exclusion.

It also creates several different possible responses. Some citizens seek investigative journalism; some follow partisan commentators; some participate in movements; others withdraw from news. Distrust does not have a single ideological destination.

The 2025 Greek World Values Survey, published in April 2026, sharpens this picture. In a sample of 1,200 respondents, **59.3% felt that people like them had little or no say in government**, while **64.5% expressed confidence in their own capacity to participate politically**. Yet 53.1% described their voting choice through party identification, and approximately four in ten through dislike of the alternatives. [diaNEOsis-EKKE, World Values Survey](#).

My reading is that Greece contains a large constituency for additional channels of political voice without having undergone a complete dissolution of partisan attachment. Many citizens appear to regard the political system as insufficiently responsive while continuing to make distinctions among established political camps.

The growth of digital media has also been accompanied by renewed ownership concentration. This is one of the strongest qualifications to a simple displacement thesis.

The 2026 Reuters Institute report records the acquisition of the NewsIt group by Evangelos Marinakis's conglomerate; of iefimerida by Dimitrios Mpakos, Ioannis Kaymenakis, and Alexandros Exarchos; and of the formerly cooperative newspaper *Efimerida ton Sintakton* by

Dimitris Melissanidis. These developments connect established business ownership to significant digital news production. [Reuters Institute, Greece 2026](#).

The technological possibility of creating a publication cheaply therefore does not settle the question of who can sustain it. Reporting, legal defence, advertising sales, technical infrastructure, and audience development require continuing resources. Financial vulnerability can make an initially independent outlet available for acquisition.

Solomon's **Who Owns the Media** investigation is valuable because it maps relationships between media ownership and other business activities. It provides a way to investigate the economic infrastructure behind public communication rather than treating every website as a separate centre of influence. [Solomon's ownership project](#).

A particularly important recent study is **Yani Kartalis's** *From Ostensible to Actual Media Pluralism* (2025). It examines approximately 3.38 million headlines from 81 Greek websites during 2024, with more detailed analysis of political and economic coverage. The study finds considerable thematic similarity, recognizable clusters of governmental stance, reproduction of news-agency material, and an association between common ownership and similar positioning. Its results do not depict uniformly pro-government coverage: a strongly critical cluster remains. The study concerns headlines and uses automated measures, so it cannot establish direct owner instructions. [Kartalis, GreeSE Paper 210](#).

This evidence changes the appropriate unit of analysis. Counting outlets is insufficient. One must examine the diversity of original reporting, sources, interpretations, and ownership.

The same applies to social media. A person watching news on YouTube may be consuming the work of a television broadcaster, a digital newspaper, an independent reporter, a political organization, or an individual creator. The distribution platform does not by itself reveal where editorial power lies.

There are therefore several intermediaries between an event and the citizen: the person producing the account, the organization financing it, the platform distributing it, and the social relationships through which it is recommended. Some older intermediaries lose power while others acquire new forms of reach.

Personal leadership has become more detachable from long organizational apprenticeship. Stefanos Kasselakis's ascent to the SYRIZA leadership in 2023 is a particularly revealing case.

His rapid campaign used autobiographical storytelling, personal presentation, and social platforms, while television entertainment coverage amplified the resulting visibility. Anastasia Veneti described this interaction through the concept of "politainment." The process combined a personal media presence with an actual party leadership election. [WIRED's investigation and interview with Veneti](#).

The structural issue is the relationship between different sources of authority. A leader can claim legitimacy from a broad personal following or a direct membership vote, while party cadres claim authority from organizational continuity, ideological commitment, and internal procedures.

When these sources diverge, a successful leadership campaign may produce a fragile party. Visibility can help secure the position without supplying a shared programme, trusted relationships among officials, or accepted rules for resolving disagreement.

Open leadership selection can thus have contradictory effects. It widens participation while potentially weakening the position of members who have performed continuous organizational work. A leader may become more directly accountable to a large but intermittently engaged audience and less dependent on intermediate bodies.

This is one of the most important changes to examine in Greece: **the weakening of internal mediation can increase personal centralization even while participation appears to expand.**

New Democracy illustrates a different adaptation. It combines a long-established organization and governmental resources with personalized digital communication. Its strength cannot be assessed by online popularity alone. Local organization, recognizable personnel, electoral credibility, and the ability to present administrative achievements reinforce its public communication.

The governing party also benefits when dissatisfied voters disagree about the alternative. An incumbent does not need to retain universal confidence if competing opposition forces fail to establish a plausible common route to government.

Its central vulnerability is that a political identity built around competence makes administrative failure especially consequential. Claims of modernization invite scrutiny of transport safety, disaster management, public services, and institutional accountability. Digital networks allow citizens to juxtapose official performance narratives with their own experiences.

PASOK faces another problem. Its remaining organizational resources and social-democratic identity provide continuity, but its history also ties it to the governing establishment. It must translate discontent into renewed confidence in a party associated with earlier administrations. Organizational survival provides an opportunity; it does not automatically produce an intellectually convincing alternative.

KKE represents a more durable connection between doctrine, organization, and political identity. Its significance for this analysis is that ideological and organizational continuity can remain a resource in a volatile media environment. Digital channels can extend a stable political framework rather than continually reconstructing it around a leader's persona.

Course of Freedom illustrates the visibility available to an opposition centred on confrontational scrutiny, legal argument, and the personality of Zoe Konstantopoulou. Its development raises a recurring question for personalized challengers: can a distinctive public voice acquire the personnel and internal coordination required for a broader governing role?

The nationalist and religious right contains several organizational forms. It should not be treated as one online community with one leadership centre.

Greek Solution is especially instructive because its communication extends across older and newer media. A Solomon investigation by **Danae Maragkoudaki**, edited by **Stavros Malichoudis**, documents connections around outlets including Alert TV, Focus FM, Machi

FM, and voicenews.gr. This shows why the party's visibility should be investigated through an interlinked media environment rather than attributed solely to social platforms. [Solomon's investigation of the Velopoulos media network](#).

Niki, meanwhile, makes religious and national identity particularly explicit. More generally, religious networks provide relationships, trusted speakers, and interpretive traditions that can be extended digitally. The Church of Greece, individual clergy, lay organizations, and religious political activists nevertheless have distinct positions and interests.

The Reuters Institute's 2025 report also identifies an expanding far-right YouTube environment, including creators with Golden Dawn connections and content concerning Orthodoxy, Turkey, Trump, and Putin. That establishes the existence of a recognizable repertoire; it does not establish the size of a unified electoral bloc or foreign direction of those audiences. [Reuters Institute, Greece 2025](#).

There is an additional caution against assuming that Greece simply reproduces American culture wars. **Sokratis Koniordos and Dimitri Sotiropoulos's** 2023 study of vaccination, migration, family and gender, and national identity found bounded tensions and pragmatic accommodations alongside traditional declarations. They also observed that conflicts often followed initiatives from state authorities and became intertwined with party competition. Their evidence concerns an earlier period and includes small qualitative groups, but it challenges the assumption that cultural polarization necessarily originates online or consumes every political relationship. [Koniordos and Sotiropoulos, GreeSE Paper 182](#).

The Tempi mobilizations provide the clearest example of political authority developing outside established party channels. The 2023 railway disaster became a focal point for demands concerning safety, accountability, and the treatment of ordinary citizens by public institutions.

The anniversary demonstrations in 2025 involved families, unions, professionals, and a geographically extensive mobilization. Their significance lay partly in the breadth of participation across existing political affiliations. AP, February 2025 mobilizations.

The movement's potential to unite otherwise divided citizens followed from the character of its demands. Railway safety and a credible investigation could command support without agreement on taxation, migration, foreign policy, or the ownership of industry.

Digital communication helped make testimony, public criticism, and collective participation visible. But the authority involved was also grounded in bereavement, persistent campaigning, professional knowledge, and physical demonstrations. Reducing the movement to an online reaction would miss the foundations of its credibility.

The transition toward electoral organization became concrete in May 2026. **Maria Karystianou**, whose daughter died in the crash, launched **Hope for Democracy**, identifying transport safety, education, health, and corruption among its concerns. [Reuters, 22 May 2026](#).

This transition exposes a difficult organizational problem. Agreement around a demand for justice does not provide automatic agreement across a governmental programme. Once a movement selects candidates, establishes leadership procedures, and takes positions on

additional questions, it introduces distinctions that a broad campaign could previously leave unresolved.

There is also a tension between personal moral authority and organizational accountability. A respected campaigner can attract support through an exceptional personal history. A lasting party must establish procedures that remain legitimate when other members disagree with that person.

The same opposition space is being reorganized through a different route by **Alexis Tsipras**, who launched the **Greek Left Alliance, ELAS, on 26 May 2026**. His declared priorities included institutional independence, corruption, incomes, housing, and public services. This combines an established political reputation with a new organizational vehicle. [Reuters, 27 May 2026](#).

These developments reveal two distinct recruitment paths: a public campaign generating a political leader, and an established leader attempting to reorganize an electoral audience. Both must subsequently construct durable organizations.

The possibility of an overarching anti-establishment constituency has now received unusually direct scholarly examination. **Christos Papagiannis, Stefanos Tyros, and Sofia Vasilopoulou**, in *Beyond Left and Right* (March 2026), analyse Eteron survey data from 2,574 adults collected in 2025. Their analysis identifies an establishment–anti-establishment dimension alongside left–right differences. However, second-choice party preferences remain significantly constrained by ideological distance. Shared distrust therefore does not erase the distinctions between radical-left and hard-right electorates. The findings are observational and do not show that social media caused the division. [Papagiannis, Tyros, and Vasilopoulou, GreeSE Paper 217](#).

This provides a strong empirical basis for distinguishing a common protest from a potential governing coalition. Citizens can agree that institutions are unresponsive while holding incompatible ideas about what a responsive government should do.

The material foundations of these conflicts remain essential. Digital communication gives grievances visibility, but its political effects depend on the conditions being interpreted.

Housing offers a particularly clear example. Eurostat reports that Greek households devoted an average of 36% of disposable income to housing in 2024, compared with 19% across the EU. Housing-cost overburden affected 29% of the urban population and 28% of the rural population. [Eurostat, *Housing in Europe*, 2025 edition](#).

These conditions help explain how a narrative of national economic recovery can coexist with dissatisfaction among households. Aggregate improvement and personal insecurity are different experiences.

The political divisions therefore also concern who benefits from tourism, property appreciation, investment, and economic restructuring; who faces rising living costs; and who possesses family resources capable of absorbing uncertainty.

An online campaign gains force when it supplies a persuasive interpretation of such experiences. The same financial pressure can be attributed to domestic business power,

government policy, European constraints, migration, or political corruption. The competition among interpretations is where intellectual traditions, party messaging, journalism, and creator communities meet.

Geography continues to matter. Athens, Thessaloniki, tourist areas, agricultural regions, and border communities experience different combinations of housing costs, labour markets, public services, and national-security concerns. Digital networks can connect these experiences nationally, while their meanings remain locally differentiated.

The implications for the Greek state are best understood by separating public visibility from administrative capacity. Kevin Featherstone and Dimitris Papadimitriou's *Prime Ministers in Greece: The Paradox of Power* (2015) is fundamental here. It examines how politically dominant leaders can coexist with weaknesses in central coordination and implementation. Their subsequent *Greek Prime Ministers in the Eye of the Storm* extends the investigation to crisis management and institutional change. [LSE's presentation of their research](#).

Applied to digital politics, their argument suggests that a prime minister's ability to issue messages rapidly and dominate the public agenda need not produce equivalent control throughout ministries, regulators, public enterprises, and local administration.

This creates a potentially widening gap between expectations and performance. Personalized communication attributes achievements to the leader. It can also make failures across a complicated administrative system appear to be direct evidence about that leader's competence or intentions.

Digital administration introduces a further transformation. Online services can reduce the need for personal intervention in routine transactions, make decisions traceable, and improve access. The European Commission's 2025 assessment records continuing digital-service development alongside remaining gaps; 78% of Greek respondents considered digitalization of public and private services to be making their lives easier. [European Commission, Greece's Digital Decade report](#).

The political consequence depends on institutional design. Standardized and auditable services can reduce opportunities for selective mediation. Systems that permit discretionary exceptions or opaque alteration of records can reproduce older relationships through new technology.

The OPEKEPE agricultural-subsidy investigations make this issue concrete. In July 2026, the European Public Prosecutor's Office indicted 22 defendants, including four serving MPs, while dismissing allegations against seven other serving MPs for insufficient evidence. The alleged practices included interference with inspections, retrospective changes to data, and false certifications. These are pending allegations against the indicted individuals, not convictions. [EPPO, 16 July 2026](#).

For political sociology, the case directs attention to control over administrative processes: who can alter a decision, obtain an exception, influence verification, or challenge an official finding? These powers remain organizationally embedded even in a society where public communication has become highly digital.

The European dimension also remains indispensable. Greek governments operate within institutions that affect financial resources, regulatory standards, and accountability. The EPPO's role illustrates how an external institutional channel can generate consequences within domestic politics. European integration can therefore be experienced simultaneously as a constraint on political choice and as a source of oversight.

Investigative journalism supplies another route from digital communication to institutional action. **Eliza Triantafyllou and Tassos Telloglou's** reporting for Inside Story helped uncover the Predator surveillance affair before it received extensive attention elsewhere. Here, the crucial capacity was sustained original investigation, subsequently amplified through the wider media system. [Reuters Institute, Greece 2023](#).

In February 2026, a Greek court convicted Intellexa founder Tal Dilian and three others of personal-data offences, with the sentences subject to appeal, and referred possible more serious offences for further investigation. That ruling does not establish that Mitsotakis ordered Predator surveillance. [Reuters, 26 February 2026](#).

The broader point is that political accountability depends on connections among reporting, technical expertise, legal representation, oversight bodies, courts, and public pressure. Online attention can strengthen these connections, but it cannot perform all their functions.

For your proposed analysis, I would distinguish the following degrees of transformation:

Political function	Observed direction in Greece	Continuing organizational requirement
Making grievances publicly visible	Strong expansion beyond party channels	Credible testimony, reporting, and sustained attention
Interpreting events and assigning responsibility	Greater competition among parties, outlets, experts, and creators	Intellectual production and trusted sources
Establishing a political personality	Faster routes to national visibility	Conversion of attention into durable support
Mobilizing demonstrations	Easier coordination across existing affiliations	Organizers, associations, logistics, and continuity
Selecting leaders and candidates	Greater exposure to personal popularity and open participation	Accepted procedures and internal legitimacy
Winning parliamentary power	Increased volatility and new entrants	Electoral organization, credible programmes, and institutional rules
Allocating resources and implementing policy	Much less displacement by social media	Administrative authority, expertise, monitoring, and legal accountability

This is my analytical synthesis. It identifies where the evidence supports displacement and where it supports adaptation or coexistence.

The scholarship also provides tools for examining the communicative mechanisms more closely. **Zizi Papacharissi's** *Affective Publics* explains how shared sentiment and storytelling can bring people into a public before they have developed a common programme. Her framework is broader than Greece, but it is particularly useful for understanding the coexistence of intense collective expression and uncertain organizational continuity. [Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*](#).

Dimosthenis Antypas, Alun Preece, and José Camacho-Collados offer a more specific empirical finding. Their comparative research, including Greek MPs' Twitter communication, found that negative political messages spread more widely. This supports attention to the circulation advantages of criticism and indignation. It does not establish that such messages change votes, or that platform algorithms alone cause their spread. "Negativity Spreads Faster," 2023.

For further investigation, the most productive sequence would be to connect **Mouzelis's account of incorporation, Sotiropoulos's analysis of informal organization, Featherstone and Papadimitriou's research on governing capacity, Stavrakakis and Katsambekis's analysis of political framing, and the newer empirical work by Kalogeropoulos, Kartalis, and Papagiannis–Tyros–Vasilopoulou.**

That combination permits a demanding test of the transformation you propose. The decisive evidence would concern whether online publics can maintain organizations, finance independent knowledge production, recruit competent personnel, resolve internal disagreements, and preserve accountability after entering government. Greece already demonstrates their capacity to create visibility, impose issues, and elevate leaders. How consistently they can perform these further functions remains the central unresolved question.

Austria

Austria's political transformation is best understood as a growing separation between the organisation of political attention and the organisation of state power. Social media has greatly expanded the ability of leaders, activists, alternative media and intellectual networks to reach citizens outside established party channels. Yet Austria's parties, provincial organisations, chambers, trade unions and public institutions retain considerable influence over candidate recruitment, policy preparation, coalition formation and implementation.

Your emphasis on the movement of mass communication into cyberspace therefore identifies a central development. In Austria, however, its effects are uneven: **the older organisations have lost more control over political identification and public discussion than over the machinery through which binding decisions are made.**

The following analysis draws on sources available through September 2026. I distinguish empirical findings from the broader sociological interpretation developed from them.

Austria began this transformation with unusually comprehensive political camps. The historical *Lager* were social environments that connected political convictions with employment, education, associations, cultural activities and personal relationships.

The socialist camp encompassed the party, trade unions, workers' educational organisations, cooperatives, leisure associations and municipal government. Its intellectual inheritance included Austromarxism, but its postwar practical identity increasingly centred on social security, collective bargaining, public services and opportunities for advancement.

The Catholic conservative camp connected religious traditions, agricultural interests, business organisations, provincial elites and professional associations. Within the ÖVP, the *Bünde*—organisations representing occupational and social constituencies—gave these interests an institutional presence inside the party. Conservative politics consequently involved continuous negotiation among organised groups.

The German-national “third camp,” from which the FPÖ developed, supplied a different historical identity. It combined national-liberal and German-national traditions, opposition to the dominance of the other camps, and subsequently an increasingly successful claim to represent people excluded by their arrangements.

These histories matter because the parties originally provided much more than electoral programmes. They supplied interpretations of society, collective identities and routes into positions of influence. The extensive institutional mapping in Herbert Dachs and colleagues'

Politik in Österreich: Das Handbuch remains a useful foundation for understanding that structure. [Bibliographic record and contents](#).

After 1945, cooperation between the dominant camps became a response to the destructive conflicts of the interwar period. Three arrangements should be distinguished:

- **Consociational accommodation:** cooperation among elites representing different social camps.
- **Proporz:** proportional sharing of offices and influence.
- **Social partnership:** negotiation among organised labour, business and agricultural interests.

Party patronage could accompany these arrangements, but it is analytically different from them. Negotiating a collective agreement, distributing government responsibilities and appointing a party associate to an office are distinct processes.

Gerhard Lehmbruch's *Proporzdemokratie* (1967) provided a foundational interpretation of negotiated democracy in Austria and Switzerland. Kurt Richard Luther and Wolfgang C. Müller's edited *Politics in Austria: Still a Case of Consociationalism?* (1992) already examined the weakening of the inherited camp structure. **The erosion of Austrian party society was well under way before social media.** [Lehmbruch's study](#), [Luther and Müller's collection](#).

Secularisation, educational expansion, occupational change, greater individual mobility and increasingly competitive journalism loosened inherited loyalties. The digital transformation accelerated this process by making alternative political interpretations continuously accessible.

The resulting change is particularly significant sociologically: a person can remain integrated into an institution historically associated with one camp while identifying politically with another. Organisational membership and political allegiance increasingly follow different paths.

The present parliamentary situation demonstrates the difference between electoral success and governing capacity. The September 2024 National Council election produced the following allocation:

Party	Vote share, rounded	Seats
FPÖ	28.8%	57
ÖVP	26.3%	51
SPÖ	21.1%	41
NEOS	9.1%	18
Greens	8.2%	16

The ÖVP and SPÖ together received approximately 47.4% of the vote and exactly 92 of the 183 seats. The subsequent coalition with NEOS held 110 seats. These figures show the erosion of the old two-party electoral dominance alongside the continuing ability of established organisations to assemble a governing majority. [Official final election results](#).

Following unsuccessful coalition negotiations, including talks between the FPÖ and ÖVP, Christian Stocker became chancellor in March 2025. The federal government currently listed

by the Chancellery includes Andreas Babler as vice-chancellor and Beate Meinl-Reisinger as foreign minister. [Government formation](#), [official government composition](#).

The institutional significance is straightforward. Winning the largest share of votes creates political authority and bargaining strength, but government formation also requires workable relationships with other parties. Austria's government is appointed by the federal president and depends on parliamentary support or toleration; the National Council can remove it through a vote of no confidence. [Austrian Parliament's explanation](#).

This creates a persistent tension between a campaign presented as the selection of a national leader and a constitutional system that produces government through institutional negotiation.

The movement into cyberspace is substantial, but established journalism remains deeply involved in it. The 2026 Digital News Report provides several useful indicators:

Indicator	Austrian finding
Weekly news consumption from individual creators or influencers	28%
ORF's combined weekly news reach	70%
Overall trust in news	39%
Trust in ORF news among respondents familiar with the brand	66%
Annual increase in use of social and video networks for news	5 percentage points

These are survey measures, not exclusive audience shares or measurements of time spent. Creator audiences overlap with institutional news audiences. Moreover, news consumed online includes established organisations' websites, apps and social accounts. [Sergio Sparviero and Josef Trappel, Digital News Report 2026: Austria](#).

The important transformation concerns several different functions.

First, **access to an audience has become less dependent on editorial permission**. A politician can publish an entire speech or an emotionally effective excerpt without first persuading a broadcaster to carry it.

Second, **the selection of what people encounter has acquired additional intermediaries**. Platform recommendation systems, influential accounts, group administrators and personal contacts now operate alongside editors and party organisations.

Third, **political interpretation has become more continuous**. Campaigning extends into daily commentary on crime, migration, prices, education, international events and perceived cultural changes.

Fourth, **audience relationships have become more personal**. The same account can present policy, humour, domestic life and indignation. Political affinity may develop through familiarity before it becomes agreement with a programme.

Finally, **the boundaries between producing ideas and distributing them have narrowed**. A think tank can publish research, make explanatory videos and cultivate its own audience. An activist can formulate a concept and immediately test its reception.

My interpretation is that these changes redistribute political influence among organisations and individuals while also changing the internal balance of organisations. Those able to attract attention gain bargaining power over those whose authority comes mainly from office, membership or expertise.

The FPÖ has been particularly well positioned to connect digital communication with an established anti-establishment tradition. Its development cannot be reduced to the recent success of online personalities. The party entered the digital period with a recognisable identity, experienced personnel, territorial organisations and a long history of personalised political communication.

Kurt Richard Luther's research is especially useful here. His studies examine the FPÖ's organisational adaptation, electoral strategy and difficulties in moving between protest and government. They show why the party must be analysed as an organisation making strategic choices, alongside its leaders' public performances. [Luther's research and publications](#).

The FPÖ's communication environment contains several distinguishable components:

Component	Examples	Principal function
Official party communication	FPÖ channels, FPÖ-TV, politicians' accounts	Present the party's interpretation directly
Party-proximate media	<i>unzensuriert</i>	Circulate interpretations through a news-like format
Independently operated aligned media	AUF1, <i>Info-DIREKT</i>	Sustain broader audiences around overlapping political narratives
Activist and intellectual networks	Identitarian actors and associated commentators	Develop concepts, symbolic actions and ideological arguments
Supporter networks	Accounts, groups and interpersonal circulation	Repeat, modify and distribute material

These categories should not be treated as a single ownership or command structure. Institutional affiliation, personnel connections, ideological agreement and occasional amplification are different relationships.

The Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance, DÖW, documents interaction among parliamentary, activist and media actors in its report covering 2020–2023. It describes a division of activity within a broader radical-right environment, including digital publicity, pandemic mobilisation and transnational connections. Its evidence supports analysis of collaboration and circulation; it does not justify attributing every action to central party direction. [DÖW, *Rechtsextremismus in Österreich 2023*, published 2025](#).

The political advantage of this environment is that it can provide an ongoing interpretation of events. Migration, inflation, public-health restrictions and distrust of established institutions can be connected through a recurring account of elites neglecting or overriding ordinary citizens.

That account has substantive political content. It presents national sovereignty, restrictive immigration policy and priority for an established national community as answers to insecurity.

Its appeal involves judgments about representation, belonging and control, as well as dissatisfaction with particular policies.

At the same time, an audience can be encouraged to distrust institutions capable of challenging its preferred interpretation. This makes disputes about facts inseparable from disputes about who is entitled to describe reality.

Heidi Schulze's study, "Who Uses Right-Wing Alternative Online Media?" (2020), helps clarify the relationship. Using comparative data that include Austria, she found associations with immigration-critical attitudes, political interest, distrust of public-service broadcasting and reliance on social media. These findings indicate that audiences bring prior dispositions to their media choices. They do not establish how many voters were persuaded to change parties by those outlets, and the underlying 2019 data precede the pandemic expansion. [Schulze's article](#).

Small intellectual groups can exert influence by changing political vocabulary. This is particularly important in Austria's Identitarian milieu.

In discussing the 2026 *Handbuch Rechtsextremismus in Österreich*, Bernhard Weidinger describes the Identitarians as a relatively small strategic avant-garde supplying concepts, narratives and tactics. Their influence can therefore exceed their organisational size. The DÖW account discusses the circulation of "remigration" and population-replacement narratives into broader political debate. [Andreas Kranebitter, Isolde Vogel and Bernhard Weidinger's handbook](#).

The general mechanism is *metapolitical*: influence the categories through which people understand a problem, and subsequent policy demands become easier to formulate within those categories.

This does not mean that intellectual activists control the electoral party. Parties select, modify or distance themselves from concepts according to their own interests. But it does mean that counting party members or parliamentary seats misses part of the process through which political agendas are formed.

Ruth Wodak's *The Politics of Fear* offers a complementary explanation. She examines how threat construction, repeated exclusionary framing, provocation and the normalisation of previously marginal language operate across speeches, journalism and social media. Her work is comparative, with Austria providing a major context. [Publisher's account of the expanded edition](#).

The pandemic connected previously separate forms of distrust. Opposition to restrictions brought together people whose motives differed: concerns about civil liberties, hostility to government, vaccine scepticism, economic grievances and more comprehensive conspiratorial interpretations.

The resulting milieu was heterogeneous. Its significance for political organisation lay in the creation of relationships among people who had not previously belonged to the same political network. The FPÖ could address this field through its existing opposition identity, while alternative media offered continuing interpretations after particular restrictions ended.

Digital communication also remained connected to physical places. A 2024 study by Umut Nefta Kanilmaz, Bernd Resch, Roland Holzinger, Christian Wasner and Thomas Steinmaurer examined the Austrian COVID protest movement through a geographically referenced Twitter network. It found strong geographical and linguistic structuring, including identifiable national communities. This preprint provides a useful corrective to the idea of a completely placeless online political sphere. [Study and abstract](#).

The ÖVP illustrates how a powerful inherited organisation can be reorganised around personalised communication. Under Sebastian Kurz, the party's public presentation became strongly centred on the leader, tightly coordinated messages and a promise of renewal.

The underlying organisational problem was different from that faced by a new movement. A leader taking control of an established party must manage provincial elites, occupational organisations, experienced officeholders and competing internal interests. A strong personal electoral mandate can increase the leader's leverage over these groups.

The relationship also works in the opposite direction. Provincial organisations supply candidates, local knowledge, personnel and practical continuity. They remain important when a leader's public standing declines.

Kurz's political project also demonstrates the continuing importance of conventional media. Paul Balluff, Jakob-Moritz Eberl and colleagues examined 222,659 articles from seventeen Austrian outlets between 2012 and 2021 in their study of the Austrian political advertising scandal. They found unusual increases in the former chancellor's visibility in the implicated outlet and less favourable coverage of challengers. The authors explicitly distinguish these patterns from proof of illegal conduct. [“The Austrian Political Advertisement Scandal,” published in the January 2026 issue of *The International Journal of Press/Politics*.](#)

The broader implication is that direct communication and favourable journalistic treatment can reinforce each other. A digitally effective leader still benefits when conventional outlets establish the themes that other actors discuss and circulate.

The ÖVP's present educational infrastructure also shows organisational adaptation. Its former Political Academy now operates as **Campus Tivoli**, combining training, research, policy papers and online learning. The institution incorporates contemporary communication and technological questions into a continuing apparatus for developing political personnel. [Campus Tivoli](#).

The SPÖ's central difficulty is the declining correspondence between social representation and electoral identification. It retains organisations capable of representing employment interests, municipal services and social protection. Yet those functions no longer reliably determine how the people concerned interpret migration, national identity, cultural change or the political system.

A person may value collectively negotiated wages while preferring another party's position on immigration. Someone may support public housing while distrusting the national SPÖ leadership. These combinations become easier when citizens encounter political interpretations outside the organisations that provide their material representation.

The party consequently faces several partially competing demands: represent workers' economic interests; retain urban progressive voters; address insecurity over migration and integration; preserve governing credibility; and maintain relationships among provincial organisations.

Digital communication makes these tensions more visible because different parts of the party can acquire audiences for different emphases. It can also create new connections across the party's fragmented constituencies.

The **Karl-Renner-Institut** supplies a concrete example of that adaptation. Its current programmes combine political management and grassroots organisation with AI competence and voter communication. Its *Digi-Impuls* meetings explicitly address communications staff, community organisers and content creators. The inherited educational organisation is becoming a meeting place for newer forms of mobilisation. [Renner-Institut's programme](#).

The SPÖ's problem should therefore not be described simply as insufficient online activity. Its more difficult task is to establish a convincing relationship between economic interests, cultural experiences and political identity.

The Greens and NEOS occupy different positions within the same transformation. The Greens' strengths lie partly in issue-based mobilisation, environmental commitments and constituencies for whom climate policy, rights and institutional integrity are central concerns.

Such political involvement can flourish outside permanent party membership. It also creates a tension between movement expectations and governmental compromise: a party's supporters can organise public criticism of its decisions through many of the same channels that previously supported it.

NEOS combines a different set of themes: education, administrative reform, individual opportunity, economic competence and European integration. Its organisational challenge is to turn relatively loose reform sympathies into a durable party capable of recruiting personnel and negotiating policy.

The **NEOS Lab** explicitly describes itself as a training centre, knowledge hub and institution for developing talent and participation. This is evidence that even a newer party seeks to institutionalise the expertise and relationships needed beyond campaigning. [NEOS Lab's mission](#).

The 2024 election survey also shows that the parties' audiences were motivated by different substantive priorities. Climate was particularly prominent among Green voters, while NEOS voters discussed a broader combination of education, economic, budgetary and other reform questions. The relevant subsamples were small, so fine distinctions should be treated cautiously. [ORF/FORESIGHT/ISA election survey](#).

Economic think tanks form a further layer of political organisation because they supply interpretations before issues become parliamentary choices. The question is not only who proposes a tax or spending measure. It is also who establishes whether the underlying problem is understood as excessive taxation, inadequate investment, unfair distribution, weak incentives or administrative failure.

Stephan Pühringer and Christine Stelzer-Orthofer examined Agenda Austria and the Hayek Institut in their 2016 study of Austrian neoliberal think tanks. They combined analysis of institutional and personal networks with analysis of public argument. Their interpretation is that these organisations participate in a *discourse coalition* supporting market-oriented changes to the welfare state. This is a critical political-economy account, rather than an uncontested description of the organisations' purposes. [Their study](#).

The broader mechanism is important regardless of one's evaluation of the proposals. Research, selected statistics, expert appearances and accessible explanatory material can establish what political actors regard as realistic or necessary. Influence can occur without an organisation issuing instructions to a party.

On the progressive side, the **Momentum Institut**, founded in 2019, explicitly combines economic analysis with the journalistic outlet **MOMENT.at**. It therefore exemplifies the convergence of research, public interpretation and audience formation. Its institutional profile names Barbara Blaha and Leonhard Dobusch in its leadership. [Momentum's description](#).

Its 2025 annual report records €990,000 in support from the Bundes-Arbeiterkammer while stating that it accepts no party funding or donations conditional on content. This supports describing an institutional connection to organised labour; it does not establish SPÖ control. [Momentum's 2025 annual report](#).

These examples reveal a significant development: organisations that once mainly addressed policymakers or journalists now also build public audiences themselves. Intellectual influence increasingly depends on the ability to move between specialised argument and accessible communication.

The struggle over Austrian identity supplies another durable intellectual background. Debates about national belonging involve several historical inheritances: the relationship with German nationalism, the memory of National Socialism, the legitimacy of the postwar settlement, neutrality and Austria's European orientation.

Digital communication gives these inherited themes new occasions for mobilisation. A controversy about migration can become an argument about national continuity; a dispute over European policy can become an argument about sovereignty; criticism of a political statement can become an argument about historical guilt or freedom of expression.

Ruth Wodak and Markus Rheindorf address these connections particularly directly in *Identity Politics Past and Present: Political Discourses from Post-war Austria to the Covid Crisis* (2022). Their 2026 book, *Babyelefant und Hausverstand: Wie Krisen produziert werden*, extends the analysis to crisis communication, blame, solidarity and appeals to "common sense." [Verified publications and research description](#).

Here, political intellectual work consists partly in defining which experiences belong together. The same economic difficulty can be interpreted through redistribution, national preference, market reform or governmental incompetence. Digital circulation increases the speed and frequency with which these competing interpretations reach citizens.

Material insecurity remains essential to understanding why particular interpretations succeed. The Austrian evidence does not support a complete explanation in terms of algorithms or political personalities.

In the 2024 election survey, dissatisfaction with the country's direction and the government was widespread. Immigration and living costs were prominent issues. Strikingly, the leading candidate was not among the top voting motives for any party. The FPÖ performed particularly strongly among employed respondents without the *Matura*. [FORESIGHT's election findings](#).

That finding does not show that personal communication had no effect: voters' reported motives cannot reveal every influence on their judgments. It does establish that a serious explanation must include substantive grievances and issue preferences.

FORESIGHT's electoral-flow estimates also show that approximately 443,000 people who had voted ÖVP in 2019 moved to the FPÖ in 2024, compared with an estimated 65,000 moving from the SPÖ. Thus, the immediate growth of the FPÖ involved substantial reorganisation within the right and centre-right electorate. These are statistical estimates of voter movements, not direct tracking of individuals. [Electoral-flow analysis](#).

The 2025 Austrian Democracy Monitor adds an important distinction. Only 35% of respondents thought the political system worked well, and 31% felt well represented in parliament. Yet trust remained considerably higher in administration, ordinary courts and the Constitutional Court. Satisfaction also differed sharply by income: 19% in the lowest third, compared with 50% in the highest third. [Democracy Monitor 2025](#). My interpretation is that Austria faces a pronounced problem of experienced representation alongside continuing confidence in important parts of the state. An anti-establishment appeal can therefore attract people who want institutions to work more effectively, as well as people seeking more fundamental changes.

The Austrian public should not be imagined as two uniformly polarised blocs. Different issues produce different alignments.

Martina Zandonella's analysis of Austrian survey data identifies relatively broad agreement on some distributive questions, alongside stronger differences over migration and climate. These differences appear especially clearly along party-political lines. Her findings suggest a landscape of uneven conflicts rather than one comprehensive division encompassing every social question. [Zandonella's analysis of polarisation](#).

This matters for interpreting social media. Highly active accounts can make a conflict appear socially universal even when most citizens are less consistently aligned. The intensity of online expression and the distribution of public opinion are different empirical objects.

For your research question, four distinctions are therefore necessary:

1. **Exposure:** who encounters a message?
2. **Engagement:** who reacts, comments or shares?
3. **Persuasion:** whose judgment changes?
4. **Mobilisation:** who subsequently votes, protests, joins or donates?

A large figure at one stage does not establish an equally large effect at the next. Austria currently lacks a single public measure that would reliably allocate national political influence among parties, influencers, alternative media and established journalism.

Social partnership remains one of the strongest organisational continuities beneath these changes. Austria's chambers have statutory membership arrangements, whereas trade-union membership is voluntary. The core social partners include the Chamber of Labour, the trade-union federation, the Economic Chamber and the agricultural chambers. [Federal government explanation](#).

Their activities extend into legislative consultation, vocational training, administrative commissions and social-insurance institutions. Their joint account states that collective agreements cover nearly 98% of employees in the commercial economy. Eurofound independently describes the continuing centrality of sectoral bargaining. [Social partners' functions](#), [Eurofound on Austrian collective bargaining](#).

The consequence is that political disaffiliation does not automatically produce institutional disintegration. A citizen can reject the governing parties while remaining protected by rules produced through organisations associated with the postwar settlement.

Emmerich Tálos and Tobias Hinterseer's *Sozialpartnerschaft. Ein zentraler politischer Gestaltungsfaktor der Zweiten Republik am Ende?* (2019) directly addresses the weakening and continuing significance of this system. Tálos's wider work also shows why government composition matters: access for organised interests can change through political decisions, independently of communication technology. [Discussion of the book](#), [Tálos's scholarly bibliography](#).

Territorial organisation also continues to produce outcomes that national communication alone cannot explain. Provinces and municipalities provide settings in which voters encounter concrete services, recognised individuals and established relationships.

The June 2026 Graz election analysis is illustrative. FORESIGHT estimated that the KPÖ retained a higher proportion of its previous municipal electorate than any other party. It also documented substantial differences between municipal and provincial voting by residents of the same city. [Graz electoral-flow analysis](#).

This does not isolate the causal effect of local organisation. It does demonstrate that national party preference is an incomplete description of political allegiance. Voters make different judgments at different levels, and locally accumulated credibility can remain valuable in a highly digital society.

The transformation of communication affects the Austrian state through several identifiable mechanisms. The first is agenda pressure. Ministers and parliamentary parties must respond to controversies that develop outside their organisations, often before internal consultation has produced a settled position.

The second is the increased importance of communication personnel. Those who select messages, interpret audience responses and manage leaders' visibility become important participants in political decision-making. Their priorities may differ from those of subject specialists or territorial officials.

The third is pressure on compromise. A coalition agreement requires concessions, but a highly personalised relationship with supporters can create expectations of consistency and immediate action. Publicly explaining compromise becomes part of maintaining the coalition itself.

The fourth is the struggle over the institutions that mediate public knowledge. ORF's governance is a particularly revealing example. Following a Constitutional Court ruling concerning excessive governmental influence, the 2025 reform reduced the federal government's appointments to the Foundation Council from nine to six and increased those of the Public Council from six to nine. Other institutional appointment channels remained. [Austrian Parliament's account of the reform](#).

This shows how communication power is shaped by constitutional adjudication, legislation and institutional representation. A broadcaster's position cannot be explained solely by its audience or editorial preferences.

The fifth mechanism concerns the economics of journalism. Financial pressure can increase the importance of owners, advertising and public support. The 2025 Austrian Digital News Report describes both the movement of advertising revenue towards global platforms and continuing controversies over public advertising. The digital transition can therefore strengthen platforms while also making domestic journalism more sensitive to the allocation of institutional resources. [Digital News Report 2025: Austria](#).

Taken as an analytical relationship, these processes create feedback: political actors compete for attention, obtain office through institutional procedures, and then participate in decisions affecting the communication environment in which future competition occurs.

The relevant scholarship is strongest when several research traditions are brought together. No single approach adequately covers inherited social organisation, intellectual production, digital audiences and state decision-making.

For a systematic investigation, I would give particular weight to the following combinations:

Research question	Authors and works	Main contribution
How did encompassing political camps develop and weaken?	Gerhard Lehmbruch; Anton Pelinka; Luther and Müller's 1992 collection	Historical political culture, elite accommodation and party-system change
Why does organised interest representation persist?	Emmerich Tálos, Ferdinand Karlhofer, Tobias Hinterseer; Luther's study of party–union directorates	Connections between electoral parties, organised interests and policy formation
How did electoral competition become increasingly media-centred?	Fritz Plasser and Peter A. Ulram, including their work on declining <i>Lager</i> mentality	The transition that preceded today's platform environment
How are national identity and political threats constructed?	Ruth Wodak, Markus Rheindorf and collaborators	Language, historical memory, crisis interpretation and normalisation
How do intellectual networks shape economic debate?	Stephan Pühringer and Christine Stelzer-Orthofer	Relationships among expertise, funding,

Research question	Authors and works	Main contribution
How do parliamentary and extra-parliamentary nationalist actors interact?	Bernhard Weidinger, Andreas Peham, Andreas Kranebitter and Isolde Vogel	institutions and public argument Organisational continuities, ideological networks and concept circulation
Who uses alternative media, and why?	Heidi Schulze	Audience selection and the relationship between predispositions and media use
How do political and commercial media relationships operate?	Paul Balluff, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Hajo Boomgaarden and colleagues	Empirical investigation of patterns of political visibility and coverage
What do changing communication habits actually look like?	Sergio Sparviero, Josef Trappel, Stefan Gadringer and the Austrian Digital News Report team	Repeated measurement of news use and trust
How do insecurity and representation shape political attitudes?	Martina Zandonella, Christoph Hofinger and FORESIGHT	Surveys connecting political dissatisfaction with social experience

Pelinka's *Austria: Out of the Shadow of the Past* (1998) and *Vom Glanz und Elend der Parteien* (2005) are particularly useful for connecting historical political culture with changing party functions. They belong alongside, rather than being replaced by, the newer communication literature. Pelinka's bibliography. The methodological differences among these authors are productive. Network analysis identifies relationships; discourse analysis reconstructs meanings; surveys measure attitudes and reported behaviour; institutional analysis explains decision procedures. A convincing account must establish the connections between these levels rather than assuming that evidence at one level proves effects at another.

The next phase will depend on which actors can connect public identification with durable practical performance. Three developments deserve close observation.

One is whether the FPÖ can turn its broad oppositional appeal into stable governing relationships without losing the sense of distance from established arrangements that supports part of its attraction. Another is whether the SPÖ and ÖVP can renew political identification around the services, representation and expertise their organisational environments still provide. Digital competence can assist this, but credibility also depends on what citizens experience. A third is the development of organisations that combine research, journalism, community-building and political participation. Momentum, party academies and activist media already illustrate different versions of this development. For Austria, the most revealing future evidence will concern **conversion between forms of power**: which online audiences become dependable electorates; which electorates sustain workable coalitions; which intellectual networks supply actual policy; and which organisations retain citizens' trust through implementation. Those connections will determine how deeply the transformation of mass communication reshapes the functioning of the Austrian state.

Poland

Poland's political transformation is best understood as a redistribution of the power to organise political loyalties. Parties still select candidates, assemble parliamentary majorities and control important resources. Increasingly, however, the people who establish a political issue, give it an emotionally persuasive interpretation and gather an audience around it operate through media outlets, intellectual circles, civic organisations and individual digital channels.

This substantially supports your emphasis on the movement of political communication into cyberspace. The qualification is that Poland has developed a particularly strong interaction between **older ideological communities, party organisations, broadcast media and digital personalities**. Understanding this interaction explains more than treating social media as a replacement for parties.

The analysis below combines historical scholarship with the 2023–2025 electoral cycle and available 2026 research. Where I propose a broader causal interpretation, I distinguish it from findings directly established by surveys, election observation or individual studies.

The electoral surface already reveals several different distributions of power. The October 2023 parliamentary election produced the following results:

Electoral committee	Vote share	Sejm seats won
Law and Justice — PiS	35.38%	194
Civic Coalition — KO	30.70%	157
Third Way	14.40%	65
The Left	8.61%	26
Confederation — Konfederacja	7.16%	18

These are the seats awarded in that election, rather than a claim about subsequent parliamentary affiliations. Turnout reached 74.38%. KO, Third Way and the Left together won 248 of the 460 seats, allowing Donald Tusk to form a government even though PiS remained the largest electoral committee. [OSCE/ODIHR, 2023 election report](#)

In June 2025, the PiS-supported Karol Nawrocki won the presidential runoff with 50.89%, defeating Rafał Trzaskowski. The government's parliamentary victory had therefore failed to establish a corresponding presidential majority. [Reuters, final presidential result](#)

The analytical implication is substantial: **a coalition capable of removing a government, an audience capable of sustaining a political identity, and a majority capable of electing a**

president are different formations. They overlap, but their membership, motivations and organisational requirements differ.

Poland consequently requires at least four simultaneous maps: social interests; intellectual and moral interpretations; channels of communication; and institutions capable of making or blocking binding decisions.

The deepest division concerns the meaning of the post-1989 order. During the first phase after communism, political identities were strongly organised around the distinction between the former communist establishment and the former opposition. Mirosława Grabowska's *Podział postkomunistyczny* (2004) is a foundational study of this division.

The subsequent conflict between the Civic Platform tradition and PiS changed its structure. Both emerged from the broad post-Solidarity political world. Their confrontation increasingly concerned competing interpretations of the transition itself.

One interpretation understood 1989 as a successful negotiated emancipation: imperfect institutions could gradually improve through constitutional government, economic development and European integration. Another understood the settlement as incomplete: powerful networks had survived, national interests had been subordinated, and cultural authority remained concentrated among elites who presented their own preferences as the requirements of modernity.

These positions never described every voter accurately. They supplied the language through which many otherwise separate disputes became connected. Privatisation, judicial appointments, media ownership, historical education and relations with Brussels could all be interpreted through the same question: **who actually gained the right to define Poland after communism?**

This helps explain the unusual intensity of Polish political antagonism. Opponents frequently appear as representatives of an illegitimate settlement or as threats to the conditions of legitimate government. Disagreement about a policy becomes disagreement about the authority of the people proposing it.

Jarosław Kuisz develops one influential explanation in *The New Politics of Poland: A Case of Post-Traumatic Sovereignty* (2023). He argues that historical experiences of lost statehood and external domination continue to shape understandings of sovereignty. His interpretation helps explain why European institutions can appear as protection against domestic abuse to some Poles and as restrictions on recovered self-government to others. This is Kuisz's historical and liberal interpretation, rather than a diagnosis shared by all Polish scholars. [Manchester University Press](#)

My inference is that social media draws much of its political effectiveness from these already established interpretive structures. A brief video about a court, migrant, German politician or Catholic ceremony can activate a much larger historical narrative without having to explain it.

Class, status and territorial recognition give these narratives their social force. An account confined to constitutional values would miss why the competing narratives resonate differently across society.

Poland's economic transformation generated major opportunities alongside disruption, insecurity and uneven access to public services. Political evaluations depend on where people live, how they obtained their position, whether they expect their children to advance, and whether they feel respected by socially influential institutions.

The familiar contrast between a metropolitan liberal Poland and a provincial conservative Poland captures some electoral tendencies. It becomes misleading when treated as a division between two internally homogeneous societies.

A business owner in a smaller town may support conservative politics from a position of success. A university graduate in Warsaw may experience housing insecurity and precarious employment. A person benefiting from European integration may still resent cultural condescension from people claiming to represent "Europe."

Maciej Gdula's work is relevant here, especially the study conducted with Katarzyna Dębska and Kamil Trepka, *Dobra zmiana w Miastku* (2017), and his *Nowy autorytaryzm* (2018). Their research directs attention towards recognition, aspiration and identification with political authority. One useful interpretation is that support for an assertive national leadership can offer participation in a collective drama of restored standing. Since the Miastko research concerns one locality, it should not be treated as a nationwide measurement of voter motives. [Miastko study](#)

PiS's family-benefit politics can be understood within this framework. A transfer such as the original 500+ programme carries an economic effect and a public message about whose contribution deserves recognition. A political account that describes beneficiaries merely as voters "bought" by payments misses this second dimension.

Conversely, successful redistribution does not permanently secure allegiance. Once a benefit becomes an expected entitlement, voters may judge parties through inflation, services, housing, competence or cultural concerns. Political success can therefore change the standards by which its author is subsequently assessed.

Paweł Marczewski's 2025 *Klasowe trajektorie polskich wyborów* develops a particularly useful corrective: political preferences reflect social trajectories and fears of downward mobility as well as present income. His analysis gives special attention to people who have entered the middle class without acquiring a secure sense of their position. [Marczewski's analysis](#)

Research by Michał Feliksiak, Beata Roguska and Paweł Ruszkowski likewise finds divisions both between and within social classes on European integration and same-sex partnerships. This complicates any attempt to assign each political camp to one economic class. [Study of class and polarisation](#)

For digital politics, the consequence is that **the same economic frustration can acquire very different political meanings**. It may become a demand for stronger social provision, lower taxation, national economic protection or punishment of a supposedly self-serving establishment. The communicator who supplies the interpretation helps determine which organisational channel receives the resulting discontent.

Poland's intellectual background consists of several overlapping milieus. These milieus produce concepts, educate participants, establish reputations and translate grievances into public arguments. Their influence cannot be measured adequately by party membership.

The following map identifies important organisational centres. Intellectual proximity does not by itself establish financial dependence or party control.

Milieu	Principal intellectual work	Connection to political organisation
Teologia Polityczna	Political community, religion, national tradition, authority and European civilisation	Journals, books, seminars and digital publication form a conservative intellectual public
Klub Jagielloński / Pressje	Republicanism, Catholic social teaching, state capacity, subsidiarity and development	Connects policy expertise, civic education, local activities, podcasts and public campaigns
Kultura Liberalna	Constitutional rights, pluralism, liberal political culture and democratic legitimacy	Combines an internet weekly, publishing, debates and video discussions
Krytyka Polityczna	Class, inequality, feminism, culture and criticism of the post-1989 settlement	Links publishing and intellectual debate with activism and wider left public life
Stefan Batory Foundation	Civic participation, institutional accountability, European cooperation and democratic standards	Provides grants, research, advocacy and organisational support
Ordo Iuris	Legal arguments concerning family, abortion, religious freedom and sovereignty	Converts moral positions into legal interventions, analyses and public campaigns

There are significant differences even among organisations commonly placed on the conservative side. **Teologia Polityczna**, founded by **Marek A. Cichocki and Dariusz Karłowicz**, approaches politics through philosophical and religious questions about community and human existence. Its own description identifies a conservative-liberal milieu. [Teologia Polityczna's founding account](#)

Klub Jagielloński explicitly describes itself as nonparty and Christian democratic. Its republicanism includes concern for local communities, citizen empowerment and the quality of the state. Its combination of policy reports, podcasts, local meetings and technological projects demonstrates how an intellectual milieu can acquire several routes into public life. [Jagiellonian Club's description](#)

These distinctions matter politically. A conservative intellectual can support national sovereignty while criticising administrative incompetence, excessive centralisation or party patronage. An organisation may agree with PiS on one constitutional or cultural question and reject its conduct on another.

The liberal field is also differentiated. **Kultura Liberalna**, associated with Jarosław Kuisz and Karolina Wigura, places constitutional freedoms, dignity and pluralism at its centre. Its organisational form already incorporates the digital transformation: an online weekly, social distribution, publishing and video podcasts. [Kultura Liberalna](#)

The **Batory Foundation** performs a different function. Grantmaking, monitoring, expertise and advocacy help sustain civic activity between moments of mass mobilisation. Its cooperation with the Open Society European Network and other international organisations is publicly documented. Such cooperation identifies a real institutional relationship; establishing control over a party or the wider liberal public would require separate evidence. [Batory Foundation's methods and partners](#)

On the left, Krytyka Polityczna has helped maintain a language of class, public provision and cultural emancipation that cannot be reduced to defending the liberal transition. This creates recurrent tensions within the wider anti-PiS electorate: defeating PiS and agreeing on an economic or social programme are distinct objectives.

The general organisational process is therefore more complex than intellectuals supplying party programmes. **Milieus define which problems deserve attention, which descriptions are credible, and which people deserve to speak.** Parties draw on these resources while attempting to subordinate them to electoral priorities.

Catholicism remains an important infrastructure, but its components need to be distinguished. The episcopate, parish life, Catholic educational institutions, Radio Maryja's audience, religious publishers, conservative philosophers and organisations conducting legal campaigns perform different functions.

Radio Maryja and TV Trwam illustrate how broadcasting, religious identification and sustained audience participation can create a political community outside formal party membership. Such a community can provide parties with attentive supporters while also exerting pressure on them.

Pluralist Catholic traditions associated with publications such as *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Znak* and *Wież* demonstrate another possibility: religious commitment can coexist with criticism of national-conservative politics.

Brian Porter-Szücs's *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland* (2011) is an important historical reference here. Alongside *When Nationalism Began to Hate* (2000), it helps situate relations between Catholicism and nationalism within historical change. [Porter-Szücs's university bibliography](#)

The digital transformation introduces a further possibility: national-Catholic symbols can circulate among audiences whose connection to religious institutions is loose. An image, historical anniversary or conflict over public morality can become a marker of political belonging independently of regular parish participation.

My interpretation is that this weakens any simple chain running from clergy to believer to party. Religious institutions continue to matter, while digital communicators gain greater capacity to select and reinterpret religious symbols.

Historical memory also supplies personnel and organisational resources. Museums, commemorations, historical institutes, publications and educational projects help determine which versions of national experience receive public authority.

Nawrocki's career provides a particularly concrete example. Before becoming president, he directed the Second World War Museum in Gdańsk and led the Institute of National

Remembrance. His official biography also describes the use of games and digital applications in historical education. [Official presidential biography](#)

The broader inference is that institutions producing historical knowledge can also produce public recognition and political credibility. Memory politics contributes to the formation of potential leaders, rather than merely supplying campaign rhetoric after candidates have been chosen.

For this dimension, **Jan Kubik's** work on symbols and political mobilisation, **Tomasz Zarycki's** studies of cultural authority and peripheral position, and **Jadwiga Staniszkis's** analyses of transformation and structural power remain valuable intellectual starting points.

The shift into cyberspace has changed the division of political labour. Several mechanisms are especially important.

First, it has reduced the cost of reaching people without securing a newspaper editor's approval or building a large membership organisation. A politician, activist or presenter can establish repeated contact through a personal channel.

Second, it has increased the value of a recognisable personality. Viewers encounter a voice, manner and emotional style repeatedly. Political credibility can develop through familiarity before viewers acquire detailed knowledge of a programme.

Third, it has made supporters more active in distribution. They select clips, produce memes, challenge opponents and circulate interpretations within social networks. A centrally produced message becomes material for many decentralised adaptations.

Fourth, it has created new intermediaries. Recommendation systems, channel owners, moderators, advertising services and influential accounts determine visibility. The relationship may feel direct to the viewer while depending on a substantial commercial and technical infrastructure.

Finally, it has changed the relationship between organisation and leadership. A leader may become more dominant within a party through personal visibility while becoming more dependent on outside commentators whose audiences the party cannot command.

Robert Gorwa's *Computational Propaganda in Poland* (2017) documents an early version of this organisational combination. Traditional activist and party-youth networks used mailing lists, closed Facebook groups and messaging services for coordination. His study also examined manufactured identities and possible automated amplification. Its findings concern a particular period and research sample; they do not establish the contemporary proportion of Polish political communication attributable to bots. [Gorwa's Oxford report](#)

The important historical correction is that these processes predate the latest short-video platforms. Karolina Koc-Michalska, Darren Lilleker, Paweł Surowiec and Paweł Baranowski were already analysing professional online campaigning in their study of Poland's 2011 election.

Different platforms facilitate different activities. As an analytical distinction, Facebook is particularly useful for community circulation and coordination; YouTube for sustained personal

authority and extended discussion; short video for discovery and compressed political performance; and X for rapid exchanges involving politicians, journalists and highly active commentators. These are overlapping functions, rather than measured rankings of each platform's electoral effectiveness.

Konfederacja demonstrates how digital communication can reorganise competition on the right. Its significance extends beyond taking votes from PiS. It offers competing interpretations of freedom, economic aspiration, national interest and opposition to established authority.

PiS's political offer has combined national conservatism with an extensive role for the state and social redistribution. The Mentzen-associated current places greater emphasis on entrepreneurship, taxation and resistance to bureaucratic interference. Nationalist currents add other priorities, and the broader radical-right field contains substantial ideological and organisational differences.

This creates a problem for PiS: an audience receptive to nationalism does not necessarily accept its economic programme, leadership hierarchy or claim to be the principal representative of the right.

The 2025 presidential campaign produced an unusually clear demonstration of the new relationship between audience ownership and political bargaining. After receiving 14.81% in the first round, **Slawomir Mentzen invited the two finalists to his YouTube programme and presented proposed policy commitments.** Both subsequently appeared. [Reuters on the invitation and demands](#), [Nawrocki interview](#), [Trzaskowski interview](#)

The institutional significance is striking. An eliminated candidate became a host through whom the remaining candidates sought access to an electorally important public.

Three resources came together: his first-round support, his continuing relationship with viewers, and his ability to define the interview's agenda. The first resource was electoral, the second communicative, and the third editorial.

This example does not establish that Mentzen could transfer his voters as a bloc. It demonstrates a capacity to make other politicians negotiate publicly within a setting he controlled.

It also shows why digital politics cannot be understood solely through shrinking attention spans. Extended interviews can become major political events. Short clips subsequently carry selected moments into wider circulation. Long-form authority and short-form discovery reinforce one another.

The growth of creator-led media is another organisational transformation. Krzysztof Stanowski's Kanał Zero illustrates the emergence of a media enterprise built around recognisable personalities and digital distribution. The Reuters Institute's 2025 report recorded more than 1.4 million subscribers and 450 million views by the end of its first year. These are platform totals, rather than counts of unique Polish voters. [Digital News Report 2025: Poland](#)

The subsequent direction is equally revealing. The 2026 report describes Kanał Zero's expansion into a website and satellite television, alongside a programme hosted by former president Andrzej Duda. Digital success was being converted into a broader media institution. [Digital News Report 2026: Poland](#)

My inference is that successful digital personalities often begin to acquire functions previously distributed among newspapers, television stations and party-adjacent discussion forums: selecting guests, conferring legitimacy, defining controversies and maintaining an audience's shared references.

This gives commercial incentives political consequences. A presenter needs continued attention and audience loyalty. A party needs votes, coalition partners and some freedom to compromise. Their interests can coincide during mobilisation and diverge when governing requires restraint.

Consequently, a party may become dependent on an allied media public that punishes compromises more severely than the general electorate would.

Established broadcasters remain part of this process. Poland's liberal, conservative and broader commercial media have expanded across websites, video, social accounts and conventional broadcasting. A television interview can generate a digital controversy, which then becomes the subject of subsequent television coverage.

The 2023 OSCE observation found strongly partisan public-media coverage favouring the PiS government. It also differentiated among private outlets, identifying critical coverage in several major organisations and more neutral treatment in others. This is more informative than classifying all private media as one political actor. [OSCE/ODIHR, media monitoring](#)

After the change of government, public broadcasting remained contested. The 2025 OSCE report found that the management transition had failed to ensure impartiality, despite some reporting improvements. [OSCE/ODIHR, 2025 election report](#)

Meanwhile, conservative audiences and media personnel could reorganise around alternative outlets. The Reuters Institute's 2026 account describes TV Republika's expansion and further fragmentation among politically aligned digital ventures. It reports 25% weekly offline news reach for TVP, alongside overall news trust of 39% and news avoidance of 46%. These figures come from an online survey and should not be interpreted as television market shares or mutually exclusive audience categories. [Digital News Report 2026: Poland](#)

The deeper organisational point is that **political communities can survive the loss of a particular communication institution**. They retain familiar personalities, interpretations and loyalties that can migrate to another outlet.

Liberal, feminist and left mobilisation has also expanded beyond party channels. The movements defending constitutional institutions, the women's protests of 2016 and 2020, local initiatives and later electoral participation campaigns demonstrate that political mobilisation can develop through networks whose objectives only partly coincide with those of opposition parties.

A useful distinction is between organising against a threat and organising agreement about what should replace it.

People may mobilise together against an abortion restriction or a perceived assault on judicial independence while disagreeing about taxation, welfare, migration or the eventual governing coalition. Parties can benefit electorally from mobilisation without acquiring control over its participants.

The Batory Foundation's research discussions following the 2023 election explicitly examined civil society as an increasingly autonomous participant in public life, including its experience in electoral mobilisation and responses to major crises. [Research programme on mobilisation and self-organisation](#)

Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk, particularly in *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment* (2022), are central authors for understanding how disputes about gender and family connect moral identity, anti-elite narratives and transnational activism. **Grzegorz Ekiert, Jan Kubik and Michał Wenzel** are important for the organisational and unequal social foundations of civil society.

The political limitation of digitally assisted protest is that mobilisation can be intense without generating durable agreement, local organisation or policy expertise. Its strength is the capacity to activate participants whom established organisations fail to reach.

Both properties matter after an electoral victory. Governments inherit expectations formed through mobilisation but must reconcile them within institutions and coalitions.

Generational change introduces further divisions within the major camps. Younger citizens encounter political arguments through different combinations of entertainment, social relationships and news. Yet “the young” do not form a single political constituency.

Gender, education, employment, housing and place of residence intersect. A young person's insecurity may be interpreted through public-service failures, discrimination, taxation, migration or blocked social advancement.

A recent contribution is Michał Grzębowski's *Polskie podziały: mężczyźni* (August 2026). It examines debates about boys' and men's circumstances and their intersections with class and territorial inequalities. This approach helps identify substantive social problems behind political narratives about masculinity, rather than assuming that online style alone explains their appeal. [Grzębowski's analysis](#)

The 2025 election monitoring also complicates the notion that successful short-video communication belongs exclusively to the right: the OSCE identified both Mentzen and the Left's Magdalena Biejat as prominent in TikTok engagement within its monitored sample. Engagement measures cannot establish equivalent electoral influence. [OSCE/ODIHR, online campaign findings](#)

Polarisation is reinforced online, but “two sealed tribes” is an inadequate model. Paweł Matuszewski is especially important for your precise question. His *Cyberplemiona* (2018) examines Facebook behaviour during parliamentary campaigning.

His research with **Gabriella Szabó** asks whether online divisions actually follow party boundaries, while work with **Katarzyna Walecka** examines Facebook news consumption during the 2017 judicial crisis. This research programme points to a more complex structure than uniform partisan isolation. It also draws attention to relatively stable media habits and the disproportionate activity of certain accounts. [Matuszewski's research and bibliography](#)

Several distinctions follow.

People can encounter opposing arguments while interpreting them as evidence of the other side's dishonesty. High exposure therefore need not produce mutual understanding.

A small number of extremely active participants can make a position appear more socially prevalent than it is. Posting volume is consequently a poor substitute for representative public-opinion research.

Finally, party supporters may inhabit different online communities despite voting alike. A religious conservative, an economic nationalist and an anti-establishment entrepreneur may converge electorally while following different interpreters and assigning different meanings to the same event.

Digital communication can therefore reinforce a common electoral front while preserving tensions that later divide it.

These changes affect the functioning of the state through identifiable institutional mechanisms. The first is the conversion of communicative support into legal authority.

Poland's presidency supplies an independent electoral mandate and important blocking powers. Under Article 122, the Sejm can override a presidential veto by a three-fifths majority with the required quorum. A parliamentary governing majority therefore does not automatically possess the capacity to implement its legislative programme. [Official explanation of presidential legislative powers](#)

This creates fertile conditions for competing narratives of obstruction and resistance. The government can portray the president as preventing fulfilment of an electoral mandate; the president can portray intervention as protection against parliamentary overreach. Digital communication continuously reproduces these interpretations.

The second mechanism is the struggle over institutions that certify authoritative decisions: courts, election bodies, public broadcasters and regulatory authorities.

Wojciech Sadurski's *Poland's Constitutional Breakdown* (2019) analyses the weakening of constitutional restraints after PiS's 2015 victories. His central concern is the concentration of authority through changes affecting the Constitutional Tribunal, courts and other institutions. This is a major legal account of the process, written from a clearly critical liberal-constitutional position. [Oxford University Press](#)

For your wider sociological question, the crucial additional issue is how professional authority becomes politically interpreted. A judicial decision may be received as law by one public and as the intervention of a hostile institutional group by another. The political struggle then reaches beyond who should govern to who may authoritatively determine the rules of government.

Legal validity still requires examination of particular appointments, procedures and decisions. Sociological symmetry between rival claims does not establish that their legal merits are equivalent.

The third mechanism concerns institutional repair. A government promising depoliticisation faces pressure from supporters to remove personnel associated with its predecessors. It must distinguish lawful correction from the reproduction of partisan control. Online audiences can

make this distinction harder by rewarding rapid confrontation and treating procedural restraint as betrayal.

The fourth is the expansion of regulatory conflict into the platforms themselves. Political communication raises questions about campaign finance, third-party spending, transparency and responses to manipulation. The 2025 OSCE report identified shortcomings in third-party campaign accountability and coordination around digital threats. [OSCE/ODIHR, campaign regulation findings](#)

The state thus becomes both a participant in political communication and an authority expected to regulate its conditions.

Territorial organisation remains a major limit on purely digital accounts. Municipal governments, local associations, party branches and professional communities maintain relationships that national online visibility cannot automatically reproduce.

This matters particularly for the Polish People's Party tradition, local electoral committees and established city leaderships. Their importance includes knowledge of local problems, candidate recruitment, administrative experience and relationships of practical trust.

Research by **Jarosław Flis, Adam Gendźwill, Marta Lackowska, Borys Martela and Anna Dąbrowska** provides a valuable counterweight to an exclusive focus on national political spectacle. Their 2026 index examines everyday local democracy through transparency, responsiveness and citizen participation, using an initial dataset from 2022. [Index of everyday local democracy](#)

The distinction is between attracting attention to a problem and maintaining the capacity to address it. A successful political organisation must somehow connect the two.

The most useful authors can be arranged by the level of the process they explain. Alongside the studies discussed above, the following works provide a coherent reading programme:

Level of explanation	Authors and principal works	Particular contribution
Historical political identities	Mirosława Grabowska , <i>Podział postkomunistyczny</i> (2004)	Social foundations of the postcommunist cleavage
Symbols and mobilisation	Jan Kubik , <i>The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power</i> (1994)	How cultural authority becomes political capacity
Peripheral status and elite authority	Tomasz Zarycki , <i>Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe</i> (2014)	Relations between cultural hierarchy, geography and political classification
Conservative criticism of the transition	Zdzisław Krasnodębski , <i>Demokracja peryferii</i> (2003)	An influential critique of peripheral, imitative liberal modernisation
Sovereignty and historical experience	Jarosław Kuisz , <i>The New Politics of Poland</i> (2023)	The continuing political force of historical insecurity
Recognition and support for authority	Maciej Gdula , <i>Nowy autorytaryzm</i> (2018); work with Dębska and Trepka	Social motives extending beyond income and deprivation

Level of explanation	Authors and principal works	Particular contribution
Political imagination and institutions	Rafał Matyja , <i>Wyjście awaryjne</i> (2018)	A route beyond interpreting the state entirely through the dominant party confrontation
Nationalism and religious history	Brian Porter-Szűcs; Rafał Pankowski , <i>The Populist Radical Right in Poland</i> (2010)	Historical and cultural environments of nationalist mobilisation
Gender and political mobilisation	Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk , <i>Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment</i> (2022)	Connections between moral controversy, populism and organised activism
Constitutional transformation	Wojciech Sadurski , <i>Poland's Constitutional Breakdown</i> (2019)	Institutional mechanisms of weakened checks and balances

For the digital dimension specifically, Matuszewski's *Cyberplemiona*, his studies with Szabó and Walecka, and Gorwa's research are especially closely matched to your question. A recent synthesis is **Paweł Matuszewski and Marcin Troszyński's "Social media and politics"** in *The Oxford Handbook of Polish Politics* (2026). Its publication is verified in the university bibliography; the chapter itself was not available for this analysis. [Bibliographic record](#) These authors should be read with attention to their different positions. Krasnodębski and the conservative intellectual milieus help reconstruct the arguments motivating criticism of liberal modernisation. Sadurski and Kuisz analyse threats to liberal constitutional government. Gdula and other left researchers investigate inequalities and forms of identification that liberal accounts may understate. Digital-network researchers test claims about communication that all political camps are inclined to exaggerate.

The central theoretical proposition I would draw from Poland is that political integration is becoming more dispersed at the level of communication while remaining concentrated at the level of binding decisions. Many actors can define grievances, gather audiences and impose reputational costs. Far fewer can negotiate a parliamentary agreement, staff an administration, finance a policy or issue an enforceable judgment.

This produces three consequential tensions.

A party leader can communicate more personally while losing control over the wider ideological public from which the party draws support. An opposition can mobilise a broad digital coalition while struggling to govern that coalition after victory. A state can retain strong formal powers while losing shared acceptance of the institutions exercising them.

The decisive questions for Poland's next phase are therefore whether durable organisations can emerge from the newer audiences; whether the established parties can incorporate younger constituencies without surrendering agenda control to outside personalities; and whether institutional authority can recover sufficient cross-camp acceptance to make electoral alternation workable. Poland's experience shows that the movement of communication into cyberspace changes all three problems, but does not resolve any of them by itself.

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic illustrates a substantial redistribution of political power from traditional party organizations toward leaders, media businesses, online personalities, and networks of supporters. But the redistribution is uneven: digital communication has transformed the production of political visibility more thoroughly than it has transformed the institutions that convert visibility into governmental authority.

Your proposed perspective is therefore particularly productive for Czechia, provided that we distinguish three processes: the weakening of older party loyalties; the emergence of new organizations that combine business resources with personalized communication; and the formation of political communities through digital media. These processes overlap, but they have different origins and consequences.

My central interpretation is that **Czech politics increasingly operates through competing networks that connect intellectual production, economic resources, media exposure, political recruitment, and state institutions.** Parties remain central junctions within these networks, although they no longer organize all their activities or control all their participants.

The account below uses the October 2025 election as its parliamentary reference point and incorporates verified developments through September 2026. Where I move from documented findings to a broader explanation, I identify that explanation as an interpretation.

The present parliamentary distribution provides a useful starting point:

Electoral list	Vote share, October 2025 Seats	
ANO	34.51%	80
SPOLU: ODS, KDU-ČSL, TOP 09	23.36%	52
STAN: Mayors and Independents	11.23%	22
Czech Pirate Party	8.97%	18
SPD: Freedom and Direct Democracy	7.78%	15
Motorists for Themselves	6.77%	13

These are the official election results, rather than a continuously updated count of parliamentary-group membership. ANO subsequently formed a coalition with SPD and the Motorists, together possessing 108 seats; the Babiš government secured parliamentary confidence on 15 January 2026. [Czech Statistical Office results](#); [Inter-Parliamentary Union record](#).

The deeper question is why these particular organizations became capable of assembling support—and why some older organizations lost that capacity.

The historical starting point is a conflict over the proper intermediaries between society and the state. This conflict existed long before Facebook, YouTube, or TikTok.

After 1989, several understandings of legitimate politics developed alongside one another.

The tradition associated with **Václav Havel** emphasized civic responsibility, independent public activity, moral accountability, and the capacity of associations and individuals to challenge institutionalized power. Political legitimacy could not be exhausted by electoral victory or membership in a parliamentary party. Writers, intellectuals, journalists, civic associations, and public initiatives retained a legitimate role in scrutinizing government.

The tradition associated with **Václav Klaus** emphasized competitive parties, parliamentary mandates, market coordination, and skepticism toward actors claiming a superior moral authority outside electoral competition. From this perspective, unelected civic organizations could become privileged intermediaries claiming to represent society without accepting electoral responsibility.

These were competing accounts of democratic mediation. Their contemporary descendants remain visible whenever Czech politicians dispute whether NGOs, journalists, judges, experts, or elected representatives possess the authority to define the public interest.

A third tradition developed around **social democracy and organized social protection**. It treated politics as the representation of economic interests through parties, unions, welfare institutions, and collective bargaining. A fourth, partly inherited from communist administrative culture, valued practical management, technical competence, and the provision of material security while regarding ideological controversy with suspicion.

These traditions should not be treated as completely separate genealogies. They intersected, borrowed from one another, and changed over time. Nevertheless, they explain why Czech demands for politics “beyond the parties” can take very different forms: civic participation, managerial government, direct democracy, or personalized leadership.

For the formation of the post-1989 right, **Seán Hanley’s *The New Right in the New Europe: Czech Transformation and Right-Wing Politics, 1989–2006* (2008)** remains a foundational historical study. For the older electoral structure, **Lukáš Linek and Pat Lyons’s *Dočasná stabilita?* (2013)** reconstructs the roles of social divisions, ideological orientation, and party identification between 1990 and 2010. Hanley’s book; [Linek and Lyons, Czech Academy of Sciences](#).

The older party system began losing credibility before mass political communication moved onto social platforms. This chronology matters because otherwise digital technology receives credit for changes it mainly accelerated.

During the 1990s and 2000s, ODS and ČSSD organized much of political competition around market reform, taxation, welfare, and assessments of the post-communist transformation. KDU-ČSL and KSČM retained distinctive social and ideological constituencies. Yet this was already

a relatively fragile system compared with the deeply rooted mass-party environments historically found in parts of Western Europe.

Privatization controversies, patronage, corruption scandals, and the perceived distance between political elites and citizens weakened its legitimacy. The 1998 “Opposition Agreement” between the principal rivals became an especially important symbol of the suspicion that public confrontation could coexist with cooperation in maintaining access to power.

Linek’s *Zrazení snu?*—approximately, *A Dream Betrayed?*—examines political attitudes between 1996 and 2006 and identifies the events of 1997–1998 as a turning point in durable dissatisfaction with politics and parties. The implication is significant: subsequent online mobilization encountered an already substantial reservoir of distrust. [Linek’s study](#).

The breakthroughs of Public Affairs—*Věci veřejné*, or VV—in 2010 and ANO in 2013 therefore represented organizational responses to an existing crisis of representation. They offered new personnel, professional competence, and an attack on established political practices.

This development also complicates the equation of anti-establishment politics with the radical right. **Hanley and Allan Sikk** distinguish anti-establishment reform parties that combine relatively moderate socioeconomic positions with demands to change how politics operates. Their comparative research shows that such breakthroughs cannot simply be attributed to economic collapse. [“Economy, Corruption or Floating Voters?”](#).

The Czech sequence is best understood as follows: distrust weakened inherited loyalties; political entrepreneurs supplied new organizational forms; digital communication subsequently expanded their capacity to maintain mass contact without building correspondingly large memberships.

The social foundations of this transformation are more complicated than a division between metropolitan liberals and a disadvantaged provincial population.

That division captures some visible electoral geography, but it obscures differences in wealth, security, education, social connections, and expectations within both categories.

The 2019 research project *Rozdělení svobodou*—*Divided by Freedom*—is particularly useful here. Daniel Prokop, Martin Buchtík, Paulína Tabery, Tomáš Dvořák, and Matouš Pilnáček applied an approach drawing on Pierre Bourdieu and Mike Savage. Their study considered multiple forms of resources rather than reducing class to occupation or income. It surveyed 4,039 respondents across more than 1,300 municipalities. [Research design and authors](#).

Its six-class account helps distinguish established security, cosmopolitan opportunities, traditional employment, strong local connections, vulnerability, and deprivation. The political relevance is that citizens with similar incomes may experience society very differently depending on whether they possess housing, useful networks, institutional confidence, and realistic opportunities for their children. [The research findings](#).

My interpretation is that four overlapping conflicts organize much contemporary Czech political communication:

- **Material security:** pensions, housing, wages, energy costs, taxation, and public services.
- **Recognition:** whose experience counts as normal, respectable, informed, or backward.
- **National autonomy:** how Czech interests should relate to the EU, Western alliances, and international obligations.
- **Institutional trust:** whether journalists, experts, courts, ministries, and political leaders can be believed.

Digital communication allows these conflicts to be joined in highly effective ways. An energy-price complaint can become a claim about European domination; a disagreement over migration can become a dispute over whether ordinary citizens are permitted to speak; an investigation into a politician can become evidence, for supporters, of hostile institutional coordination.

However, these combinations are politically constructed. They do not mean that every voter holds a consistent worldview across all four dimensions.

Martin Buchtík's *Různá vyprávění o jedné společnosti* (2024) directly challenges the assumption of two internally coherent camps. His argument is that Czech society is often better described as fragmented, with inconsistent and intersecting attitudes, than as comprehensively divided into two ideological blocs. This is essential for understanding why political communication repeatedly attempts to impose a simple binary structure on a much more complicated population. [Buchtík's book and argument](#).

The intellectual background is sustained by identifiable institutions, each connecting ideas to politics through a different mechanism.

A useful map is the following:

Milieu or institution	Principal intellectual orientation	Route into political influence
Centre for the Study of Democracy and Culture, CDK, Brno	Conservative liberalism, religious and cultural reflection, European political questions	Publishing, seminars, intellectual formation, and personal continuity with political leadership. Petr Fiala was among its founders in 1993.
Václav Klaus Institute, IVK	Markets, national sovereignty, traditional values; criticism of European integration, environmentalism, and judicial expansion	A sustained interpretive programme, public commentary, and networks extending from Klaus's political career.
CEVRO University	Market economy, rule of law, liberal democracy, conservatism, and Euro-Atlantic orientation	Professional education and connections with parliament, ministries, and other public institutions.
Institute for Politics and Society	Policy discussion and expertise associated with ANO's political environment	Conferences, policy papers, and direct personnel links: its board includes figures such as Karel Havlíček and Ondřej Knotek.

Milieu or institution	Principal intellectual orientation	Route into political influence
Masaryk Democratic Academy	Democratic-left analysis of inequality, housing, capitalism, climate, and social fragmentation	Research, political education, and the preservation and renewal of social-democratic arguments.
PAQ Research and related public sociology	Empirical analysis of education, poverty, taxation, benefits, and social opportunities	Data, policy design, advisory participation, and administrative usefulness.

These connections are documented in the institutions' own accounts. They establish organizational identities and channels of access; they do not imply that every participant follows a common political command. [CDK](#); [IVK](#); [CEVRO University](#); [Institute for Politics and Society](#); [Masaryk Democratic Academy](#); [PAQ's account of policy influence](#).

This map exposes several differences that disappear in ordinary party reporting.

First, **the Czech right contains competing intellectual projects**. Fiala's Brno milieu connects conservatism with constitutional institutions and Western political belonging. Klaus's institute gives greater emphasis to the national state and resistance to supranational, environmental, and judicial constraints. These traditions share elements of market liberalism but can reach sharply different conclusions about contemporary European politics.

The Klaus institute's explicit criticism of *soudcokracie*, or rule by judges, is especially relevant to the relationship between political ideas and state organization. It identifies judicial authority as a possible displacement of democratic political decision-making. That is the institute's normative position, and should be distinguished from an empirical demonstration that courts control Czech politics.

Second, **ANO possesses an intellectual and policy environment despite presenting itself through a highly personalized leadership structure**. Its public language may be pragmatic and managerial, but policy institutes and expert networks help translate that language into proposals and personnel.

Third, **the decline of social-democratic electoral representation has not eliminated left intellectual production**. It has weakened the connection between that production and a stable parliamentary organization. Ideas about housing, labor, inequality, and ownership continue to circulate, but they face a problem of political aggregation.

Fourth, **expert influence can operate with little mass visibility**. PAQ's account of its work describes participation in policy development through research, advisory bodies, and ministry engagement. Such influence differs fundamentally from an influencer's capacity to attract attention. A modestly known researcher may affect the design of a benefit system more directly than a personality with a very large audience.

The milieu around Havel's legacy also continues to circulate ideas through debates, educational work, publications, and audiovisual programming. The Havel Channel provides a concrete example of intellectual activity being extended digitally with philanthropic support. Here, digital media renew an established civic tradition rather than replace it. [Havel-associated public activities](#).

The shift into cyberspace has changed the hierarchy of political intermediaries, while established media remain deeply involved.

Václav Štětka's Czech chapter in the *Digital News Report 2026* reports overall trust in news at 31%, with 41% avoiding news sometimes or often. Online news remains dominant, but television and social-media news use have stabilized rather than showing an uninterrupted transfer from the former to the latter. These are online-survey findings, not measures of the percentage of political power controlled by each medium. [Digital News Report 2026: Czech Republic](#).

Three transformations should be distinguished.

Ownership has become an increasingly important political resource. Large business groups can possess media assets alongside interests in other economic sectors. This creates potential channels of influence through investment decisions, appointments, editorial priorities, and the selection of issues.

The ownership map also changes. It would be outdated to describe Mafra simply as Babiš's current media group: the 2026 Reuters Institute account records Pavel Tykač's acquisition of a 50% stake in 2025, following the earlier decade of Babiš ownership beginning in 2013. Elsewhere, PPF's holdings connect Nova with streaming and telecommunications through CME and Oneplay. [Reuters Institute ownership account](#); [PPF's CME portfolio](#).

Domestic digital intermediaries have acquired a structural role. Seznam combines technology, advertising, distribution, and publishing. Its importance illustrates why "the internet" should not be treated as a decentralized space occupied only by individuals. It contains powerful domestic organizations as well as global platforms. [Seznam's company profile](#).

Journalistic material now circulates beyond the editorial setting in which it originated. A televised interview becomes a short video; an investigation becomes a partisan screenshot; a parliamentary exchange becomes a meme. Consequently, the political meaning of journalism is partly determined by subsequent selection, commentary, and recirculation.

Ownership alone does not establish that journalists receive political instructions, and different outlets within concentrated ownership structures need not share identical editorial positions. The analytical task is to identify concrete mechanisms rather than infer uniform control from ownership.

The most substantial scholarly treatment is **Václav Štětka and Sabina Mihelj's *The Illiberal Public Sphere: Media in Polarized Societies* (2024)**. Their framework connects political institutions, media structures, audience behavior, and competing standards of credibility. Crucially, they argue that the political effects of platforms depend on the surrounding media environment: digital communication can support illiberal mobilization, but it can also provide resources for democratic resistance. Their principal research period was 2019–2022, so its account should be used as an explanatory framework rather than an automatic description of every Czech development in 2026. [The open-access book](#).

Different digital channels perform different organizational functions. The following is an analytical distinction, rather than an assertion that each platform belongs to one political camp:

Channel	Political function	Organizational consequence
Facebook pages and groups	Repetition, discussion, local circulation, event organization	Sustains contact with supporters outside formal membership
YouTube and video podcasts	Extended familiarity with personalities, interviews, recurring commentary	Produces trusted hosts and potential political recruits
Instagram and TikTok	Short, visual, personalized communication	Allows politics to enter entertainment and lifestyle audiences
Telegram and closed messaging networks	Intensive circulation within relatively committed communities	Maintains cohesive publics that may distrust mainstream sources
X	Rapid interaction among politicians, journalists, and commentators	Helps set elite agendas without representing the electorate as a whole
News sites, portals, and newsletters	Selection, interpretation, investigation, and repeated delivery	Preserves editorial influence through new distribution methods

The underlying change is that **a supporter can now perform useful political work without joining a party**. Sharing material, defending a leader, supplying small donations, attending an event, or recruiting acquaintances can all occur through relatively loose affiliation.

For leaders, this arrangement has an additional attraction: it expands external support without necessarily expanding the number of members entitled to challenge decisions internally. **Tomáš Cirhan and Jakub Stauber’s “Online Supporter and Registered Sympathiser as Alternatives to a Regular Party Member” (2018)** addresses precisely this issue in VV and ANO. It is one of the closest existing studies to your central hypothesis. [Cirhan and Stauber’s article](#).

However, the apparent directness of communication can conceal new intermediaries. Campaign professionals, platform-ranking systems, presenters, moderators, advertising services, and influential group administrators acquire functions previously exercised by party officials and editors.

ANO represents the most developed Czech combination of entrepreneurial organization and personalized mass communication.

Lubomír Kopeček’s study **“‘I’m Paying, So I Decide’: Czech ANO as an Extreme Form of a Business-Firm Party” (2016)** identifies concentrated leadership, professional campaigning, controlled recruitment, and territorial structures with strongly supportive functions. The organizational principle is that resources and authority are assembled around the founder rather than gradually delegated upward from an extensive membership. [Kopeček’s article](#).

My interpretation is that digital communication fits this structure particularly well. The leader can maintain a continuous public presence while the organization supplies production, research, scheduling, and electoral administration. What appears to the audience as a personal relationship is supported by professional work behind the scenes.

This also changes political accountability inside the organization. Local activists remain useful, but the leader's perceived ability to attract voters can outweigh their preferences. The electoral audience becomes a source of authority that the leadership can invoke against internal dissent.

Lenka Bušíková and Petra Guasti's "The State as a Firm" (2019) explains the corresponding political appeal as technocratic populism. Competence is presented as the basis for a direct relationship with ordinary people, while established political conflict is portrayed as wasteful or obstructive. Their account also traces historical antecedents in Czech political culture, including the use of practical competence against supposedly detached intellectual elites. [Bušíková and Guasti](#).

The resulting promise is attractive because it offers relief from the burdens of politics: citizens can expect an effective manager to solve problems without requiring sustained participation in parties or policy debates.

But the origins of ANO's support should not be rewritten in light of its later trajectory. **Vlastimil Havlík and Petr Voda's research on VV in 2010 and ANO in 2013** found that perceived competence mattered and that standard social characteristics explained less than they did for established parties. Their findings did not confirm a simple explanation based on dissatisfaction with democracy itself. Early support contained expectations of improvement, not only resentment. ["Cleavages, Protest or Voting for Hope?"](#).

ANO's subsequent movement toward a more sovereignty-focused and culturally confrontational position demonstrates how a centralized organization can change political emphasis while preserving leadership continuity. Its affiliation with Patriots for Europe and its coalition with SPD and the Motorists mark a different alignment from its earlier liberal-centrist positioning. [Babiš's return and changed European alignment](#).

The Motorists provide an especially clear case of cultural identity and online familiarity becoming parliamentary power.

Their appeal brings together several elements: attachment to cars and individual mobility, opposition to environmental restrictions, distrust of progressive cultural authority, and a political style that treats provocation as evidence of independence.

Filip Turek's movement from automotive and racing-related public visibility into political commentary and elected office illustrates how a pre-existing cultural audience can become politically relevant. The audience does not have to begin with a comprehensive party programme. Identification with a personality and a way of life can precede systematic political commitment. [Account of Turek's trajectory](#).

The organizational connections are unusually concrete. August 2026 reporting identifies **Petr Macinka, Filip Turek, Matěj Gregor, and Vladimír Pikora** as regular participants in XTV programming; reporting also documents their transition from Xaver Live presenters into Motorists MPs. Macinka publicly credited XTV with helping the party reach parliament and government. [Deník N's reporting](#); [HlídacíPes.org's account](#).

There is also documented financial cooperation between digital media and parliamentary politics. The European Parliament's disclosure lists a 2025 Patriots for Europe contract with XTV for video-podcast services at €11,917.01. Reporting describes this as a framework

amount, so it should not be treated as proof that the entire sum was spent. [European Parliament contract disclosure](#).

The significance extends beyond an effective advertising campaign. A recurring media environment can provide political socialization, familiarity among future colleagues, audience testing, recruitment, and a recognizable public style. It can therefore perform several functions once associated with a party's press, youth organization, and training institutions.

The Motorists also demonstrate the importance of the final institutional step. Their online visibility became governmental influence through a registered political organization, successful electoral lists, and coalition bargaining. Their 13 seats mattered because they helped construct a parliamentary majority.

SPD, the Pirates, STAN, and SPOLU represent different responses to the same communication environment.

For **SPD**, the central mechanism is the sustained interpretation of politics through threats to national control, security, and the right of ordinary people to be heard. Direct-democracy language strengthens the claim that existing intermediaries obstruct the popular will. Social media can sustain this interpretation between elections, continually connecting new controversies to an established political identity.

Nevertheless, digital prominence should not be mistaken for electoral dominance. PSSI's monitoring of August 2025 found SPD and its allies prominent in popular monitored content, while Stačilo! was particularly visible on Telegram. Its sample examined selected high-interaction posts and online articles, rather than all political exposure. Stačilo!'s subsequent failure to enter the Chamber illustrates the gap between concentrated online activity and broad electoral support. [PSSI's monitoring report](#).

The **Pirate Party** represents a different relationship between digitalization and politics. Its political identity grew around transparency, digital rights, participation, and the modernization of public administration. Here, the internet was also a model for how political organization should work.

That produces a distinctive tension. Open discussion and internal participation can strengthen legitimacy among activists, while also making rapid message discipline more difficult. Government requires negotiation, responsibility for imperfect implementation, and decisions that cannot always await extensive internal deliberation.

The Pirates therefore show why familiarity with digital culture does not automatically confer a lasting advantage in digital campaigning. A participatory organization and a highly centralized personal campaign use the same platforms under very different internal rules. Štětka and Mihelj's discussion of Czech digital challengers helps locate the Pirates within this broader diversity. [Social media, illiberalism, and resistance](#).

STAN is important because its identity rests substantially on municipal and local political experience. Its model highlights a resource that national online popularity cannot readily reproduce: trust built through repeated contact with a recognizable local officeholder.

My interpretation is that STAN's organizational value lies in connecting local reputations to a national electoral offer. Digital media can publicize that offer, but much of its credibility depends on relationships developed elsewhere. Its 22 seats in 2025 demonstrate the continued viability of this route.

SPOLU, meanwhile, combines organizations with distinct ideological and social histories. Its coalition format shows how established parties adapt to fragmentation by pooling electoral strength. It also exposes the difficulty of maintaining a common political identity when conservative, Christian-democratic, and liberal priorities diverge.

An opposition identity centered on resisting Babiš can help coordinate voters and parties. Once in government, that identity must coexist with decisions on public finances, services, energy, and security. My inference is that a coalition unified substantially by its opponent faces a recurring challenge: explaining a positive social project that remains persuasive when everyday material pressures become more salient.

The traditional left faces a problem of representation that digital communication alone cannot resolve. Social demands persist even when the organizations historically associated with them lose electoral relevance.

Welfare expectations, economic insecurity, and dissatisfaction with ownership structures can be incorporated into different political offers. ANO can combine social protection with managerial leadership; nationalist actors can attach material grievances to sovereignty; democratic-left intellectuals can propose institutional reforms without possessing an equally effective electoral vehicle.

Ondřej Slačálek and Daniel Šitera develop a critical-left interpretation of these problems in **“Czechia 30 Years On: An Imperfect Oligarchy Without Emancipatory Alternative.”** Their framework links ownership and the post-1989 transformation to the weakness of an effective emancipatory alternative. This is a situated theoretical interpretation, rather than a neutral label that all researchers accept. [The chapter's edited volume.](#)

Civic mobilization constitutes another route to mass political influence outside party membership.

Million Moments for Democracy—*Milion chviliek pro demokracii*—illustrates how petitions, public events, local volunteers, digital communication, and a professional coordinating organization can be combined. Its current organizational account identifies local groups, communication staff, fundraising, volunteers, and educational activities. This is substantial organization, although it takes a different form from a party. [The organization's structure.](#)

Such a movement can influence the political agenda, raise the costs of controversial decisions, encourage electoral participation, and pressure opposition parties to coordinate. It does not follow that every participant would support a common party programme or transfer allegiance to the movement's leaders.

The distinction is sociologically important: **agreement on what must be opposed is often easier to achieve than agreement on who should govern and how.**

Civic and liberal online personalities also demonstrate that the new communication environment has no fixed ideological destination. Karel Kovář, known as **Kovy**, connects entertainment with public affairs and civic questions. His role illustrates the emergence of an intermediary whose audience is not assembled through party membership. His visibility, however, does not by itself establish a measurable effect on voting. [Czech Radio's interview with Kovy](#).

Czech cultural conflict has distinctive intellectual content and should not be assimilated mechanically to Polish or Hungarian patterns.

The volume **Pavel Barša, Zora Hesová, and Ondřej Slačálek** edited, *Central European Culture Wars: Beyond Post-Communism and Populism* (2021), is particularly valuable. It examines conflicts over memory, morality, and identity while questioning explanations that reduce everything to a generic post-communist condition.

Slačálek's Czech analysis gives greater importance to disputes about democracy and relations with the West than to the church-centered moral conflicts especially prominent in Poland. The comparative weakness of Catholic institutional authority changes how cultural conservatism is organized and justified. [Open-access volume](#).

In Czech political communication, cultural defense can consequently be expressed through secular language: common sense, personal freedom, opposition to regulation, national autonomy, or resistance to supposedly privileged cultural elites.

This is particularly visible in disputes about environmental policy. The political question becomes simultaneously economic and symbolic: who pays for transition, whose lifestyle is constrained, and who has the authority to define responsible behavior?

The same applies to relations with the West. Western integration can signify security, democratic belonging, and economic opportunity. It can also become the object of arguments about dependency, unequal status, or external interference. Political actors compete to connect these interpretations with citizens' everyday experiences.

Barša and Slačálek are especially useful because they also examine liberal responses and forms of depoliticization. Their work resists an account in which one camp possesses ideas while the other merely reacts emotionally. The Charles University OLIPOL project explicitly investigates how liberalism and polarization interact. [OLIPOL's research framework](#).

Foreign influence is one component of the communication environment, but domestic organization and commercial incentives require separate analysis.

A misleading or conspiratorial channel may be motivated by ideology, audience revenue, donations, personal ambition, foreign connections, or several of these together. Similar content does not demonstrate common financing or centralized direction.

Natália Tkáčová and Kristína Šefčíková's PSSI research, **"Disinformation as a Business" (2023)**, identifies different financial and organizational models, including advertising and voluntary contributions. This helps explain why some communication networks reproduce themselves through their relationship with audiences. Their survival need not depend entirely on a political party or foreign sponsor. [PSSI's business-model study](#).

There is a consequential feedback mechanism here. A channel attracts people by expressing distrust; its financial viability becomes dependent on retaining them; maintaining that audience may reward continuing conflict with established institutions.

At the same time, organizations countering disinformation also participate in the governance of communication. Their classifications and proposals can affect funding, advertising, and platform decisions. They should therefore be studied as actors with stated objectives, while their factual findings are assessed on their evidence.

The effects on the Czech state depend on how these communication networks interact with institutions possessing their own authority.

Online popularity can produce political pressure, but it cannot supply all the resources necessary for administration. Government still requires legal competence, departmental coordination, reliable information, parliamentary votes, and implementation through organizations with established procedures.

This produces several important tensions.

A leader who derives legitimacy from personal responsiveness may portray administrative constraints as excuses. Officials may then face pressure to prioritize visible, rapidly communicable results. Conversely, failures of implementation can damage the competence claim on which that leadership rests.

A governing party may also regard public institutions as communication problems: hostile journalists, uncooperative experts, or obstructive officials. The resulting response can involve changes in appointments, funding, or institutional design.

The June 2026 proposal to replace public-broadcasting licence fees with state-budget financing illustrates this connection. The government approved a bill changing the financing model; critics argued that the proposed arrangement and funding reductions would increase political dependence. The analytical issue is how financial arrangements affect the ability of institutions to maintain an independent public voice. Cabinet approval of a proposal should not be confused with completed enactment. [Government announcement](#); [Reuters on the proposal and criticism](#).

Constitutional institutions also limit the conversion of a parliamentary victory into comprehensive state control. Constitutional legislation requires three-fifths of all deputies—120—and three-fifths of senators present. The coalition’s original 108 deputies therefore do not constitute an independent constitutional majority. The Senate must also agree to electoral legislation. The president and Senate participate in Constitutional Court appointments, creating another route of institutional authority distinct from the governing coalition. [Czech Constitution, Articles 39, 40, and 84](#).

These arrangements do not guarantee institutional independence in practice. They do mean that the Czech state contains several sources of legitimacy and recruitment that cannot simply be read off the lower-house election result.

Jiří Příbář provides a particularly clear example of an intellectual route into state authority. His work on legal symbolism, sovereignty, and constitutional imaginaries concerns how legal institutions generate and sustain legitimacy. His appointment as a Constitutional

Court justice in June 2024 also represents a concrete movement from academic legal theory into constitutional decision-making. He is relevant to the intellectual organization of the state, although he should not be presented as an empirical researcher of platform campaigning. [Constitutional Court biography and bibliography](#).

For a sociology of state power, this suggests that at least three recruitment processes must be examined separately: electoral recruitment through parties, public-personality recruitment through media, and professional recruitment through legal, academic, and administrative networks.

The existing scholarship is strongest when these different levels are combined. The following works provide a focused reading map:

Question	Authors and principal work	Distinctive contribution
What supported the older party system?	Lukáš Linek and Pat Lyons, <i>Dočasná stabilita?</i> (2013)	Social divisions, party identification, and electoral continuity before the newer challengers
Why did distrust precede the platform era?	Lukáš Linek, <i>Zrazení snu?</i> (2010)	Distinguishes dissatisfaction, alienation, and regime legitimacy
How did Czech conservative politics develop?	Seán Hanley, <i>The New Right in the New Europe</i> (2008)	Intellectual and organizational formation of the post-1989 right
How is ANO organized?	Lubomír Kopeček, “‘I’m Paying, So I Decide’” (2016)	Entrepreneurial resources and centralized party authority
How does managerial legitimacy become populist?	Lenka Bušíková and Petra Guasti, “The State as a Firm” (2019)	Expertise claims, direct representation, and the delegitimation of political mediation
Why did voters support early challengers?	Vlastimil Havlík and Petr Voda, “Cleavages, Protest or Voting for Hope?” (2018)	Competence expectations and the limits of explanations based solely on protest
How can online supporters substitute for members?	Tomáš Cirhan and Jakub Stauber, “Online Supporter and Registered Sympathiser...” (2018)	Loose affiliation and its consequences for internal party power
How do media structures interact with polarization?	Václav Štětka and Sabina Mihelj, <i>The Illiberal Public Sphere</i> (2024)	Connects ownership, institutions, audiences, and digital communication
What are the specifically Czech cultural conflicts?	Pavel Barša, Zora Hesová, and Ondřej Slačálek, eds., <i>Central European Culture Wars</i> (2021)	Memory, identity, morality, democracy, and Western belonging
Is society actually divided into two camps?	Martin Buchtík, <i>Různá vyprávění o jedné společnosti</i> (2024)	Fragmentation and inconsistent attitudes beneath simplified political narratives

Two further research directions deserve emphasis.

First, **visible personalization must be separated from demonstrated changes in voting behavior**. Linek and Marcela Voženílková's 2017 study of elections between 1996 and 2013 found no general increase in independent leader effects over that period. Leaders mattered more for some new populist parties, but the effects were not large. This historical finding cannot settle what happened after 2013, yet it prevents us from assuming that a leader's greater media visibility necessarily means a proportionate increase in voters' dependence on personality. [Their study of electoral personalization](#).

Second, **participation in online discussion is socially selective**. Lenka Vochocová, Václav Štětka, and Jaromír Mazák's work on the gendered character of Czech online political participation demonstrates why comment sections cannot be treated as an unfiltered expression of the public. The people most visible in discussion are not necessarily representative of those who read, remain silent, or ultimately vote. [The authors' publication record](#).

For your particular inquiry, the most promising further investigation would follow concrete connections across five stages: **who formulates an interpretation; who finances and distributes it; which audience adopts it; which organization converts that audience into political support; and which state decisions subsequently change**. Czech research has examined several of these stages in considerable depth. The remaining challenge is to connect them without treating shared language, online engagement, electoral success, and governmental influence as interchangeable evidence.

Hungary

Hungary's political transformation is best understood as a redistribution of organisational power among parties, leaders, media institutions, intellectual networks, and digitally connected citizens. Your central observation captures an important part of this change: reaching a national political audience increasingly requires neither a long-established party organisation nor admission to the traditional mass media. However, the Hungarian evidence also shows that online communication can strengthen local organisation, concentrate authority around leaders, and create new intermediaries with considerable political power.

The change of government in 2026 makes these distinctions particularly important. The final election count gave Tisza 141 parliamentary seats and Fidesz–KDNP 52; Péter Magyar became prime minister on 9 May. An explanation based only on Fidesz's institutional and media advantages would struggle to explain this outcome. An explanation based only on Magyar's online success would struggle to explain how attention became nationwide electoral mobilisation. [Reuters, final election count](#); [AP, Magyar's inauguration](#).

I would therefore distinguish three capacities throughout the analysis: **the capacity to organise public attention; the capacity to organise a political community; and the capacity to exercise state power.** They overlap, but they are increasingly held by different actors. The discussion below uses evidence available by 10 September 2026 and distinguishes established research from interpretations of the latest developments.

The first correction concerns the starting point: Hungarian political organisation was already extending beyond parties before social media became dominant. Television, newspapers, cultural associations, churches, professional networks, and intellectual circles all helped organise political identification. Citizens did not normally encounter politics only through party membership or parliamentary representation.

What has changed is the allocation of functions within this wider environment:

Political function	Earlier principal intermediaries	Increasingly important digital arrangements	What still requires durable organisation
Making a political actor nationally visible	Television editors, newspaper leadership, party leadership	Video interviews, personal pages, creators, recommendation systems	Sustained production, credibility, access to information
Defining public problems	Parties, editorial institutions, recognised intellectuals	Investigative outlets, online commentators,	Research, verification, policy expertise

Political function	Earlier principal intermediaries	Increasingly important digital arrangements	What still requires durable organisation
Creating collective identity	Party traditions, associations, commemorations	circulating personal experiences Recurring online interaction, shared symbols, participatory campaigns	Relationships capable of surviving disappointment
Mobilising participation	Party branches and established civic organisations	Online invitations, volunteer groups, digital fundraising	Local coordination, candidates, electoral work
Selecting political personnel	Party careers and organisational bargaining	Public visibility combined with centrally managed recruitment	Competence assessment, accountability, working relationships
Influencing government between elections	Parliamentary groups, organised interests, professional bodies	Public campaigns and pressure from online supporters	Administrative procedures, negotiation, implementation

The displacement is therefore greatest in **visibility, agenda formation, and initial mobilisation**. It is less complete in recruitment and considerably less complete in governing.

The deeper Hungarian background consists of overlapping conflicts about national identity, social status, modernisation, and the location of legitimate authority. These cannot be reduced to a single left–right division.

One conflict concerns the historical and cultural definition of the nation: national continuity, Christianity, historical memory, Hungarians outside the borders, and the significance of sovereignty. Another concerns whether modernisation should be understood primarily through integration into Western institutions or through strengthening domestic political and economic autonomy. A third concerns distribution: who benefited from economic transformation, who lost occupational security, and who believes that advancement depends on political connections.

A fourth conflict concerns authority itself. Should elected political leadership have the decisive role in setting the country’s direction, or should its decisions be substantially constrained by constitutional courts, professional institutions, European bodies, and rights-based organisations? These positions cut across economic preferences. A voter may support redistribution and strong national sovereignty, or market liberalism and extensive constitutional constraints.

The older *népi–urbánus* opposition supplied part of the language through which these conflicts were understood. But treating contemporary camps as unchanged descendants of that division would be misleading. The relevant process is the repeated political recombination of inherited identities.

Zsolt Enyedi’s work explains why parties must be studied as producers of these divisions, as well as their representatives. In “The Role of Agency in Cleavage Formation” (2005), he

shows how political organisations connect social groups, reinforce cultural distinctions, and help align attitudes with partisan identification. Political camps are consequently not simply pre-existing social populations waiting for parliamentary expression. Organisations help make them coherent. [Enyedi's article and abstract](#).

Applied to the digital period, this suggests an important extension: a leader, a group of creators, or a network of online communities can now perform some of the identity-building work previously concentrated in parties. Nevertheless, inherited attachments still affect which messages are credible and which alliances are possible.

Fidesz's long ascendancy rested partly on its ability to organise a social and cultural world around electoral politics. Explaining this solely through government communication or passive reception of propaganda overlooks an earlier and more active organisational achievement.

After the 2002 defeat, the civic circles helped connect local activists, educated middle-class participants, cultural initiatives, commemorations, and existing associations. They created opportunities for belonging and participation outside the electoral calendar. Béla Greskovits's study, "Rebuilding the Hungarian Right through Conquering Civil Society," demonstrates the importance of this work. It also challenges the stereotype that the right's social foundation consisted mainly of politically passive or poorly informed citizens. [Greskovits's study](#).

The corresponding weakness of the liberal-left was not simply inferior messaging. Laura Jakli, Greskovits, and Jason Wittenberg analyse 4,836 partisan protest events from 1989–2011 and argue that asymmetries in civic mobilisation contributed both to Fidesz's victory and to the subsequent weakness of resistance. Their findings locate an important organisational imbalance before the mature social-media period. ["Asymmetric Mass Mobilization and the Vincibility of Democracy in Hungary"](#).

The implication is that Fidesz accumulated several kinds of resources together: electoral loyalty, local relationships, cultural identification, organisational experience, and eventually extensive institutional resources. Its later digital activity operated upon this accumulated foundation.

The post-2010 governing system connected this social organisation with control over appointments, economic opportunities, and communication infrastructure. Several influential theories illuminate different aspects of that connection.

András Körösenyi, Gábor Illés, and Attila Gyulai describe a **plebiscitary leader democracy**: a system in which personalised leadership, recurring popular authorisation, and the leader's ability to redefine political conflicts become central. Their account explains why party organisations and parliamentary institutions can remain formally important while political initiative concentrates elsewhere. It also treats personalisation and media performance as structural features rather than superficial matters of style. [The Orbán Regime: Plebiscitary Leader Democracy in the Making](#).

Bálint Magyar and Bálint Madlovics focus instead on **patronal relations**: the coordination of office, property, economic advantage, and personal dependence. Their framework directs attention to relationships that formal constitutional descriptions leave invisible. It is an analytical model requiring evidence about particular networks, rather than a reason to classify

every business–political connection identically. [The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes and related works](#).

Gábor Scheiring explains the social and economic foundations of the transformation through deindustrialisation, insecurity, class restructuring, and the political demands of domestic capital. His “accumulative state” concept highlights the organisation of economic advancement and ownership. This helps explain why national-economic narratives could resonate with experiences that communication campaigns did not themselves create. [The Retreat of Liberal Democracy](#).

These approaches answer different questions. Leadership theory explains the organisation of authority and consent; patronal analysis examines dependence and resource allocation; political economy explains the social interests and grievances available for mobilisation.

The intellectual background should consequently be mapped as several interacting environments, rather than as two unified ideological headquarters. A useful distinction is between producing ideas, reproducing elites, investigating public affairs, mobilising audiences, and designing policy.

Intellectual or communicative environment	Illustrative institutions and actors	Principal political function
National-conservative education and elite formation	MCC and its educational, publishing, research, and international programmes	Training, relationship formation, cultural reproduction, preparation for public roles
Conservative strategic and ideological production	Századvég; the intellectual environment around <i>Kommentár</i> and the XXI. Század Intézet; Márton Békés and other participant theorists	Interpreting national interests and legitimating political strategy
Constitutional and sovereignty debates	Legal scholars, constitutional institutions, the Deák Ferenc Műhely, Béla Pokol’s juristocracy research	Defining the relationship between electoral authority, legal interpretation, and supranational institutions
Liberal constitutional and policy research	University researchers, CEU-associated scholarship, policy institutes, rights organisations	Institutional criticism, policy alternatives, professional standards, international comparison
Investigative and independent journalism	Direkt36, Átlátszó, Telex, HVG, 444, Válasz Online, Magyar Hang	Producing information, scrutinising officeholders, establishing public problems
Left and socially critical discussion	Partizán and parts of the wider critical intellectual environment	Connecting inequality, public services, labour, and social experience with politics
Creator and entertainment publics	Youtubers, podcasters, satirists, cultural personalities	Reaching audiences through familiarity, humour, and personal credibility

Intellectual or communicative environment	Illustrative institutions and actors	Principal political function
Movement and governing expertise	Tisza's volunteer communities, recruited professionals, policy working groups	Converting mobilisation into candidates, programmes, and administrative personnel

These are functional groupings, not claims of common ownership or coordinated instructions. Institutions within the same row can disagree sharply.

MCC illustrates why durable organisations remain important even when communication becomes digital. Its own institutional description encompasses regional education, leadership development, research institutes, publishing, fellowships, and international activity. Such arrangements create repeated contact and career relationships that a successful social-media account cannot reproduce by itself. [MCC's institutional structure](#); [MCC's self-description](#).

Márton Békés's *Nemzeti blokk* (2022) is useful as an articulation of the governing camp's own interpretation of its project: national integration and the construction of a durable political community. It should be read as a participant's theoretical account, alongside competing explanations of the same system. [Publisher-supplied description of *Nemzeti blokk*](#).

The wider analytical point is that intellectual activity can prepare a vocabulary, train personnel, and establish legitimacy without determining individual government decisions. Influence must be traced through actual appointments, organisational links, documents, and policy choices.

The liberal and government-critical environment had a different relationship between intellectual strength and political organisation. Professional expertise, investigative capacity, cultural standing, and international recognition did not necessarily produce strong electoral organisations. Conversely, the decline of established opposition parties did not entail the disappearance of the journalists, researchers, lawyers, or cultural communities whose work had contributed to opposition public life.

This distinction helps explain how Tisza could displace older opposition parties while drawing upon a public already familiar with criticism of corruption, public services, and concentrated power. Political audiences can transfer their electoral support faster than professional institutions change their personnel or intellectual orientations.

It also explains why independent journalism should not automatically be treated as a party's communication department. An outlet can publish material damaging to Fidesz, help make a challenger visible, and subsequently scrutinise that challenger. The different business models—subscriptions, memberships, donations, advertising, and grants—also produce different dependencies and incentives. Judit Szakács documents this variety in her account of the Hungarian media environment. [Reuters Institute, Hungary 2026](#).

Béla Pokol's work belongs in this map because it examines political power exercised outside electoral and parliamentary channels. His juristocracy analysis asks how authoritative legal interpretation and professional legal institutions can move substantive political decisions away from elected bodies. This is directly relevant to the question of what lies beneath parliamentary conflict.

The competing constitutional interpretation understands courts and rights institutions principally as safeguards against concentrated majority power. The disagreement concerns where legitimate political decision-making ends and legal constraint begins. It cannot be resolved merely by identifying one side with democracy and the other with its negation. The Deák Ferenc Műhely's research programme explicitly formulates its subject through the paired processes of judicialisation of politics and politicisation of law. [The workshop's research statement](#).

For the digital transformation, I would extend this discussion by separating **authority to interpret law**, **authority to define public problems**, and **capacity to distribute interpretations to mass audiences**. These powers can reinforce one another, but they need not reside in the same organisations. This extension is my analytical proposal, not an attribution of a completed digital theory to Pokol.

The digital transformation itself developed in identifiable stages. Márton Bene and Norbert Merkóvity's 2026 review provides a particularly useful chronology:

- **1996–2006:** experimentation with websites and, especially around 2002, email and SMS mobilisation.
- **2006–2014:** incorporation of online tools into campaigning, with blogs and interactive communication supporting personalisation.
- **2014–2019:** Facebook became especially important for opposition actors compensating for disadvantages in established media.
- **After 2019:** digital campaigning became a strategic priority across the major camps, with expanding advertising, multiple platforms, and additional campaign intermediaries.

This periodisation shows that digital politics did not suddenly begin with Magyar. His emergence occurred within an already developed communication environment. Bene and Merkóvity, "A digitális kampányok története Magyarországon (1996–2024)".

The most important mechanism is that citizens have become part of the machinery distributing political communication. A political message is now designed partly to make its recipient act publicly: share it, comment on it, react to it, reproduce its language, or send it into a personal group.

Bene describes this through the **viralisation of political communication**. The politically relevant audience is therefore not simply the population that receives a message. It also includes the smaller population willing to circulate it. Communication becomes responsive to the dispositions of those active participants, who are not necessarily representative of the electorate. [Bene, "The Viralization of Political Communication and its Normative Implications"](#).

This changes organisational power in several ways. A party supporter can perform distribution work previously requiring an established media outlet. A leader's personal following can become a resource independent of the party's collective reputation. A creator can decide which political actor enters an audience's field of vision. And a group administrator can influence the everyday political environment of a locality.

The resulting communication may feel direct, but it contains new intermediaries: platform companies, recommendation systems, creators, moderators, production teams, and highly active users.

Megafon illustrates how an established political camp adapted through organisational outsourcing. Its significance was not merely that government-supporting individuals posted videos. It supplied a differentiated layer of campaigning alongside formal party communication.

Bene and Vanessza Juhász's study of the 2022 campaign compared ten Megafon influencers with Orbán, Fidesz's page, and constituency candidates. In their analysed advertisements, influencers concentrated heavily on attacks, while official electoral actors more often presented achievements and policy messages. Seventy-eight per cent of the sampled influencer advertisements were attack-oriented. [The authors' account of the Megafon study](#).

This arrangement can protect a leader's preferred public role while allied communicators conduct more confrontational argument. Juhász's separate study of 499 advertisements examines that argumentative division of labour. [Juhász, "Influenszer politikusok és politikai influenszerek"](#).

Financial resources remained substantial. Political Capital's monitoring attributed 87% of approximately €10.59 million in identified Meta and Google political advertising expenditure between 29 December 2024 and 27 September 2025 to government-aligned actors. This measures an advertising advantage, not an equivalent proportion of public attention or political persuasion. [Political Capital's monitoring results](#).

The withdrawal of political advertising by major platforms then altered the usefulness of this financial advantage. Meta and Google stopped carrying EU political advertising around autumn 2025 in response to the new regulatory environment. The distinction matters: the EU introduced regulatory requirements; the platforms chose to discontinue the service. [AP on Meta's decision](#); [Google's documentation](#).

My inference is that this increased the relative value of established audience relationships, voluntary sharing, creator credibility, and activist coordination. It did not eliminate the usefulness of money: production, staffing, events, and organisation still require resources. But expenditure could no longer be converted into paid distribution through the same channels.

Fidesz's digital fighters, digital civic circles, and the 2026 forty-day online mobilisation initiative demonstrate its effort to adapt. They also show that an established party can attempt to organise online participation through its existing community. [Reuters on Fidesz's digital mobilisation](#).

The rise of creator media changed political credibility as well as distribution. A newspaper typically asks readers to trust an institution. A recurring video personality can accumulate trust through familiarity, humour, perceived candour, and a recognisable manner of interpreting events.

Political influence can therefore emerge from an audience originally assembled around entertainment or general conversation. The creator need not offer a comprehensive ideology. Repeated judgements about what is absurd, unfair, shameful, or admirable can establish a political orientation.

Reporting on Hungarian podcasters documents this mixture of humour and political discussion, including Ádám Nagy's programmes, Partizán, and Orbán's increasing appearances in sympathetic podcast settings. These are different political and editorial projects using some common communicative forms. [Reuters on Hungarian podcasters](#).

Partizán is especially important because it combines a recognisable presenter with substantial journalistic production. It demonstrates that digital media can generate new institutions, including editorial selection, interviewing authority, and sustained analytical programming. The decline of older gatekeepers can therefore be accompanied by the rise of new ones.

The February 2024 crisis revealed how these different actors could interact without belonging to one organisation. The pardon scandal became publicly consequential through reporting; influencers organised a major demonstration; Magyar's interview on Partizán provided a separate route for an emerging political actor to achieve national visibility. The influencer protest should not retrospectively be treated as simply an operation of the later Tisza movement. AP on the influencer-organised demonstration.

Szakács's 2025 account records more than 2.7 million views for Magyar's breakthrough interview. That is a measure of video viewing, not 2.7 million distinct Hungarian voters. Its importance lies in demonstrating the scale of exposure achievable through a digital editorial institution outside the established party structure. [Reuters Institute, Hungary 2025](#).

Several processes converged: a moral crisis affecting the governing camp's self-presentation; an insider's claim to knowledge; the visibility supplied by an independent platform; and dissatisfaction searching for an electorally credible focus. Digital communication accelerated their convergence.

The scandal's particular force also requires explanation. A controversy can be especially damaging when it contradicts a political community's own central moral claims. That mechanism differs from ordinary disagreement between opposing camps: it potentially destabilises the standards through which supporters justify their attachment.

Hungarian research on moral emotions helps explain why communication can create such durable camps and such sudden ruptures. Gabriella Szabó's edited volume examines shame, guilt, pride, and hubris in the 2022 campaigns. Balázs Kiss's "double resentment" analysis considers how rival camps cultivate their own experiences of injury and moral superiority. These approaches connect everyday political emotion with larger cultural conflicts. [Szabó, *Managing Moral Emotions in Divided Politics*](#); [Kiss, "Double Resentment"](#).

Anger is only part of the mechanism. Hope, patriotic pride, solidarity, and the pleasure of participating in a successful collective undertaking can also circulate effectively. Xénia Farkas and Bene's visual analysis found widespread patriotic symbolism and an association with positive reactions. [Their study of visual communication](#).

This matters for understanding Magyar's emergence. National symbols were available for appropriation by a challenger; they were not permanently owned by the governing party. Burai, Bagi, and Juhász's analysis of the 2024 campaign shows both continuity in national framing and differences in how leaders used populist communication. [Their comparative study](#).

Tisza's distinctive organisational achievement was to connect rapid personal visibility with a growing field of participation. Its ascent changed the order in which a national political organisation could be assembled. Large-scale attention and a recognisable leader became available before the development of an organisational structure comparable in age and depth to Fidesz's.

But the subsequent development cannot accurately be described as the absence of organisation. Ilona Gizińska reported in June 2025 that more than a thousand Tisza islands brought together tens of thousands of participants. She distinguished these associations from formal party structures and described online recruitment and 65 thematic working groups. These are dated observations, not present membership totals. [Gizińska's organisational account](#).

The distinction between a formal party and its surrounding movement is crucial. A relatively restricted decision-making organisation may coexist with a much larger participatory environment. Volunteers can supply enthusiasm, information, relationships, and labour while possessing limited authority over central decisions.

This produces a potentially consequential asymmetry: **participation may be widely distributed while decision-making remains concentrated.** Whether such an arrangement becomes internally democratic depends on recruitment procedures, rights of dissent, accountability, and the influence of local participants—not simply on how many people join online activities.

Reuters' reporting from rural constituencies before the 2026 election describes face-to-face campaigning around jobs, infrastructure, and healthcare. Such work helps explain how nationally visible grievances could be connected to local choices. [Reuters on the rural campaign](#).

Locality remains a major corrective to the idea that cyberspace dissolves political organisation. Bene and Gábor Dobos's *Networked Locality* draws on a five-year research project combining surveys and content analysis. Their findings indicate that nearly half of the political Facebook content encountered by users concerns local politics.

Mayoral pages and community groups reach people who are interested in practical information even when they avoid national political debate. Local political actors can consequently acquire an audience through useful communication. Yet the authors also find limited spillover from local engagement into national political attitudes. [Networked Locality](#); [the authors' research summary](#).

The resulting political geography is more complicated than an opposition between an offline countryside and an online capital. Local relationships can operate digitally; national messages can arrive through trusted local actors; and online activity can support participation in physical communities.

This also changes the research question. Counting national leaders' followers tells us little about who controls the communication environment of a particular town, which local figures possess credibility, or how national mobilisation enters everyday relationships.

The decline of older opposition parties can be interpreted partly as the loss of their intermediary role. Previously, they offered channels through which dissatisfaction was

organised, represented, and translated into an electoral choice. A challenger with national visibility and a credible prospect of victory can make those channels appear less necessary.

My interpretation is that this involved two related processes. First, voters gained another route for identifying with an opposition project. Second, professionals, volunteers, and donors gained another prospective destination for their activity. These movements need not occur at the same speed.

The process also explains why ideological traditions can survive the electoral decline of their associated parties. Social-democratic concerns, liberal constitutional arguments, green issues, and conservative criticism can migrate into journalism, civic organisations, local politics, or a broader electoral coalition.

A large new coalition may consequently achieve electoral coherence before resolving disagreements among its supporters. Differences over redistribution, national identity, public appointments, European integration, and institutional reconstruction can become more visible once the common task of defeating the incumbent has been completed.

The 2026 change introduces an additional development: supporters may now exert substantial pressure upon their own governing leadership. In an essay published on 31 August, Bene argues that an autonomous digital crowd has become an important force within the victorious camp's public. He suggests that strong partisan identification and fear of the rival previously restrained such pressure, whereas the new situation gives supporters greater room to formulate demands.

This is a timely interpretation rather than an established causal finding. Its importance is that it complicates the image of a leader simply commanding an obedient online following. Bene also distinguishes active initiators, those who amplify them, and the broader public influenced by the resulting atmosphere. The most visible group should not be mistaken for the whole electorate. [Bene, "Árad a digitális tömeg, fel van adva a lecke Magyar Péternek".](#)

A related contemporary interpretation appears in Zsiga Bulcsú's discussion of the limits of *élménykormányzás*: governing that attempts to sustain the participatory experience created during mobilisation. It directs attention to what happens when supporters expect to remain active participants in a shared political undertaking. [Zsiga, "Az élménykormányzás határai," 9 September 2026.](#)

I would identify a central tension here. Personalised campaigning invites citizens to place trust in a leader, while participatory campaigning invites them to regard the political project as partly their own. Once government begins making appointments and allocating scarce resources, those expectations may conflict.

For the functioning of the Hungarian state, the consequences extend beyond campaign communication. The first is a potential weakening of intermediate deliberation. If ministers or representatives owe their visibility primarily to a leader's national appeal, they may possess less independent authority within the governing organisation. A large parliamentary majority does not by itself tell us how much substantive debate occurs before decisions reach parliament.

The second is a widening gap between the speed of public demands and the speed of implementation. A visible problem can enter the agenda within hours; administrative reform

may require budgeting, recruitment, negotiation, and years of execution. The political organisation must translate between these different timescales.

The third is a new form of selective responsiveness. Online pressure can expose neglected problems and constrain arbitrary decisions. It can also privilege issues with strong visual or emotional appeal over less visible institutional work.

The fourth concerns expertise. A rapidly assembled movement must acquire the knowledge needed for government. Existing professional networks remain important sources of personnel. The September 2026 announcement that András Bíró-Nagy would take responsibility for EU affairs in the Prime Minister's Office provides a concrete example of the movement between political research and executive office. [Official government announcement](#).

The fifth concerns institutional reconstruction. A new majority can seek to remove arrangements associated with its predecessor, but the lasting question is whether replacement arrangements create independent constraints or place comparable powers under new leadership. Proposed reforms must therefore be evaluated through their actual procedures and implementation. For example, reporting on Tisza's June public-media bill establishes the proposed reorganisation; it does not by itself establish the eventual independence of the reconstructed institutions. Reuters on the public-media proposal.

The international environment remains part of this domestic organisation of power. European institutions affect resources and legal constraints; international academic and policy networks circulate ideas and personnel; philanthropic organisations support particular activities; conservative international networks provide audiences and recognition; and platform companies determine important conditions of communication.

These mechanisms should be distinguished. A grant, a professional association, membership in a European party family, a legal obligation, and dependence on a platform are different relationships. They cannot be treated as interchangeable evidence of political direction.

Bozóki and Dániel Hegedűs's account of Hungary as an "externally constrained hybrid regime" is useful here because it identifies the EU's simultaneous roles in constraint, support, and legitimation. It is a model developed for the earlier regime, rather than a classification to apply automatically to September 2026. [Their 2018 study](#).

The authors most useful for a systematic research programme can therefore be organised by the mechanisms they explain. This is more productive than assembling a list of commentators who share one assessment of Hungarian politics.

Authors and principal works

Zsolt Enyedi — "The Role of Agency in Cleavage Formation" (2005)

Béla Greskovits — study of the Civic Circles Movement (2020)

Laura Jakli, Greskovits, Jason Wittenberg — "Asymmetric Mass Mobilization..."

Distinctive contribution to the question

Explains how political organisations actively construct and consolidate camps.

Reveals the associational and cultural work underlying Fidesz's social strength.

Supplies historical evidence about unequal capacities to organise society outside parliament.

Authors and principal works

András Körösényi, Gábor Illés, Attila Gyulai — *The Orbán Regime* (2020)

Bálint Magyar and Bálint Madlovics — *The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes* (2020)

Gábor Scheiring — *The Retreat of Liberal Democracy* (2020)

András Bozóki and Dániel Hegedűs — *externally constrained hybrid-regime analysis* (2018)

Béla Pokol — *juristocracy research*

Ervin Csizmadia — *historical studies of Hungarian political development*

Márton Bene and Norbert Merkóvity — *history of digital campaigning* (2026)

Bene — *viralisation research*

Bene and Gábor Dobos — *Networked Locality* (2025)

Bene and Vanessza Juhász — *Megafon studies* (2025)

Gabriella Szabó, Balázs Kiss, Xénia Farkas and collaborators

Gábor Polyák, Ágnes Urbán, Petra Szávai — *“Information Patterns and News Bubbles in Hungary”* (2022)

Judit Szakács; *Political Capital, Mérték, and Lakmusz* researchers

Distinctive contribution to the question

Explains personalised authority, popular authorisation, and the subordination of collective institutions to leadership.

Examines informal dependence, resource coordination, and the relationship between political and economic power.

Connects political transformation with class, insecurity, ownership, and economic restructuring.

Explains the interaction between domestic rule and the EU environment.

Directs attention to political authority exercised through legal interpretation and professional institutions.

Examines political learning, recurring organisational patterns, and the rise and decline of dominant parties. [Publications](#)

Provides the clearest compact chronology of Hungary’s changing campaign infrastructure.

Explains citizens’ incorporation into the distribution of political messages.

Shows how digital communication and territorial organisation interact.

Explains the outsourcing and division of campaign labour through influencers.

Examines moral emotions, cultural conflict, visual communication, and collective identification.

Investigates news consumption, political polarisation, and politically dependent “grey-zone” media. [Article record and abstract](#)

Supplies current evidence about media institutions, financing, platform advertising, and campaign content.

There are also different evidentiary levels within this literature. A representative survey, a content analysis, an institutional history, a participant’s ideological interpretation, and a contemporary essay can all be useful, but they establish different things.

One remaining question is how far online success independently changes electoral behaviour. The evidence does not justify assigning a simple percentage of Hungary’s political transformation to social media.

Bene’s study of the 2014 election found an association between candidates’ average Facebook shares and their electoral performance after accounting for other factors; likes and comments

did not show the same significant relationship. The finding is valuable, but observational: successful candidates may attract sharing as well as benefit from it. [“Post Shared, Vote Shared”](#).

The same discipline is necessary when interpreting 2026. Advertising expenditure is not persuasive effect; video views are not unique citizens; comments are not a representative opinion poll; electoral victory is not proof that every element of the winning campaign was effective.

For the next stage of Hungarian political development, the decisive observations will concern **who can constrain whom inside the new arrangements**. Can local participants influence central decisions? Can journalists retain critical independence from the audiences that finance them? Can parliamentary representatives and experts modify a leader’s preferred course? Can government respond to online pressure without treating its most active supporters as the entire public? And can Fidesz preserve or reconstruct a durable political community after losing executive office?

Those relationships will determine whether Hungary’s digital transformation produces more plural sources of influence, a renewed concentration of authority around political leaders, or an unstable combination of both.

Slovakia

Slovakia’s political transformation is best understood as a redistribution of power among party leaders, intellectual networks, professional media, online personalities and state institutions. Social media has greatly expanded the ability to organise political audiences outside conventional party structures. At the same time, parties retain decisive control over parliamentary entry, coalition formation and appointments. The result is a highly personalised system in which political influence can be accumulated outside parties and subsequently converted into governmental power through them.

Your hypothesis therefore identifies an important development, but Slovakia adds a historical qualification: its post-1989 parties were often organisationally thin and dominated by leaders well before social media became central. Digital communication has accelerated an existing tendency and changed the resources on which political leadership depends.

The account below distinguishes established research findings from my own synthesis. It incorporates developments available through September 2026, while identifying the dates of particular surveys and institutional assessments.

The starting point is Slovakia’s particular combination of weak party institutionalisation and persistent political divisions. Three transformations occurred together after 1989: democratisation, economic restructuring and the creation of an independent state. Disagreement over one transformation repeatedly reinforced disagreement over the others.

During Vladimír Mečiar’s ascendancy, questions of national sovereignty became entangled with executive authority, privatisation, media control and relations with Western institutions. His opponents brought together people who disagreed about economic and cultural policy but shared concerns about political accountability and Slovakia’s international isolation.

The democratic mobilisation of 1998 consequently established a durable organisational precedent: opposition parties could combine with civic associations, intellectuals, independent journalists and internationally connected experts to challenge a governing leadership. Political organisation already extended substantially beyond party membership.

Kevin Deegan-Krause’s *Elected Affinities: Democracy and Party Competition in Slovakia and the Czech Republic* explains these earlier connections between national questions, economic reform and democratic accountability. It provides an essential foundation for understanding why subsequent technological change operated differently in the two successor states. [Deegan-Krause, *Elected Affinities*](#)

The governments associated with Mikuláš Dzurinda subsequently connected European integration with extensive market reforms. Robert Fico’s rise demonstrated that support for integration could coexist with opposition to the social consequences of those reforms. Slovakia joined the EU and NATO in 2004 and adopted the euro in 2009, but institutional integration did not produce agreement about the cultural authority of “the West.”

This distinction remains fundamental. EU membership can be valued for employment, investment, mobility and security while particular European policies are rejected as intrusive. Likewise, dissatisfaction with domestic liberal elites does not necessarily imply support for leaving Western institutions. Slovakia’s historical trajectory and its continuing organisational weaknesses are documented in the [BTI 2026 country report](#).

The deeper political map contains several intersecting divisions. Treating Slovakia simply as a confrontation between a liberal camp and a nationalist camp obscures the mechanisms that determine coalition possibilities.

Division	Central disagreement	Organisational consequence
Social protection and market reform	How should economic insecurity, taxation and public services be addressed?	Separates social-democratic and market-liberal constituencies, including within otherwise compatible political alliances.
Constitutional restraint and majority authority	How far should courts, prosecutors, journalists and civic organisations constrain elected governments?	Produces recurring alliances around accountability, alongside campaigns against allegedly unaccountable elites.
Cultural liberalism and Christian conservatism	Family, sexuality, education, religion and the public definition of normality	Divides the opposition internally and permits cooperation across the government–opposition boundary.

Division	Central disagreement	Organisational consequence
Western alignment and geopolitical balancing	Relations with the EU, NATO, Russia and Ukraine	Connects foreign policy to domestic identity, historical memory and perceptions of security.
Metropolitan opportunity and regional insecurity	Unequal access to good employment, services, infrastructure and influential institutions	Gives territorial and social meaning to arguments about neglected citizens and distant elites.
Ethnic representation and national integration	Minority rights, language and representation, especially concerning Hungarians and Roma	Creates political needs that nationwide ideological blocs do not fully accommodate.
Established politics and moral renewal	Whether existing politicians are capable of governing honestly	Repeatedly creates openings for new leaders and electoral organisations.

These divisions do not mechanically determine individual votes. Their importance lies in the combinations that political actors construct.

A voter can favour redistribution, oppose corruption, hold conservative views on family policy and support EU membership. Another can support civil liberties and market liberalism while resisting European fiscal integration. Such combinations help explain both electoral volatility and the difficulty of maintaining broad anti-Fico coalitions.

Tim Haughton and Kevin Deegan-Krause place particular emphasis on the **clean-versus-corrupt dimension**. Their argument is that voters repeatedly move between new political vehicles promising renewal. Parties lose the advantage of novelty as they enter government, acquire responsibility and disappoint expectations. Social media can accelerate this cycle, although their theory does not reduce it to technological causes. [Haughton and Deegan-Krause, *The New Party Challenge*](#)

The intellectual background consists of several distinct environments, each with its own institutions and routes into public life. Some produce policy expertise; others produce moral vocabularies, historical interpretations or recognisable political personalities.

The civic-democratic environment has a particularly clear institutional expression in the **Institute for Public Affairs, IVO**. Its founders included Martin Bútora, Zora Bútorová, Grigorij Mesežnikov, Oľga Gyárfášová, Vladimír Krivý, Péter Hunčík, František Šebej and Ivan Mikloš. This is a documented intersection of social research, civic activism and reform politics.

IVO explicitly seeks to influence public discussion and policymaking through research, publications, seminars and expert recommendations. Its significance therefore exceeds the readership of individual studies: it helps sustain a community sharing a language of democratic accountability, open society and institutional reform. Its declared independence and its normative orientation should both be recognised. [IVO's institutional description](#)

Alongside this environment are organisations specialising in foreign affairs, public administration, economic policy and legal accountability. The **Slovak Foreign Policy Association, SFPA**, for example, maintains programmes on European affairs, neighbouring

countries, Eastern Europe, security and energy. These networks preserve expertise and international relationships across changes of government. [SFPA's research programmes](#)

Their political effect often operates indirectly. They establish which problems deserve attention, supply experts for public debate, develop policy proposals and create careers connecting research with administration. Shared professional backgrounds can facilitate recruitment into politics without implying that one institution directs an entire party.

A second environment centres on **market-oriented economic expertise**. INESS illustrates how economic arguments circulate through research notes, public education, indicators, podcasts and media commentary. Economists such as Robert Chovanculiak and Martin Vlachynský translate questions of taxation, regulation and state expenditure into accessible public arguments. This environment overlaps with some positions associated with SaS, but its intellectual activity is broader than party campaigning. [INESS publications and activities](#)

A third environment is **Catholic and Christian-conservative intellectual organisation**. Its resources include parishes, schools, associations, publications and institutions devoted to intellectual formation. The Ladislav Hanus Fellowship and its associated institute explicitly connect Christian culture, natural law, education and public engagement. Figures including Martin Luterán and Juraj Šúst belong to this wider field. [Ladislav Hanus Fellowship](#)

This environment matters because it produces relatively durable commitments that survive electoral disappointment. A party may decline while the institutions that transmit its underlying moral concerns remain active.

It is also internally differentiated. Catholic social thought, constitutional conservatism, opposition to abortion, geopolitical sympathy for Russia and support for Fico are separate positions. They sometimes coincide, but they cannot be treated as a single doctrine. The intellectual journal *Verbum* and the conservative newspaper *Postoj* exemplify organised debate within this broader environment. *Postoj* explicitly presents itself as a professional participant in public discussion from a conservative standpoint. [Verbum](#), [Postoj's editorial mission](#)

A fourth environment combines **socialist criticism, national sovereignty and opposition to Western power**. The publication *Slovo/Noveslovo* and its surrounding discussion circles provide a forum for authors including Eduard Chmelár, František Škvrnda, Pavol Dinka and Branislav Fábry.

Within this field, criticism of capitalism can connect with socialist historical memory, anti-fascism, arguments for geopolitical multipolarity and opposition to military escalation. Contributors differ substantially, and their relationship to Smer is neither uniform nor reducible to formal party membership. [Slovo/Noveslovo](#)

The analytical question is how selected elements of these more elaborate arguments enter mass communication. A discussion of international order may become a short message about “peace”; a critique of cultural liberalism may become a warning about children; an analysis of economic dependency may become an appeal to national sovereignty. This translation between intellectual production and politically effective language is one of the most important background processes.

The principal parties assemble these intellectual and social resources in different ways. The following table is an analytical map of the period, rather than a claim that each party possesses a coherent doctrine or exclusively controls a social group.

Political formation	Main political offer	Organisational significance
Smer and Robert Fico	Social protection, experienced leadership, national sovereignty and increasingly strong opposition to liberal cultural and geopolitical positions	Combines an established party with personalised communication and access to sympathetic media environments.
Hlas	Social-democratic continuity, administrative competence and a less confrontational public identity	Emerged from Smer through the transfer of experienced personnel; its separate existence widened the range of voters available to a subsequent coalition.
Progressive Slovakia, PS	European orientation, institutional reform, civil rights and modernisation	Connects professional expertise, younger and urban constituencies, civic concerns and contemporary campaigning. Its challenge is expanding these connections into a broad governing coalition.
OLaNO, subsequently Slovensko	Personalised anti-corruption mobilisation and moral confrontation with established politicians	Shows how a leader can build electoral strength with limited conventional membership, while encountering difficulties in governing a diverse coalition.
KDH	Christian democracy, family policy, community and moral continuity	Possesses social resources that cannot be explained by online popularity; cultural commitments can produce selective cooperation with governing parties.
SaS	Economic liberalism, entrepreneurship and individual freedom	Demonstrates that market liberalism, cultural liberalism and attitudes toward European integration do not always move together.
SNS and Republika	Different versions of nationalism, cultural opposition and challenges to established elites	Compete over overlapping audiences; SNS has also provided parliamentary access to personalities from smaller organisations and alternative media.

The parliamentary conversion of these resources is instructive. The September 2023 election produced 42 seats for Smer, 32 for PS, 27 for Hlas, 16 for the OLaNO alliance, 12 for KDH, 11 for SaS and 10 for SNS. Smer, Hlas and SNS consequently began with **79 of 150 seats**. These are the original election allocations, rather than today's parliamentary-group memberships. [IPU election record](#)

Fico remains prime minister, but the origin of his fourth government is analytically more revealing than a simple description of his personal popularity: **coalition compatibility**

converted several separate political audiences into a governing majority. [Official prime minister's biography](#)

Digital communication changes particular functions of political organisation more profoundly than others. It is useful to separate the tasks that a traditional party once combined.

Political function	Change associated with digital communication
Producing interpretations	Politicians, commentators, activists and creators can circulate interpretations without obtaining an editorial commission or party position.
Maintaining identification	Repeated videos, comments and shared controversies sustain a feeling of belonging between elections.
Recruiting participants	Online audiences can supply volunteers, donors, candidates and protest participants.
Mobilising action	Events and campaigns can be coordinated rapidly across multiple towns and among citizens abroad.
Aggregating competing demands	Parties and coalition negotiations remain crucial because online agreement against an opponent rarely settles policy trade-offs.
Exercising authority	state Parliamentary support, administrative expertise, legal powers and appointments remain indispensable.

This division helps explain why a party can become less important as a membership community while remaining powerful as the organisation that allocates candidacies and offices.

Slovakia's nationwide parliamentary constituency reinforces the relevance of national visibility. Preferential voting also gives individual candidates opportunities to mobilise support within a party list. My inference is that this creates favourable conditions for cooperation between a party possessing electoral infrastructure and a personality possessing an audience.

However, weak membership does not have a uniform effect on electoral survival. Marek Rybář and Peter Spáč show that Slovak parties with different levels of institutionalisation can achieve reelection, and that leadership choices and the subsequent construction of constituency links matter. Organisational development remains a variable rather than a predetermined destiny. [Rybář and Spáč, "Social Origin Is No Destiny"](#)

The most visible digital mechanism is the growing ability to bypass critical interviewing. A politician with a substantial following can reach supporters through a recorded statement, livestream or sympathetic interviewer. This changes the bargaining relationship with journalists: refusal to participate in a demanding television debate becomes less costly.

Andrea Chlebcová Hečková and Simon Smith document precisely this development. Their 2024 Slovakia report describes Fico and leading Smer and SNS politicians obtaining exposure through partisan alternative media and their own accounts while avoiding critical confrontation. They record almost seven million interactions with Fico's Facebook profile during 2023. These are interactions, not seven million distinct people or an estimate of votes influenced. [Reuters Institute, Slovakia 2024](#)

The apparent directness of this relationship has several consequences.

First, political authenticity becomes associated with a familiar voice and style. Supporters repeatedly encounter the same person explaining successive events.

Second, the leader can respond immediately to controversy, reducing the time available for verification and coordinated institutional responses.

Third, disagreement with a journalist can itself become attractive political content. The conflict demonstrates to supporters that the leader is resisting an institution they distrust.

Fourth, online popularity may strengthen leaders within their own parties. Colleagues who depend on the leader's audience have fewer independent resources with which to challenge them.

These mechanisms apply across ideological boundaries. The Reuters Institute's 2021 report describes Igor Matovič using Facebook to accuse major media organisations of serving oligarchic interests. It also records Fico and Marián Kotleba using both social and conventional media against pandemic measures. Personalised digital confrontation was therefore part of the political system before Fico's return to government. [Reuters Institute, Slovakia 2021](#)

The alternative-media environment is politically important because it can preserve an audience across changing issues. A person initially attracted by opposition to pandemic restrictions may subsequently encounter material about Ukraine, European institutions, migration or domestic corruption from the same familiar sources.

Continuity of the communicator can provide coherence where the substantive issues are very different. The recurring message is that established institutions conceal information, dismiss ordinary people or pursue interests opposed to theirs.

Research by Infosecurity.sk, the Prague Security Studies Institute and the Investigative Centre of Ján Kuciak maps this organisational environment on Slovak Telegram. It identifies activity by alternative outlets such as Zem a Vek, InfoVojna, Kulturblog and TV Slovan, alongside politicians and individual personalities. Among the politicians examined, Ľuboš Blaha, Milan Uhrík and Milan Mazurek were prominent. The study also documents donations, subscriptions and other income mechanisms. [Research on Slovak Telegram's organisational and financial background](#)

This financial dimension deserves attention. An audience can provide an income and an organisational base outside party employment or established journalism. Consequently, an online personality may acquire independent bargaining power when dealing with politicians.

The relationship can run in both directions: politicians provide recognition and interview access; media personalities provide access to an audience. Neither direction requires a single central coordinator.

SNS's 2023 return offers a particularly concrete example of the conversion of visibility into office. Veronika Bundzíková and Denis Janšta describe how SNS recruited candidates from smaller parties and benefited from figures known through social and alternative media. They identify Martina Šimkovičová's association with TV Slovan as one illustration.

Their study supports a carefully delimited conclusion: SNS supplied an established electoral vehicle through which externally developed reputations could enter parliamentary politics. It does not establish that every SNS seat was won by an influencer or that online activity alone caused its result. [Bundzíková and Janšta, “Slovakia’s 2023 Elections: Framing of Foreign Policy Preferences by Populists”](#)

My interpretation is that this arrangement contains a potential tension. Recruiting personalities with their own audiences may improve electoral prospects, while making the resulting parliamentary group harder to discipline. The same independence that gives a candidate electoral value can later produce bargaining power against the party leadership.

Civic mobilisation uses the same technological opportunities for different purposes. The murders of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová in February 2018 triggered a movement in which investigative journalism, public outrage, civic organisers and demonstrations reinforced one another. Fico resigned as prime minister, while the governing coalition continued under Peter Pellegrini.

The significance of *Za slušné Slovensko*—For a Decent Slovakia—was its ability to make participation possible without requiring prior party attachment. A common demand for accountability could unite participants who disagreed about redistribution, religion or cultural policy.

The subsequent political sequence demonstrates the limits of that unity. Civic mobilisation in 2018, Zuzana Čaputová’s presidential victory in 2019 and OĽaNO’s parliamentary victory in 2020 were connected to demands for political renewal, but they did not constitute one organisation with a unified programme. Grigorij Mesežnikov and Oľga Gyárfášová’s work on Slovakia’s conflicting camps helps place these developments within the longer contest over democratic institutions. [Mesežnikov’s analysis and references](#)

The analytical distinction is between **mobilising agreement on a problem** and **organising agreement on government**. Social media greatly facilitates the former. It cannot by itself resolve conflicts over ministerial authority, taxation, health policy or coalition discipline.

The difficulties of the governments formed after 2020 gave Fico an opportunity to present experience and predictability as alternatives to disappointed expectations. His recovery therefore has to be explained through government performance and political organisation as well as communication.

The independent press has also adapted to digital conditions. Established journalism does not simply disappear when political communication moves online. It develops subscriptions, newsletters, podcasts, video programmes and communities attached to particular journalists.

The creation of Michal Kovačič’s online outlet **360°** illustrates this response. Following his departure from Markíza, the project raised more than €500,000 through crowdfunding in September 2024. By the Reuters Institute’s 2026 survey, it registered 9% weekly news usage among respondents. These developments demonstrate that journalists can also transfer professional recognition into an independently sustained digital audience. [Reuters Institute, Slovakia 2025](#), [Slovakia 2026](#)

The wider consequence is a pluralisation of intermediaries. Party leaders, professional journalists, partisan commentators and independent creators all compete for attention through overlapping digital channels.

Their economic dependencies differ. A subscription outlet must persuade readers to pay; a donor-funded organisation must maintain supporters; a commercial broadcaster depends on advertising and owners; an individual commentator may depend on donations and platform distribution. These arrangements create different incentives, which should be examined separately from editorial ideology.

Low trust is a central feature of this competition, but it must be interpreted carefully. In the Reuters Institute survey, overall trust in news was 25% in 2024, 23% in 2025 and 19% in 2026. In 2026, 47% reported sometimes or often avoiding news. These figures describe survey responses, not an objective assessment that a corresponding percentage of reporting is false. [2024 report](#), [2025 report](#), [2026 report](#)

Nor does distrust of conventional journalism establish trust in social media. In 2021, only 16% expressed trust in news on social media, compared with 30% for news overall. People can use a channel frequently while remaining suspicious of much of its content. [Reuters Institute, Slovakia 2021](#)

A more plausible interpretation is that trust becomes selective and personalised. Someone may distrust “the media” while trusting a particular journalist, or distrust “politicians” while trusting one leader.

Research associated with the Slovak Academy of Sciences’ *Pandemic Truths* project adds useful differentiation. Its analysis of late-2023 survey data identifies six groups within Slovakia’s online population, ranging from strong endorsement of conspiracy narratives to firm rejection, with intermediate and apathetic groups. This is more informative than treating the population as two homogeneous information camps. [Institute of Sociology, Slovak Academy of Sciences](#)

Geopolitical conflict now supplies domestic political identities with much of their emotional content. Arguments about Russia and Ukraine are simultaneously arguments about national vulnerability, energy, historical memory, Western authority and the trustworthiness of Slovak elites.

GLOBSEC’s 2024 findings show why this cannot be reduced to a straightforward choice between East and West. Support for EU and NATO membership had recovered to approximately 70%, yet substantial suspicion of Western actors persisted. Forty-one per cent identified Russia as responsible for the war, while a combined 51% blamed the West or Ukraine. Different questions reveal different combinations of attachment and resentment. [GLOBSEC Trends 2024: Slovakia](#)

For political communication, “peace,” “sovereignty” and “security” are especially effective because different audiences can invest them with different meanings. For some, peace means limiting military involvement; for others, resisting Russian aggression is necessary to secure peace. The disagreement concerns causal interpretation and political values as well as factual information.

Grigorij Mesežnikov and Ján Bartoš's *Who Is Playing Russian Roulette in Slovakia* maps the heterogeneous forces participating in the pro-Russian environment. Its value lies partly in showing how communist, nationalist and other ideological traditions can converge on geopolitical positions despite substantial differences elsewhere. The authors write from an explicitly critical, pro-Western standpoint, which should be considered when interpreting their classifications. [Mesežnikov and Bartoš](#)

Economic experience also matters. Slovakia's integration into manufacturing supply chains has supported growth while exposing employment and public finances to external shocks. Housing costs, energy insecurity and uneven opportunities provide material substance to political grievances. The OECD's analysis documents these vulnerabilities and the challenges of skills, innovation and economic convergence. [OECD Economic Survey of Slovakia, 2024](#)

My inference is that culturally powerful messages become more persuasive when they attach themselves to recognisable experiences of insecurity or exclusion. An explanation confined to propaganda would miss this relationship.

The 2023 deepfake episode reveals the new distribution of communicative authority, while leaving its electoral effect unresolved. The fabricated recording presenting Michal Šimečka and journalist Monika Tódová as discussing electoral manipulation became internationally prominent.

Lluís de Nadal and Peter Jančárik challenge accounts treating it as an adequate explanation for the election result. Their argument places the episode within a longer environment of institutional distrust, geopolitical attitudes and amplification by political figures. Their article is an analytical commentary, not an experiment establishing how many votes changed. [“Beyond the deepfake hype: AI, democracy, and ‘the Slovak case’”](#)

The Council for Media Services' monitoring is valuable for a different reason. It documents problems in advertising transparency and divergent platform responses to synthetic political material. Content could remain available on one platform while being removed from another. It also distinguishes misleading material from content meeting the particular statutory definition of illegality. [Council for Media Services, 2023 election monitoring](#)

The political relationship is therefore not simply direct communication between leader and citizen. Platform companies make consequential decisions about recommendation, labelling, advertising and removal.

These rules also change over time. Google introduced restrictions on EU political advertising in September 2025. Research on earlier advertising campaigns therefore cannot simply be projected onto the present environment. A plausible consequence is that previously accumulated audiences and regular unpaid distribution become relatively more valuable, although that effect requires empirical testing. [Google's policy update](#)

The effects on state functioning become clearest when struggles over public authority turn into institutional changes. Three developments are especially relevant.

First, the abolition of the Special Prosecutor's Office and the reorganisation of anti-corruption enforcement in 2024 changed the institutions responsible for investigating powerful actors. The government defended its reforms as corrections to earlier abuses; the European Commission

documented concerns about their effects on investigations and accountability. Later amendments addressed some EU financial-interest requirements without resolving the wider concerns. European Commission, Slovakia 2025

Second, replacing RTVS with STVR in July 2024 changed public broadcasting governance. This illustrates why digital reach does not remove the incentive to influence conventional media. Online channels can mobilise committed supporters, while television continues to reach other audiences and confer public visibility. The Commission’s 2025 assessment raised concerns about the new broadcaster’s autonomy. European Commission, Slovakia 2025

Third, cultural disputes can produce constitutional coalitions. The September 2025 amendment concerning national identity and cultural-ethical questions obtained the required 90 votes with assistance from conservative opposition members. That cooperation demonstrated how family and cultural policy could cross the otherwise sharp government–opposition divide. [Reuters, constitutional amendment vote](#)

The Venice Commission examined the amendment’s implications for legal certainty, international obligations and rights. The European Commission subsequently opened infringement proceedings over the EU-law issues. These were institutional challenges to the amendment, not a final judicial invalidation of it. Venice Commission opinion

The institutions constraining government nevertheless remain active. The Commission’s July 2026 report records Constitutional Court decisions overturning restrictive information-access amendments and declaring the 2025 NGO amendments unconstitutional. It simultaneously reports continuing pressure on civil society, public-media concerns and deterioration in high-level anti-corruption capacity. European Commission, Slovakia 2026

My interpretation is that Slovakia exhibits an ongoing struggle over who may legitimately scrutinise government. Political leaders invoke electoral authorisation; courts invoke constitutional standards; journalists invoke verification and public accountability; civic organisations invoke expertise and participation. Social media gives each of these disputes a wider audience and can turn institutional disagreement into personalised conflict.

The most useful scholarship can be organised by the part of this process it explains. There is no single author whose work establishes the entire transformation described above.

Authors and principal work	What their research contributes
Kevin Deegan-Krause — <i>Elected Affinities</i> (2006)	Explains the older configuration of national questions, economic reform and democratic accountability that preceded social media.
Tim Haughton and Kevin Deegan-Krause — <i>The New Party Challenge</i> (2020)	Explains cycles of party creation, disappointment and voter transfer, especially around promises of clean government.
Branislav Dolný and Darina Malová — “Organizational Structures of Political Parties in Slovakia: Parties not for Members”	Directly addresses leadership, membership and internal organisation. Particularly useful for assessing what was already weak before the digital shift. Publisher’s volume

Authors and principal work	What their research contributes
Marek Rybář and Peter Spáč — “Social Origin Is No Destiny” (2020)	Shows why electoral survival cannot be mechanically deduced from a party’s origins or membership structure.
Grigorij Mesežnikov	Provides sustained analysis of parties, elites, nationalism and democratic institutions, including the <i>Slovakia: Global Report on the State of Society</i> series. Bibliography
Oľga Gyárfášová, Vladimír Krivý and Zora Bútorová	Supply the public-opinion and political-culture foundations: values, participation, dissatisfaction, electoral behaviour and social divisions. Gyárfášová, Krivý and Velšic’s <i>Krajina v pohybe</i> (2001) and Bútorová’s <i>Democracy and Discontent in Slovakia</i> (1998) are important earlier works. Gyárfášová, Bútorová
Marián Velšic — <i>Social Networks in Slovakia</i> (2012); <i>Young People in Cyberspace—Chances and Risks to Democracy</i> (2016)	Especially close to your question: digital literacy, unequal capacities, youth and the political implications of online participation. Bibliography
Andrea Chlebcová Hečková and Simon Smith	Provide recurring empirical accounts of Slovakia’s media transformation through the Reuters Institute’s country reports.
Dominika Hajdu, Katarína Klingová and their GLOBSEC colleagues	Trace geopolitical attitudes, democratic preferences, perceived threats and information vulnerabilities. Their surveys measure attitudes rather than proving platform effects. GLOBSEC Trends programme
Veronika Bundzíková and Denis Janšta — “Slovakia’s 2023 Elections” (2024)	Analyse the framing of foreign policy in 145 online posts associated with Smer and SNS.
Jaroslav Mihálik, Michal Garaj and Jakub Bardovič (2022)	Examine social-media communication by youth political organisations in Slovakia, Czechia and at European level. Article
Lluís de Nadal and Peter Jančárik (2024)	Explain why the Slovak deepfake case requires analysis of political context, trust and elite amplification rather than technological determinism.

These research traditions also have different standpoints. Public-opinion research, organisational political science, democratic advocacy, security analysis and journalistic investigation ask different questions. Their findings are most useful when combined without treating their evaluative categories as interchangeable.

For a deeper theoretical interpretation, I would distinguish three developments.

First, political communities can now persist outside the parties that temporarily represent them. Audiences attached to a commentator, issue or moral worldview can transfer support between electoral organisations. This helps explain continuity beneath apparently rapid party change.

Second, the resources needed to gain attention diverge from those needed to govern. Confrontation, personal authenticity and rapid response may produce visibility. Administration requires expertise, negotiated priorities and reliable cooperation. Slovakia's recent political cycles repeatedly expose the gap between these capacities.

Third, digital expansion can strengthen both challenger access and leadership concentration. More people can enter public debate, but a small number of personalities may accumulate disproportionate attention. Within parties, their popularity can weaken collective deliberation; outside parties, competing journalists, civic organisations and commentators can challenge their authority.

The next phase will depend substantially on which actors turn temporary attention into durable institutions: organisations capable of recruiting competent personnel, maintaining trust across controversies and negotiating beyond their most committed audiences. That capacity is likely to be more consequential for the Slovak state than any isolated ranking of followers, views or viral posts.

Romania

Romania's central political transformation is a growing separation between the ability to mobilize public attention and the ability to organize lasting control of the state. Social media has substantially weakened established parties' control over political visibility, candidate recognition, and protest mobilization. Yet local government, public appointments, parliamentary bargaining, religious institutions, and access to public resources remain essential to turning electoral support into governing power.

Your hypothesis therefore identifies an important development, particularly in presidential elections. The Romanian evidence suggests a further formulation: **some political organization has moved outside parties, while other organizational functions have become more concentrated inside the institutions of the state.** Influencers, investigative journalists, diaspora networks, religious activists, and platform operators now perform functions previously associated with party branches and established news organizations. They interact with political parties that remain indispensable for legislation, government formation, and administrative recruitment.

The account below incorporates developments available through **10 September 2026**. Historical and empirical findings are attributed to their sources; the connections between them constitute my analytical synthesis.

A useful starting map distinguishes the following overlapping environments. These are networks of institutions, relationships, and shared interpretations, rather than internally unified blocs.

Political environment	Principal organizational resources	Central political language	Relationship to state power
Established PSD and PNL networks	Mayors, county organizations, public appointments, business relationships, party finance	Social protection, development, competence, stability	Extensive access to government and administration
Civic and reformist networks	Associations, professionals, investigative journalism, urban activism, diaspora connections	Anticorruption, merit, transparency, European normality	Influence through USR, independent candidates, municipal government, and public pressure
Nationalist and sovereigntist networks	AUR and related parties, religious and nationalist activists, diaspora organization, online personalities	National dignity, faith, sovereignty, betrayal by elites	Growing electoral strength, uneven administrative consolidation
Orthodox and other conservative religious environments	Parishes, charities, education, religious media, family organizations	Moral order, community, tradition, national continuity	Negotiated influence across party boundaries
Critical social and feminist environments	Universities, publications, civic organizations, labor and equality advocacy	Inequality, social reproduction, substantive citizenship	Greater intellectual and civic influence than parliamentary representation
Hungarian minority institutions	RMDSZ/UDMR, municipalities, schools, churches, associations, Hungarian-language media	Collective rights, institutional autonomy, community security	Durable parliamentary representation and coalition bargaining

Several of these environments share audiences, personnel, or positions on particular issues. The most consequential developments occur at their intersections.

The historical starting point is the incomplete separation of political organization from state administration after 1989. Romania did not enter the digital age with a stable system of socially rooted mass parties comparable to the strongest twentieth-century Western European examples. Its postcommunist parties developed while the ownership system, public administration, and rules of democratic competition were themselves being reconstructed.

This gave access to government unusual organizational importance. Holding office could help a party recruit supporters, sustain local elites, attract contributors, and reproduce itself between elections. Conversely, losing office threatened more than the ability to implement a program.

Clara Volintiru's *Clientelism and Cartelization in Post-Communist Europe: The Case of Romania* is particularly valuable here. She explains how clientelism can stabilize parties despite weak mass mobilization: public resources sustain relationships with clients and also help maintain party organizations. Her work with Sergiu Gherghina expands the analysis beyond a simple exchange between politicians and voters to include public resources and private contributors. [Volintiru's study](#); Gherghina and Volintiru, "A New Model of Clientelism".

The implication for your question is substantial. A party can become less convincing as a representative of a social class or coherent worldview while retaining considerable organizational strength. Its durability may depend on a mayoral network, access to development funding, appointments, and relationships with local businesses.

This helps explain why a presidential candidate can defeat established parties in a national communication contest without immediately dismantling their control over parliamentary or administrative processes.

The second historical inheritance concerns **nationalism as a language shared across otherwise antagonistic political traditions**. Katherine Verdery demonstrated that Romanian nationalism after communism cannot be explained simply as the return of beliefs suppressed before 1989. Communist cultural institutions themselves strengthened national ideology, including narratives of historical continuity, originality, and national exceptionalism. [Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*](#).

Lucian Boia's analysis complements this by examining the construction of historical narratives about origins, unity, foreigners, and exemplary rulers. Applied to contemporary politics, these works suggest that digital nationalist communication draws on an established symbolic vocabulary. Platforms supply new forms of circulation for narratives with much older institutional histories. That application is my inference; neither book studied the recent TikTok campaigns. [Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*](#).

Consequently, Romania's present conflicts cannot be arranged neatly along a single communist–anticommunist or left–right axis. Nationalist language can connect fragments of communist-era sovereignty discourse, Orthodox traditionalism, interwar historical references, contemporary hostility to political elites, and opposition to aspects of European integration.

The intellectual environment that acquired the greatest moral authority after 1989 was the heterogeneous anticommunist intelligentsia. Gabriel Liiceanu, Andrei Pleșu, Horia-Roman Patapievici, Vladimir Tismăneanu, and others helped establish the terms in which democratic legitimacy was discussed: responsibility for the dictatorship, continuity of compromised elites, European belonging, civic decency, and the recovery of a "normal" public life.

Liiceanu's *Apel către lichele* is an important primary document of this moral vocabulary. Its significance lies partly in the way essays, interviews, public letters, magazines, and broadcasting brought judgments originally articulated within intellectual circles into wider political debate. [Liiceanu, *Apel către lichele*](#).

The channels connecting intellectual prestige to institutions were concrete. Pleșu founded New Europe College and also held ministerial office. Patapievici's career connected publishing and public commentary with the body investigating the former Securitate archives and the

Romanian Cultural Institute. These examples show how cultural authority, international recognition, and state office could reinforce one another. [New Europe College's institutional history](#); [Patapievici's works and institutional biography](#).

However, this environment was never uniformly progressive or socially liberal. Patapievici's criticism of contemporary mass society illustrates the coexistence of pro-Western orientation with cultural conservatism. Others emphasized democratic pluralism, feminism, institutional accountability, or market reform. Their occasional support for the same president or party did not eliminate these differences.

My interpretation is that this intellectual environment contributed to a persistent Romanian political expectation: **legitimate change should come through morally credible people who can overcome a compromised political class**. This expectation has helped reformist candidates, but its underlying form is available to very different political projects.

It can support the competent professional, the incorruptible prosecutor, the civic activist, or the leader who claims to embody the authentic nation. Digital communication intensifies the personalization already present in this political culture.

A related but distinct environment developed around **anticorruption expertise and the monitoring of public institutions**. Alina Mungiu-Pippidi is central both as a scholar and as a participant in civic institution-building. Her work directs attention to the allocation of public resources: whether access depends on impersonal rules or privileged connections.

Her comparative research also cautions against treating the creation of an anticorruption agency as sufficient evidence of effective reform. The underlying distribution of power and the capacity to constrain favoritism matter. [Mungiu-Pippidi, *The Quest for Good Governance*](#).

There are therefore two meanings of anticorruption that should be distinguished analytically. One concerns enforceable rules, procurement, appointments, and institutional accountability. The other organizes public emotion around a division between honest citizens and a discredited political class.

The two can reinforce each other. They can also diverge: intense moral mobilization does not automatically produce a workable policy for hospitals, public employment, taxation, housing, or regional development. This distinction helps explain both the force of Romania's reform movements and the disappointment that follows their entry into government.

Economic expertise forms another route through which ideas reach the Romanian state. Cornel Ban's *Ruling Ideas* is especially useful because it examines how international economic doctrines become national policies through domestic intellectual and institutional intermediaries. His comparison of Romania and Spain emphasizes the importance of local interpreters, professional networks, policy institutions, and external constraints. [Ban, *Ruling Ideas: How Global Neoliberalism Goes Local*](#).

This shifts attention beyond party manifestos. Economists, central-bank professionals, ministries, business associations, European institutions, and internationally connected experts help determine which policies count as feasible or responsible.

Mungiu-Pippidi had already identified an associated problem in *Politica după comunism*: accession-oriented programs could become reproductions of strategies negotiated with Brussels, reducing the role of parties as sites of substantive policy deliberation. [*Politica după comunism*](#).

My inference is that this produces a recurring vulnerability. When major parties converge around a narrow range of governing choices, citizens dissatisfied with the consequences may struggle to find an established party articulating a credible alternative. Protest can then be expressed through sovereignty, cultural recognition, or hostility to the entire political establishment.

Economic insecurity does not mechanically generate nationalist voting. Political actors must interpret it, attach responsibility to particular institutions or groups, and offer an emotionally persuasive account of what went wrong.

Critical political economy and feminist scholarship illuminate experiences that this competition often obscures. Ban's work should not be equated with PSD's political position. Likewise, Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu show that citizenship must be studied through women's experiences of family, community, public authority, and political participation. Their perspective reveals forms of dependence and exclusion that remain invisible in a map limited to prominent male politicians and intellectuals. [*Bucur and Miroiu, Birth of Democratic Citizenship*](#).

Religion supplies both a vocabulary of legitimacy and an extensive organizational infrastructure. Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu's research demonstrates that church-state relations extend across electoral politics, education, property restitution, national identity, and disputes over sexuality and public morality. Religious influence operates through institutions and reciprocal recognition, as well as through personal belief. [*Stan and Turcescu, Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania*](#).

For political organization, a parish or religious association can provide something an online audience initially lacks: recurring personal contact, trusted intermediaries, shared rituals, and opportunities for practical cooperation.

Yet the Orthodox Church cannot be treated as a single electoral organization, and religious citizens do not form an automatically transferable voting bloc. The failed 2018 constitutional referendum on the definition of marriage illustrates these limits. Turnout was approximately 21.1%, despite extensive campaigning. [*IFES election data*](#).

Ov Cristian Norocel and Ionela Băluță's research on that referendum is valuable because it shows how conservative mobilization crossed conventional ideological and party boundaries. The organizational networks created or strengthened during such campaigns can retain political significance even when the immediate initiative fails. [*Norocel and Băluță, "Retrogressive Mobilization in the 2018 'Referendum for Family' in Romania"*](#).

This helps explain the social foundations available to subsequent nationalist mobilization. Digital campaigns can reactivate relationships and moral commitments that were formed in religious, cultural, or associational settings.

The shift toward cyberspace occurred through successive waves with different political beneficiaries. It is misleading to read the entire process backward from Călin Georgescu’s 2024 campaign.

The first important wave involved environmental activism, urban civic organization, and protests against the established political system. The campaign to save Roșia Montană demonstrated how citizens could participate without acquiring a durable party identity. Dan Mercea’s research on “casual protest participation” examined precisely this relationship between flexible involvement and collective action. [Mercea’s research bibliography](#).

The 2014 presidential election then demonstrated the political importance of digitally connected citizens abroad. Images and accounts of difficulties voting outside Romania circulated into domestic debate. Facebook helped organize solidarity protests, connecting administrative failure abroad with the legitimacy of the government at home. [Account of the 2014 electoral mobilization](#).

The mechanism extended beyond the diaspora’s own ballots. Migrants communicated with relatives and friends in Romania, supplied interpretations of political events, and compared Romanian institutions with those encountered abroad. Political influence therefore moved through relationships that electoral statistics capture only partially.

The 2015 Colectiv tragedy and the 2017–2019 anticorruption protests further strengthened the connection between public failures, moral outrage, and collective action. The language of corruption became a way to connect apparently separate problems with the functioning of the state. Online communication helped publicize events, coordinate participation, circulate images, and maintain attention. [Chronology of the 2017–2019 protests](#).

Mercea, Toma Burean, and Viorel Proteasa studied public Facebook communication and student participation in the Romanian #rezist demonstrations. Mercea subsequently examined Facebook event pages connecting national protest with transnational activism. These are among the works most directly relevant to your question because they investigate political organization through communication, rather than treating social media merely as another advertising channel. [Verified publications and research links](#).

The political significance of this phase can be stated in three parts:

- Participation became possible without prior party membership.
- Personal relationships and online communication could coordinate action across cities and national borders.
- Protest networks could influence legitimacy and political agendas without becoming a unified organization.

USR’s rise belongs within this wider civic transformation. It offered one route for translating reformist energies into electoral competition. But the relationship between civic mobilization and a party was necessarily incomplete: activists, professionals, donors, and supporters did not automatically agree about economic policy, cultural questions, leadership, or compromises in government.

This is a general organizational difficulty illustrated by Romania. An online campaign can unite people around opposition to an identifiable wrong. Governing requires choosing among

competing interests after the initial mobilizing issue has lost its capacity to hold everyone together.

AUR's development shows how nationalist actors subsequently adapted these opportunities. Its growth cannot be explained adequately as a triumph of online communication alone.

Sorina Soare's research emphasizes AUR's use of pre-existing activist networks concerned with Romanian–Moldovan unification, Christianity, and traditional family values. Online campaigning was combined with canvassing, volunteer activity, and efforts to establish territorial connections. Her analysis of its proposed mobile medical services also shows an attempt to connect political identity with unmet practical needs. [Soare, "Populism on the Ground: Insights from Romania"](#).

This combination has an important political logic. An online appearance attracts attention; a local activist or trusted acquaintance confirms that the organization exists beyond the screen; a practical activity supplies an experience through which supporters interpret the party's claims.

The emerging relationship is therefore more substantial than that between a broadcaster and passive viewers. Supporters can become distributors, organizers, donors, and recruiters.

AUR's diaspora connections are especially revealing. Sorina Soare and Claudiu D. Tufiş analyze the political construction of a "transnational people": citizens living outside Romania are incorporated into a national political project rather than treated as peripheral emigrants. [Soare and Tufiş, "Saved by the Diaspora?"](#).

The diaspora consequently should not be assigned a permanent liberal or nationalist identity. Living in Western Europe may strengthen expectations of institutional competence; it may also intensify experiences of insecurity, loss of status, separation from family, or attachment to national and religious communities. Different political actors can organize these experiences differently.

George Simion, Diana Şoşoacă, and Georgescu also should not be treated as interchangeable expressions of one organization. They have drawn on overlapping grievances while using different forms of leadership, rhetoric, and institutional attachment. Their competition matters because nationalist audiences can move among personalities and parties more rapidly than established organizational labels suggest.

Georgescu's 2024 breakthrough exposed the distance between conventional political visibility and platform visibility. A candidate can be marginal in the press environment followed by political professionals while becoming familiar within networks those professionals scarcely encounter.

The underlying mechanisms include repeated short videos, circulation through apparently nonpolitical accounts, influencer promotion, coordinated commenting, and recommendation systems that distribute material beyond a candidate's own followers. The European Commission's December 2024 proceedings specifically identified recommender systems, coordinated inauthentic manipulation, and paid political content as areas requiring investigation. [European Commission's announcement](#).

This changes the organization of campaigning. The relevant intermediaries may include marketing agencies, account networks, content creators, payment arrangements, and distribution specialists whose names never appear in the party hierarchy.

It also changes the experience of political authority. Repeated exposure can make a personality seem intimate and familiar before the viewer has encountered sustained questioning, a detailed program, or evidence of organizational capacity.

Nevertheless, the 2024 controversy requires careful separation of three questions:

1. **What manipulation or financing irregularities occurred?**
2. **Who commissioned, financed, or controlled particular operations?**
3. **Were the established facts sufficient to justify the legal remedies adopted?**

Evidence answering one question does not automatically answer the others.

For example, France's VIGINUM documented techniques of information manipulation and the instrumentalization of influencers. Its own publication explicitly states that the report does **not** establish a case of foreign digital interference. It draws substantially on open-source investigations and adds technical findings concerning structures contacting influencers. [VIGINUM's report and scope statement](#).

Snoop's investigation adds a further complication. It reported a PNL-funded influencer initiative whose published material benefited Georgescu. The contractor acknowledged the commissioned initiative but disputed the intended beneficiary and alleged that the campaign had been diverted or copied. This establishes a relevant domestic financing controversy; it does not explain the entire Georgescu campaign or settle the broader foreign-interference question. [Snoop's investigation](#).

The broader lesson is that apparent spontaneity, organized domestic campaigning, commercial influencer activity, and possible foreign operations can coexist. A sound explanation must reconstruct their relationships rather than select one in advance as the complete cause.

The media transformation is equally important, and extends well beyond political influencers. In the Reuters Institute's 2025 Romanian survey, 25% of respondents reported using TikTok for news. Its 2026 report found that 32% received content from creators concentrating on news, while overall trust in news stood at 23%. Yet Pro TV retained a combined online and offline weekly news reach of 60% among respondents. These are overlapping survey measures, not mutually exclusive audience shares. [Romania, Digital News Report 2025](#); [Romania, Digital News Report 2026](#).

The evidence supports fragmentation and redistribution of authority. Television brands remain influential; their content also travels online. Podcasts supply extended conversations that can be clipped into short videos. Journalistic investigations provoke reactions from broadcasters, politicians, and social media personalities.

Political money continues to shape this environment. Raluca-Nicoleta Radu's 2026 country report records €22.7 million of party spending from state funding allocated for "media and propaganda" during 2025, alongside concerns about confidentiality and opaque relationships with news organizations. [Radu's country analysis](#).

My interpretation is that such spending can produce a damaging feedback process. Established actors obtain favorable exposure, audiences become more suspicious of familiar outlets, and outsider communicators convert that suspicion into a claim to authenticity. The outsiders' own financing and methods may then receive less scrutiny from sympathetic audiences.

Digital publication does not by itself remove ownership pressures. G4Media's acquisition by Titluri Quality in August 2025 illustrates consolidation within online journalism. The transaction announcement also included a formal commitment to editorial independence. Ownership concentration and actual editorial intervention therefore remain separate questions requiring evidence. [G4Media's acquisition announcement](#).

At the same time, digital distribution has strengthened journalism capable of challenging powerful institutions. Recorder's *Justiție capturată*, by Andreea Pocotilă and Mihai Voinea, presented testimony and allegations about the concentration of judicial power, interference with cases, and relationships between political and judicial actors. Its argument should be assessed as investigative reporting, rather than treated as a judicial finding. [Recorder's documentary and explanation](#).

The organizational significance is clear: a newsroom supported by an audience can bring complex institutional practices into mass public discussion without first obtaining a party's endorsement. It can also criticize politicians whom much of its audience previously supported.

That independence became visible again in the 2026 controversy surrounding security chief Lucian Pahonțu and President Nicușor Dan's response to reporting about his past. The controversy placed a reformist president under pressure from parts of the public environment that had helped make his presidency possible. [Reporting on the September 2026 controversy](#).

The constitutional and judicial dimension is essential to understanding how these communication struggles affect the state. Romania's 2024 crisis brought election administration, intelligence assessments, constitutional adjudication, platform regulation, and public legitimacy into direct conflict.

The Constitutional Court initially validated the presidential first-round result on 2 December 2024. Intelligence material was declassified on 4 December; the Court annulled the presidential electoral process on 6 December, after overseas voting in the second round had begun. ODIHR's subsequent assessment also criticized aspects of candidate exclusion, legal certainty, and the handling of the repeat election. [ODIHR's final report](#).

From the standpoint of political sociology, this episode revealed several competing claims to authority:

Actor	Basis of authority claimed	Central accountability question
Voters and candidates	Electoral choice and participation	Was competition genuinely free and fair?
Intelligence institutions	Detection of concealed threats	What evidence can be independently examined?
Constitutional Court	Protection of constitutional elections	Were intervention, procedure, and remedy legally justified?

Actor	Basis of authority claimed	Central accountability question
Electoral and media regulators	Enforcement of campaign rules	Were rules clear and consistently applied?
Platforms	Control over technical distribution and moderation	How transparent and contestable were their decisions?
Journalists and civic monitors	Public investigation and scrutiny	How well supported and fairly presented were their findings?

My assessment is that the crisis cannot be understood solely as either the defense of democracy or the suppression of an electoral challenger. Those are competing political interpretations. Analysis requires separate examination of the underlying interference, the quality of the evidence, the Court’s reasoning, procedural safeguards, and the consequences of the remedy.

There is also a structural feedback problem. An institution may intervene to protect electoral integrity, while the intervention itself supplies an excluded candidate with a powerful narrative of persecution. Weak public explanation can deepen this effect. Conversely, failure to act against documented manipulation can undermine confidence in elections. Institutional credibility becomes part of the political struggle, rather than a secure background condition.

The repeat election did offer genuine alternatives and professionally administered voting, according to ODIHR, while online campaigning predominated and problems persisted in financing, information quality, and oversight. This combination resists a simple classification of the whole process as either fully healthy or wholly illegitimate. [ODIHR’s assessment](#).

Parliamentary results reveal the organizational limits of the communication revolution. The December 2024 election produced the following distribution. These are the original seats won, not September 2026 caucus totals after subsequent defections.

Party	Chamber of Deputies	Senate
PSD	86	36
AUR	63	28
PNL	49	22
USR	40	19
S.O.S. Romania	28	12
POT	24	7
UDMR/RMDSZ	22	10
Other national minorities	19	—
Occupied seats	331	134

Sources: [Inter-Parliamentary Union, Chamber of Deputies](#); [Inter-Parliamentary Union, Senate](#).

POT provides an unusually concrete illustration of the gap between mobilization and organization: it qualified for nine Senate seats but lacked sufficient candidates to fill two of them. Those seats remained vacant. Electoral growth had exceeded organizational preparation. [IPU’s explanation](#).

The Hungarian minority presents a different pattern. RMDSZ/UDMR's durability reflects a combination of representation and community institutions. Schools, churches, local government, associations, and Hungarian-language public communication provide continuity beyond individual electoral campaigns.

For this reason, its parliamentary weight cannot be interpreted simply as the popularity of a leader. Tamás Kiss and the contributors to *Unequal Accommodation of Minority Rights* offer an important framework for studying the relationship between minority institutions, political bargaining, and unequal implementation of rights. [*Unequal Accommodation of Minority Rights: Hungarians in Transylvania*](#).

Digital communication adds further connections across borders and generations, but the institutional density of minority representation gives it a different relationship to online volatility from a recently created personality-centered party.

The developments of 2025–2026 show that electoral mobilization and governing capacity continue to follow different rhythms. On 18 May 2025, Nicușor Dan defeated George Simion by 53.6% to 46.4%. His victory demonstrated the capacity to assemble a broad electoral coalition around a candidate positioned outside the principal governing parties' established leadership. [Report on the presidential result](#).

It did not create a unified governing organization. The Bolojan government subsequently fell on 5 May 2026 after PSD withdrew its support and joined the successful no-confidence vote. Bolojan continued in a caretaker capacity. By September, Romania remained without a replacement government enjoying full powers. [Reuters on the government's fall](#); TVR's September account.

Meanwhile, an INSCOP survey conducted on 1–7 September 2026 placed AUR at 39.7%, PSD at 18.7%, PNL at 16.3%, and USR at 9% among respondents expressing a party preference, regardless of their stated likelihood of voting. These are polling estimates from a sample of 1,100, not parliamentary seats or a prediction of the next election. INSCOP–Informat.ro survey.

This divergence is analytically revealing. Public preferences can change much faster than the parliamentary distribution of power. Government formation must still pass through parties, legislators, presidential decisions, and negotiated agreements.

The main pressures shaping Romania's further development can therefore be expressed as relationships rather than predictions:

- **Nationalist mobilization becomes more durable when online support acquires local organization, credible personnel, and practical policy capacity.**
- **Reformist mobilization retains credibility when its representatives can demonstrate institutional results after entering office.**
- **Established parties remain resilient while administrative access compensates for declining public attachment.**
- **Investigative journalism exercises greater independent influence when audience support sustains its ability to scrutinize competing political camps.**
- **Electoral regulation commands greater legitimacy when evidence, procedures, and remedies can withstand public examination.**

Each relationship can develop independently. Romania could experience growing nationalist support alongside organizational fragmentation, stronger investigative journalism alongside greater media concentration, or successful electoral mobilization alongside prolonged governmental weakness.

For a sustained study, the following works provide the most useful division of intellectual labor. Their differing scopes matter: historical studies explain inherited structures and narratives; recent communication research examines how mobilization actually operates.

Author or authors	Particularly relevant work	Main analytical use
Katherine Verdery	<i>National Ideology under Socialism</i> (1991)	Explains how communist cultural institutions strengthened national ideology.
Lucian Boia	<i>History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness</i> (English edition, 2001)	Identifies historical narratives available for contemporary political reuse.
Clara Volintiru; Sergiu Gherghina	<i>Clientelism and Cartelization...</i> (2016); “A New Model of Clientelism” (2017)	Explains party resilience through resources, appointments, and organizational relationships.
Alina Mungiu-Pippidi	<i>Politica după comunism</i> (2002); <i>The Quest for Good Governance</i> (2015)	Connects representation, institutional distrust, favoritism, and effective constraints on corruption.
Cornel Ban	<i>Ruling Ideas</i> (2016)	Shows how experts and transnational networks translate economic ideas into state policy.
Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu	<i>Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania</i> (2007)	Maps church–state relationships and religious influence beyond voting behavior.
Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu	<i>Birth of Democratic Citizenship</i> (2018)	Reconstructs citizenship through women’s everyday experiences and participation.
Dan Mercea	Studies of Roșia Montană, transnational activism, and #rezist (2014, 2018, 2022)	Explains participation and coordination beyond conventional party membership.
Dan Mercea, Toma Burean, and Viorel Proteasa	“Student Participation and Public Facebook Communication...” (2020)	Provides empirical analysis of information and participation in #rezist.
Sorina Soare and Claudiu D. Tufiş	“Saved by the Diaspora?” (2023)	Explains AUR’s transnational organization and construction of political belonging.
Ov Cristian Norocel and Ionela Băluță	“Retrogressive Mobilization...” (2023 journal issue)	Shows how conservative mobilization crosses ideological and party boundaries.
Tamás Kiss and co-editors	<i>Unequal Accommodation of Minority Rights</i> (2018)	Explains the institutional organization and bargaining

Author or authors	Particularly relevant work	Main analytical use
Raluca-Nicoleta Radu	Romanian chapters of the <i>Digital News Report</i> , especially 2025–2026	position of Hungarian minority politics. Supplies current evidence on audiences, ownership, financing, trust, and news creators.

Liiceanu, Pleșu, Patapievi, and other public intellectuals should additionally be read as **participants in the production of political legitimacy**. Their texts reveal the categories through which politics is judged. Their institutional careers reveal how those categories acquire authority. That is a different evidentiary role from the empirical research of scholars studying parties, public resources, or communication networks.

The principal research gap lies in connecting these literatures. Party research often follows organizations and resources; communication research follows content and participation; intellectual history follows arguments and prestige. Romania’s recent experience calls for tracing the entire process: **who formulates a political interpretation, who finances and distributes it, which existing relationships make it credible, how audiences become organized supporters, and which institutions determine whether that support can become effective state power.**

Serbia

Serbia provides strong evidence that political organization is being transformed by direct communication through cyberspace, but the transformation is highly uneven. Social media has enabled movements outside established parties to acquire national visibility, credibility, and mobilizing capacity. At the same time, the governing Serbian Progressive Party—SNS—has integrated digital communication into an extensive system of local organization, public employment, media influence, and personalized leadership.

The central development is therefore a struggle between **different ways of organizing political power**: a presidentially directed party apparatus, fragmented opposition parties, independent media and intellectual networks, and increasingly influential civic organizations built around universities, local communities, and online communication.

My interpretation is that Serbia illustrates three changes occurring together:

- Political leaders can increasingly communicate with supporters without substantive mediation by their own parties.
- Civic groups can organize large political interventions without first becoming parties.
- Control over state institutions still depends on resources and organizational capacities that online popularity alone cannot supply.

The account below distinguishes established research findings from my synthesis of their implications. Its current political reference point is **10 September 2026**. On 9 September, Vučić dissolved parliament and called an election for 25 October, seeking to continue his leadership as prime minister. That contest is still unfolding; its outcome should not be inferred from the size of demonstrations or online audiences. [Reuters, 9 September 2026](#)

The parliamentary distribution is only the most visible layer of this system. The December 2023 election produced the following allocation:

Electoral list or bloc	Seats won
SNS-led “Aleksandar Vučić—Serbia Must Not Stop”	129
Serbia Against Violence	65
Socialist Party-led list	18
NADA national-conservative coalition	13
“We—Voice from the People,” associated with Branimir Nestorović	13
Minority lists combined	12
Total	250

These are election-time allocations, not a description of subsequent parliamentary groups or the emerging 2026 alignments. ODIHR found that the 2023 election offered political alternatives but that presidential involvement, incumbent advantages, media bias, pressure on public employees, and misuse of resources produced unequal conditions. The seat distribution consequently records both electoral preferences and the effects of the environment in which those preferences were expressed. [ODIHR final report, including official results](#)

To understand what lies beneath those numbers, it is necessary to trace how Serbia's competing political worlds were formed.

The present intellectual divisions originated well before social media. During late socialism, writers, academics, dissident circles, cultural institutions, and debates about Yugoslavia supplied alternative political languages before a competitive party system existed. Parts of the intellectual opposition increasingly interpreted political problems through Serbian national grievances, especially the position of Serbs within Yugoslavia and the question of Kosovo.

Jasna Dragović-Soso's *Saviours of the Nation?* explains how this national turn affected the opposition itself. Acceptance of important elements of Milošević's national agenda weakened the capacity of some opponents to formulate a clearly distinguishable alternative. Her argument concerns particular intellectual networks and historical choices; it should not be generalized to all Serbian intellectuals or the whole Serbian Academy. [Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation?*](#)

A complementary explanation comes from Nebojša Vladislavljević. His study of the antibureaucratic revolution shows that mass mobilization emerged through interactions between political elites and social groups possessing grievances and agency of their own. Nationalist polarization was partly produced through those interactions. This remains relevant today: neither government rallies nor opposition demonstrations can be adequately understood by treating participants merely as passive recipients of propaganda. [Vladislavljević, *Serbia's Antibureaucratic Revolution*](#)

The 1990s also established another enduring mechanism: weakening the social environments in which alternatives could become credible. Eric Gordy's *The Culture of Power in Serbia* examines interference in political, media, cultural, and everyday life. His account helps explain how authoritarian durability can rest on resignation and diminished alternatives, alongside ideological support. [Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia*](#)

Applied to the present, this suggests a crucial question: **does cyberspace merely distribute more criticism, or does it recreate the social relationships through which citizens can act on criticism?** Serbia's student movement is significant because it has attempted the latter.

The democratic breakthrough of 2000 did not settle the relationship between parties, society, and the state. Opposition parties, civic activism, independent media, and international assistance contributed to political change, but their subsequent institutionalization involved conflicts over leadership, resources, reform priorities, and legitimacy.

Marlene Spoorri's *Engineering Revolution* is useful here because it critically examines external democracy assistance before and after Milošević's removal. Her findings challenge the assumption that strengthening selected parties necessarily produces democratic consolidation. They also provide a disciplined basis for distinguishing documented external support from the

much stronger—and separately evidentiary—claim that domestic political action is externally commanded. [Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*](#)

The subsequent disappointment with political parties created opportunities for two different responses. One was the promise of decisive, personalized government. The other was the conviction that political renewal should begin outside the established party class. Those responses now confront one another.

The intellectual field contains several overlapping currents, which do not correspond neatly to government and opposition. The following is an analytical map rather than a claim that these are internally unified camps:

Current	Central concerns	Main forms of political expression
National and sovereignty-oriented	Kosovo, national continuity, historical memory, Orthodox heritage, autonomy from foreign powers	Conservative intellectual circles, publications, parties, religious and cultural networks
Civic, constitutionalist, and antiwar	Legal limits on power, pluralism, individual rights, responsibility for wartime wrongdoing	Intellectual forums, rights organizations, independent journalism, parts of the opposition
Developmentalist and state-centered	Investment, infrastructure, employment, international bargaining, leadership competence	Governing discourse, administrative and business networks, presidential communication
Social, municipal, and ecological	Inequality, labor, housing, public space, pollution, extraction	Local initiatives, green and left organizations, environmental campaigns
Professional and participatory	Institutional integrity, expertise, public service, accountable decision-making	Universities, professional networks, student assemblies, citizens' initiatives

These currents compete over what a legitimate Serbian state should protect and how it should act. They also borrow from one another.

Within national and sovereignty-oriented discourse, the key questions concern the preservation of Serbia's historical identity, territorial claims, and freedom of international action. Earlier figures include Dobrica Ćosić and Matija Bećković; the later intellectual-media field includes *Nova srpska politička misao*, associated with Đorđe Vukadinović and Slobodan Antić.

Within civic and antiwar discourse, important figures include Nebojša Popov, Ivan Čolović, Latinka Perović, and Vesna Pešić, alongside the intellectual legacy of Radomir Konstantinović. *Pešćanik* became an important venue for this broader critical public.

Tamara Petrović-Trifunović and Ivana Spasić directly compare *Pešćanik* and *Nova srpska politička misao*. Their study shows how patriotism and cosmopolitanism function as resources in struggles over political legitimacy. They are more than abstract philosophical positions: they

help determine who is recognized as a credible participant in public debate. [Petrović-Trifunović and Spasić, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism in Intellectual Discourse”](#)

Ana Omaljev’s analysis of “First” and “Other” Serbia similarly examines how rival elites construct identities through categories such as patriotism, betrayal, Europe, and national belonging. Her work is especially close to your question because it investigates the intellectual production of political divisions beneath electoral competition. [Omaljev, *Discourses on Identity in ‘First’ and ‘Other’ Serbia*](#)

Nevertheless, these intellectual divisions should not be converted into a rigid sociology of two populations. A conservative can oppose Vučić on constitutional or national grounds. A supporter of European integration can sharply criticize European governments for accommodating him. An environmental activist can combine attachment to national sovereignty with opposition to international capital.

Spasić and Petrović’s work on varieties of “Third Serbia” is valuable precisely because it examines different attempts to escape, combine, or reject the established binary. [“Varieties of ‘Third Serbia,’” in *Us and Them*](#)

Social media changes how these intellectual traditions circulate. Earlier, sustained participation in an intellectual milieu generally required engagement with publications, institutions, meetings, or recognizable circles of authors. Today, fragments of those traditions circulate through short videos, interview excerpts, memes, historical images, and personal commentary.

My interpretation is that this makes ideological affiliation more selective. Someone can adopt a sovereignty argument about lithium extraction, a constitutional argument about presidential power, and an internationalist argument about environmental protection without joining an organization that reconciles them into a comprehensive doctrine.

Marko Živković’s *Serbian Dreambook* supplies the historical background for understanding this process. It analyzes recurring narratives concerning Kosovo, Serbia’s geopolitical position, cultural hierarchies, and conspiratorial explanations. These narratives provide material that contemporary communicators can recombine, although their circulation through social media is a later development beyond the book’s empirical subject. [Živković, *Serbian Dreambook*](#)

The political consequence is a widening gap between **consistency of doctrine** and **effectiveness of communication**. A successful communicator may unite audiences through a recurring moral opposition—ordinary people against arrogant power, national dignity against humiliation—while leaving substantive policy disagreements unresolved.

Vučić’s governing system combines ideological flexibility with organizational concentration. Its public language can accommodate economic modernization, social protection, national sovereignty, cooperation with Europe, and relationships with other major powers. Personal leadership supplies continuity across these changing emphases.

Florian Bieber identifies several mechanisms relevant to this arrangement: informal state capture, recurring crises, social polarization, and balancing external powers. Formal democratic institutions remain, while their operation is shaped by unequal access to resources and influence. [Bieber, *The Rise of Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans*](#)

There is an organizational logic behind this flexibility. The leader becomes the point at which potentially conflicting expectations are reconciled. One audience seeks investment, another national protection, another stability, another help with immediate material problems. Their attachment need not depend on agreement over an elaborate ideological programme.

This does not make all support artificial. Preferences for stability, perceived economic improvement, national representation, and a familiar leader can be sincerely held. A satisfactory explanation must account for those preferences while also examining the pressures and information inequalities surrounding political choice.

SNS remains indispensable because it organizes material relationships as well as communication. A ruling party can connect citizens to employment opportunities, administrative access, local intermediaries, public resources, and expectations of protection. These relationships operate continuously, including between elections.

Dušan Pavlović's *The Moneywasting Machine* examines the political incentives behind subsidies, privatization, investment arrangements, and appointments. Its importance is that it explains poor allocation through the interests embedded in institutions, rather than assuming that inefficiency results simply from insufficient expertise. [Pavlović, *The Moneywasting Machine*](#)

The distinction between communication and dependency is fundamental. An online critic may persuade a person that government policy is harmful. That persuasion does not necessarily remove concern about employment, the treatment of a family member, or access to a local institution.

Conversely, an organization that helps people act collectively can reduce the risks associated with individual dissent. This is one reason why faculty communities, professional associations, and neighborhood networks may become politically consequential beyond their numerical size.

Thus, the party's role can diminish in the formation of ideas while remaining powerful in the organization of livelihoods and political participation.

The presidency's predominance also needs to be separated from its constitutional competences. Serbia's Constitution assigns executive power to the Government in Article 122 and the determination and conduct of policy to it in Article 123. Article 124 establishes governmental responsibility to parliament. The President has significant specified powers, but the Constitution does not confer unrestricted direction of government policy upon that office. Article 5 additionally prohibits parties from directly exercising power or subordinating it to themselves. [Constitution of Serbia](#)

Filip Milačić's study of legislative capture explains how personal electoral authority can be translated into control over a party, then parliamentary majorities and appointments, and subsequently wider institutional influence. The article is particularly relevant to the difference between constitutional structure and actual political direction. [Milačić, "Democratic Backsliding Through Legislative Capture in Serbia: A One-Man Show"](#)

For your inquiry, the important mechanism is that political predominance can follow the leader across offices. Its organizational foundations include parliamentary loyalty, appointments,

access to resources, and public visibility. An analysis confined to the formal powers of the officeholder will miss much of this relationship.

The communication system is divided, but television remains structurally important. Snježana Milivojević's Serbia chapter in the *Digital News Report 2025* reports that 67% of surveyed respondents used social media for news. Among 18–24-year-olds, 45% used TikTok for news. Overall trust in news was only 27%. These are survey findings about news consumption, not estimates of the proportion of citizens politically controlled by platforms. [Reuters Institute, Serbia, 2025](#)

The main television environment includes RTS and RTV, alongside commercial broadcasters Pink, Happy, Prva, and B92. Critical journalism has also circulated through N1, Nova, and publications such as *Danas* and *Vreme*. Milivojević describes an environment in which national broadcasting strongly favors the governing leadership while critical outlets face economic and political pressure. The audiences of these different media overlap; they should not be treated as mutually exclusive electorates. [Milivojević's media-system assessment](#)

A useful earlier benchmark is the 2022 *Report on Digital News in Serbia*, by Jelena Kleut, Danka Ninković Slavnić, Vujo Ilić, and Igor Išpanović. Among its online-panel respondents, 34% named television as their main news source, compared with 25% naming social networks. Social networks predominated among younger respondents, while television remained especially important among older respondents. Its sample comprised 2,027 internet users, so the authors explicitly caution against treating it as a complete representation of the population. These figures should not be joined mechanically to the 2025 findings as a continuous statistical series. [2022 report](#)

More recently, CRTA's monitoring covering March to early September 2026 reported that the ruling majority received 96% of the time devoted to political actors in RTS's *Dnevnik 2*. This is a measure of airtime within a specified programme and monitoring period, not 96% of Serbia's entire information environment. It demonstrates why access to platforms has not made national broadcasting politically irrelevant. [CRTA, "Campaigning without the paperwork"](#)

Control over distribution can matter as much as control over editorial content. Media power depends on ownership, advertising, public financing, broadcast access, and the platforms through which households receive content.

The European Commission's 2025 report recorded the removal of channels critical of the authorities from a television platform after its acquisition by majority state-owned Telekom Srbija. It also raised concerns about regulatory independence and political and economic influence over editorial policy. [European Commission, Serbia Report 2025](#)

This creates an important qualification to the idea of direct communication. A speaker may bypass a newspaper editor, yet still depend on an internet platform's recommendation system, a distribution company, advertising income, or legal protection. Mediation becomes reorganized across several institutions.

Furthermore, social media often redistributes television material. A presidential appearance becomes a short clip; a television investigation becomes an Instagram post; an online controversy becomes the subject of a broadcast. The channels continually feed one another.

The governing apparatus has also extended organized political activity into cyberspace. Meta's investigation published in February 2023 attributed a coordinated inauthentic network to employees of the SNS Internet Team and public employees across Serbia. The activity targeted domestic audiences across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and local news websites, seeking to create the impression of broad spontaneous support for Vučić and SNS. [Meta's adversarial threat report](#)

This finding supports a specific conclusion: some apparent grassroots digital activity was connected to an existing organizational apparatus. It does not establish how many votes the operation produced, or justify treating every pro-government user as an organized participant.

The distinction between automated bots and coordinated human accounts also matters. The political mechanism may involve people working under instructions, rather than software generating messages independently.

My interpretation is that such activity serves several possible organizational purposes: increasing the visibility of preferred narratives, rewarding loyal participation, discouraging critics, and presenting the governing camp as socially dominant. Its effectiveness must be investigated rather than assumed from the volume of content.

Digital communication also creates new opportunities for surveillance and pressure. In September 2026, SHARE Foundation reported at least fourteen people targeted with advanced spyware. Its findings distinguished threat notifications from confirmed infections and included a forensically confirmed Pegasus infection and two infections involving newer spyware resembling NoviSpy. The report describes corroboration involving Citizen Lab and Amnesty International. [SHARE Foundation, 2 September 2026](#)

The operator responsible for the Pegasus attack was not established by the evidence reported publicly; the government denied involvement. That attribution question must remain separate from the documented targeting. [Guardian reporting on the investigation](#)

Sociologically, this means that online organization can simultaneously lower the cost of cooperation and expose the relationships on which cooperation depends. The relevant resource is not merely freedom to publish, but the capacity to communicate and organize without intimidation.

Opposition politics has repeatedly moved between parties and movements. The last decade includes protests against personalized rule, municipal and environmental mobilization, the 2023 Serbia Against Violence demonstrations and coalition, and the student mobilization following the Novi Sad disaster.

These episodes should not be collapsed into one continuous organization. They differ in leadership, social composition, demands, and attitudes toward electoral participation. Nevertheless, recurring mobilization allows experience, contacts, and repertoires of action to circulate between them.

Jelisaveta Petrović and Dalibor Petrović's 2017 study, "Connective Action as the New Pattern of Protest Activism," is especially relevant. Examining the "Against Dictatorship" protests, they used participant surveys to investigate digitally enabled mobilization through the framework of connective action. Their analysis identifies a central limitation: explaining the

emergence of a protest network is easier than explaining its consolidation into a durable organization. [Petrović and Petrović, original article](#)

That distinction separates several capacities often confused in accounts of digital politics:

Capacity	What it requires
Attracting attention	Visibility, compelling messages, recognizable voices
Mobilizing participation	Trust, coordination, a clear occasion for action
Sustaining organization	Work allocation, resources, procedures, conflict resolution
Contesting elections	Candidates, territorial coverage, monitoring, legal competence
Governing	Policy agreement, appointments, administrative knowledge, accountability

An actor can become very strong in the first two capacities while remaining weak in the others.

The environmental movement has helped create cooperation across Serbia's older ideological divisions. Conflicts over land, water, pollution, urban development, and lithium extraction connect public decisions to everyday life. They can bring together people who disagree about the EU, national identity, or economic doctrine.

Ana Vilenica and Vladimir Mentus's 2026 article, "Periphery in Movement," analyzes the contested convergence of rural communities, professional civil society, nationalists, and left actors around opposition to lithium extraction. Their explicitly critical framework emphasizes unequal power relations among local populations, corporate interests, European institutions, and national elites. [Vilenica and Mentus, *Voluntas*](#)

The cooperation does not imply agreement on a common ideology. Defending land can mean protecting national territory, preserving a village's livelihood, resisting capitalist extraction, or demanding transparent public decision-making.

My interpretation is that these conflicts broaden the meaning of sovereignty in Serbian political debate. Sovereignty becomes a question of who decides what happens to water, agricultural land, housing, and public infrastructure, alongside the established questions of borders and historical identity.

This can also change attitudes toward Europe. Support for European legal standards can coexist with criticism of European industrial priorities. Consequently, support for democratic reform should not automatically be classified as support for every policy advanced by EU institutions or governments.

The student movement represents a particularly substantial experiment in organization outside parties. Following the November 2024 Novi Sad station-canopy collapse, which ultimately killed sixteen people, demands for responsibility and transparency developed into a much wider challenge to the functioning of public institutions. The Commission's 2025 report records the national spread of protests and the centrality of perceived corruption and failures of accountability. [European Commission's assessment](#)

Its organizational significance lies in the connection between physical assemblies and digital publication.

RFE/RL's September 2025 interviews describe faculty plenums selecting social-media administrators, assigning responsibilities, checking externally supplied information, and coordinating common campaigns between faculties. The same reporting documents how older supporters receive information through children and friends. It reported approximately 400,000 followers for the central student Instagram account at that time; that is a dated account statistic, not a count of voters. [Jelena Janković's reporting](#)

Here, the social-media account can function as **the publication organ of an assembly**. Its authority comes partly from an identifiable community with procedures for deciding what it says.

This differs from personal influence founded on admiration for a presenter. It also differs from a party communications department operating within a leadership hierarchy. All three can use identical platforms while embodying different relationships between speaker and audience.

Igor Ispanović documents the complementary functions of student accounts: announcements and practical coordination, informal commentary, humor, and the circulation of the *Pumpaj* rallying expression. He also examines the dangers of exhaustion and fragmented calls for action. His account shows why maintaining collective attention requires continuing work, rather than one successful viral moment. [Ispanović, "\(Don't\) Believe the Hype"](#)

The movement's physical organization is essential to explaining its digital effectiveness. Accounts of the plenums describe working groups for media, logistics, legal support, and other functions. They also document outreach beyond university centers and the circulation of practical guidance for citizens' assemblies, or *zborovi*. These are attempts to establish repeatable forms of participation. [Stefanija Hrle Aiello's account, including assembly guidance](#)

The decentralized structure has advantages: it makes the movement harder to reduce to one leader and creates multiple sites of initiative. It also raises difficulties concerning negotiation, strategic coherence, responsibility, and the resolution of disagreement. Gresa Hasa's analysis identifies both its protective value and the unresolved question of durable political strategy. [Hasa, "Lessons from the student protests in Serbia"](#)

My assessment is that the greatest innovation is the combination of **public visibility with locally generated trust**. Videos make action visible; assemblies make commitments credible; practical cooperation gives participants reasons to remain involved.

However, participatory legitimacy has a specific scope. A faculty assembly can authorize statements and action by its participants. A national electoral mandate requires a different procedure and a much wider public. Moving between those forms of legitimacy creates difficult organizational choices.

Professional and cultural authority supplies another route around party mediation. ProGlas brings together figures from law, academia, literature, journalism, and the arts. Its publicly identified initiators include Miodrag Majić, Miodrag Jovanović, Filip Ejduš, Ivanka Popović, Dragan Bjelogrić, and Svetlana Bojković. Its activities combine public argument, local engagement, and online communication. [ProGlas's own presentation](#)

Its importance lies in the transfer of credibility from professional and cultural fields into politics. A judge, professor, actor, or writer can help make public engagement appear legitimate to citizens who distrust parties.

This creates possibilities but also a limitation. Expertise in a profession, moral credibility, communication skill, electoral representation, and governing competence are distinct resources. An effective movement needs ways to connect them without assuming that possession of one automatically guarantees the others.

A June 2026 CRTA–Stanford Democracy Action Lab survey illustrates this differentiated distribution of trust. It reported trust of 71% in state universities and 64% in the Orthodox Church, compared with 34% in the Government and 31% in parliament. The face-to-face survey interviewed 2,324 adults. Such findings indicate that institutional trust cannot be reduced to one government–opposition alignment: religious and academic authority may coexist within the same society and potentially within the same individual. [Survey and methodology](#)

Individual media personalities constitute a further, distinct form of mediation. Galeb Nikačević’s *Agelast*, for example, connects extended cultural and intellectual conversation with discussion of the student movement. Zoran Kesić’s *24 minuta* combines television satire with online circulation. The latter should be understood as television content reaching additional audiences through digital channels. [Agelast’s discussion of student demands](#), [24 minuta broadcaster page](#)

Branimir Nestorović illustrates another route: an established public personality becoming associated with a new electoral organization. His 2023 success attracted attention partly because he presented it as having been achieved with little conventional infrastructure. That is his own account of the campaign, and it does not erase his previous media visibility. [Danas/FoNet, December 2023](#)

These cases show why “influencer politics” needs subdivision. A satirist, podcast host, political entrepreneur, and collectively administered student channel have different sources of authority. Their audiences may be politically important without being directly convertible into votes.

Nor is the digital sphere inherently liberal. Jovo Bakić’s research on Serbia’s extreme right provides an earlier account of political networks extending beyond parliamentary parties. Its contemporary relevance is methodological: nationalist and radical mobilization must also be studied through organizations, cultural environments, and recruitment practices outside elections. Its 2013 findings should not be treated as measurements of present strength. [Bakić, *The Right-Wing Extremism in Serbia*](#)

International relationships enter domestic organization through several different channels. EU accession, the Kosovo dispute, relationships with Russia and China, foreign investment, and regional Serbian connections all supply resources and constraints. Their effects include economic opportunities, diplomatic legitimacy, media narratives, and arguments about national loyalty.

Filip Milačić’s *Stateness and Democratic Consolidation* explains why unresolved questions of statehood can shape democratic competition itself. When a political dispute is framed as a threat to national survival, disagreement over government performance can become entangled with

suspicion about an opponent's national commitments. [Milačić, *Stateness and Democratic Consolidation*](#)

At the same time, Serbia's economic relationships do not map neatly onto its emotional or geopolitical identifications. The BTI 2026 report identifies EU member states as accounting for approximately 60% of trade while also describing the growing importance of China and the persistence of political obstacles to accession. Economic integration and political identification can therefore develop at different speeds. [BTI 2026 Serbia report](#)

The Serbian-language public sphere also extends beyond Serbia's borders through regional media, cultural networks, and diaspora communication. This matters when interpreting platform statistics: viewers and followers may belong to a wider linguistic public rather than the Serbian electorate.

An adequate account should therefore investigate particular relationships rather than posit one hidden foreign center directing an entire camp. Funding, diplomatic support, ideological affinity, media cooperation, and operational command are different relationships requiring different evidence.

The transformation affects state functioning most directly when public visibility encounters institutional nonresponse. An investigation can circulate widely without producing prosecution. A widely supported demand can remain outside the parliamentary agenda. A professional objection can attract public backing without changing an appointment.

Marija Zurnić's research on political scandals shows why corruption must also be studied as a contested public category. Political actors compete over what counts as corruption, who bears responsibility, and whether a scandal demonstrates individual misconduct or a systemic problem. [Zurnić, *Corruption and Democratic Transition in Eastern Europe*](#)

My interpretation is that the Novi Sad disaster altered this relationship by attaching diffuse concerns about institutional quality to a concrete loss of life. Technical questions about construction, procurement, inspection, and responsibility became questions about the credibility of the state.

Yet visibility does not implement administrative reform. That requires changes in recruitment, supervision, public records, institutional independence, and the enforcement of responsibility. The Commission's 2025 report noted that 62% of senior managerial civil-service posts remained occupied through acting appointments and continued to identify concerns about pressure on the judiciary and prosecutorial autonomy. These are organizational conditions that communication alone cannot correct. [European Commission, 2025 report](#)

The emerging electoral challenge makes the conversion from social support to institutional power measurable. In the June 2026 CRTA–Stanford survey, a hypothetical Student List received 44.9% among decided voters, compared with 35.7% for SNS. This is one survey conducted before the election was called, not a forecast or a confirmed result. It nevertheless indicates that mobilization outside established opposition parties had acquired potential electoral significance. [CRTA–Stanford survey](#)

The remaining obstacles include electoral administration itself. On 9 September, CRTA's representatives involved in the voter-register audit said that restricted access and insufficient

time prevented a comprehensive assessment of the register. Their statement distinguishes suspicious patterns from evidence establishing their causes or responsibility. This is precisely the kind of institutional issue that can persist despite very extensive online scrutiny. [CRTA's audit assessment](#)

For the broader theoretical question, Serbia suggests that **political mediation is separating into functions previously bundled within parties**. Intellectuals provide interpretations; investigators produce evidence; online personalities attract attention; assemblies authorize collective action; local organizations sustain participation; electoral organizations select candidates; parliamentary majorities authorize government.

The decisive research questions are consequently more specific than whether social media has “replaced parties”:

- **Who authorizes the message?** A leader, editorial organization, party hierarchy, or deliberative collective?
- **What supplies credibility?** Professional standing, personal familiarity, national identification, evidence, or participation in shared action?
- **What sustains commitment?** Agreement, solidarity, material dependency, organizational discipline, or some combination?
- **How is support converted into public authority?** Through elections, appointments, administrative procedures, public pressure, or institutional reform?
- **Who remains accountable after that conversion?** The visible communicator, the organization behind the communicator, elected representatives, or public institutions?

The authors most directly addressing these different dimensions form a complementary research programme:

Dimension	Particularly useful authors and works
Intellectual origins of national mobilization	Jasna Dragović-Soso, <i>Saviours of the Nation?</i> (2002); Nebojša Vladislavljević, <i>Serbia's Antibureaucratic Revolution</i> (2008)
Cultural conditions of authoritarian durability	Eric Gordy, <i>The Culture of Power in Serbia</i> (1999); Marko Živković, <i>Serbian Dreambook</i> (2011)
Rival intellectual publics	Ivana Spasić and Tamara Petrović/Petrović-Trifunović, studies of “Third Serbia” and patriotism/cosmopolitanism (2013–2014); Ana Omaljev, <i>Discourses on Identity</i> (2016)
Party resources and institutional concentration	Dušan Pavlović, <i>The Moneywasting Machine</i> (2022); Florian Bieber, <i>The Rise of Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans</i> (2020); Filip Milačić's legislative-capture study
Scandals and political responsibility	Marija Zurnić, <i>Corruption and Democratic Transition in Eastern Europe</i>
Digital mobilization and its organizational limits	Jelisaveta Petrović and Dalibor Petrović, connective-action study (2017); Jelena Kleut, Danka Ninković Slavnić, Vujo Ilić, and Igor Išpanović, digital-news research (2022)
Contemporary media and student communication	Snježana Milivojević's media research; Igor Išpanović's 2025 analysis; Aleksandra Krstić's analysis of trust in student communication

Dimension	Particularly useful authors and works
Ecological cooperation across ideological divisions	Ana Vilenica and Vladimir Mentus, “Periphery in Movement” (2026)
External assistance and domestic political organization	Marlene Spoerri, <i>Engineering Revolution</i> (2014/2015)

Their findings make it possible to study the 2026 contest as a test of whether Serbia’s new civic networks can preserve their participatory credibility while developing the organizational capacities required to exercise—and constrain—state power.

Croatia

Croatia’s political transformation is best understood as the interaction of three forms of power: inherited political identities, durable networks around parties and public institutions, and increasingly personalized competition for attention through digital media. Social media has substantially widened the possibilities for political intervention outside established parties. Its effects, however, differ across political functions: it has changed publicity and mobilization more extensively than candidate recruitment, coalition formation, or the administration of the state.

Your hypothesis therefore identifies an important transformation, but Croatia requires a qualification: **the weakening of parties’ control over political communication has proceeded alongside considerable resilience in their control over organized political power.** The following analysis distinguishes research findings from my interpretation of how those findings fit together.

The distinction can be expressed through five questions:

Political function	What digital communication changes	What still requires organization
Defining public problems	Individuals, campaign groups and online publishers can bring neglected issues to national attention	Investigations, expertise and sustained campaigning

Political function	What digital communication changes	What still requires organization
Building political identification	Followers can identify directly with a personality or cause	Maintaining support beyond particular controversies
Mobilizing participation	Information, protest invitations and campaign material circulate rapidly	Local coordination and conversion of sympathy into turnout
Winning representation	Personal visibility can assist new candidates and parties	Electoral lists, geographically distributed support and coalition agreements
Exercising state power	Public pressure and online consultation can influence decisions	Parliamentary majorities, administrative competence, budgets and institutional authority

This distinction is especially useful in Croatia because the country combines vigorous political dissatisfaction with persistent historical divisions and strong local networks.

The historical foundations of political identification remain active beneath the newer communication environment. Croatian party competition developed through several simultaneous transformations: the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, the establishment of an independent state, war, changes in ownership and economic organization, and subsequent European integration. These processes connected questions that elsewhere might be more separate: national legitimacy, historical memory, religion, property, political loyalty and access to state institutions.

Consequently, the familiar left–right division cannot be interpreted solely as a disagreement about taxation or welfare. It also concerns attitudes toward the Yugoslav period, the Second World War, the independence struggle, the Catholic Church, and the relationship between national belonging and legitimate political criticism.

The Croatian Democratic Union, **HDZ**, emerged from the independence movement with a claim to founding political legitimacy. Its electoral identity could therefore combine national symbolism with much more practical relationships involving local government, public administration and economic interests. The Social Democratic Party, **SDP**, developed from the reforming communist successor party into the principal organization of the parliamentary left. Its constituency has included secular, socially liberal and social-democratic orientations, without those necessarily forming an internally uniform worldview.

An important empirical contribution is **Josip Glaurdić and Vuk Vuković’s “Voting after war: Legacy of conflict and the economy as determinants of electoral support in Croatia” (2016)**. Examining more than 500 municipalities across five electoral cycles, they found that economic considerations mattered, but communities more exposed to wartime violence were consistently more likely to support the principal party of the centre-right. Their findings show how war experiences can remain embedded in electoral geography long after immediate wartime circumstances have disappeared. [Glaurdić and Vuković, 2016](#).

The implication for digital politics is significant. A new communication technology encounters audiences whose political interpretations already have a history. A short video about national dignity, corruption, religious values or minority rights acquires meaning through these inherited

distinctions. Digital communication can reactivate historical divisions as readily as it can weaken them.

Dejan Jović offers a complementary interpretation of the production of political legitimacy. In *Rat i mit: Politika identiteta u suvremenj Hrvatskoj—War and Myth: The Politics of Identity in Contemporary Croatia* (2017)—he argues that dominant interpretations of the Homeland War help define the boundaries of acceptable public discussion. His concern is how political interests become connected with an authoritative account of national origins, and how alternative interpretations can become delegitimized. This is a critical interpretation, rather than a consensus account of Croatian society. [Jović, *Rat i mit*](#).

For your inquiry, Jović’s contribution helps explain why apparently historical disputes can have immediate political consequences. They influence who can claim to speak for the nation, whose criticism appears legitimate, and which issues political actors can raise without losing credibility among particular constituencies. Social media increases the number of participants in these disputes and accelerates their circulation.

New parties have altered representation more than they have dissolved these underlying divisions. This is demonstrated particularly clearly by **Andrija Henjak and Goran Čular’s “Old Cleavages and New Parties: The Analysis of Voting Behavior in 2020 Elections in Croatia” (2024).**

Their survey research finds that supporters of new parties were younger and differed from established-party voters in their perceptions of politics. Nevertheless, supporters of new parties on the left resembled established left voters, while supporters of new parties on the right resembled established right voters, in their relationships to history, religion and tradition. Dissatisfied nonvoters shared some perceptions with new-party voters but expressed less confidence in their ability to influence politics. [Henjak and Čular, 2024](#).

My interpretation is that Croatia has developed a second division across its inherited ideological camps: a division between acceptance of established political representation and demands for a different kind of representative. This explains why dissatisfaction with corruption can support very different political projects. A green municipal activist, a conservative anti-establishment politician and a nationalist challenger can all condemn established elites while proposing incompatible understandings of political renewal.

Social media facilitates the expression of this dissatisfaction. It does not automatically turn it into a common opposition.

The material organization of power helps explain why dissatisfaction frequently coexists with incumbent survival. Here, **Vuk Vuković’s “The political economy of local government in Croatia: winning coalitions, corruption, and taxes” (2017)** is particularly relevant.

Vuković applies selectorate theory to Croatian local government. His argument connects political longevity with coalitions of essential supporters who benefit from access to public resources, including procurement and other selective advantages. These relationships can sustain officeholders despite wider dissatisfaction. His discussion includes politicians originating in both left and right parties. The empirical measures require care: the study does

not identify every incumbent voter as a client, and procurement indicators are not equivalent to individual criminal convictions. [Vuković, 2017](#).

The broader organizational implication is that political support has several sources. Some citizens support a party because they share its values; others trust a particular mayor, appreciate services, fear the alternatives, or have relationships with people connected to public institutions. These motives can overlap.

An online challenger can rapidly expose a scandal. It takes longer to establish a credible alternative capable of governing a municipality, maintaining services, recruiting competent candidates and reassuring people whose livelihoods depend on institutional continuity.

This is one reason that **information about misconduct and electoral punishment for misconduct are separate processes**. Greater public knowledge may change political attitudes without immediately changing the organizational conditions under which people vote.

The communication shift itself is substantial, but “online,” “social media” and “independent political influence” must be distinguished. Zrinjka Peruško’s Croatian analysis in the Reuters Institute’s *Digital News Report 2022* already identified online sources as the leading route to news and described expanding social-media use alongside declining television use. Yet online consumption includes the websites and social accounts of established news organizations. It cannot be treated as a direct measure of the replacement of journalism by independent influencers. [Peruško, Croatia, 2022](#).

Her 2025 report also shows the continuing strength of broadcasting. Within the survey, HRT had weekly offline reach of 45% and online reach of 22%; commercial television remained powerful. Overall trust in news stood at 36%, while only 6% reported paying for online news. These findings describe a mixed communication environment in which extensive digital use coexists with influential broadcasters and financially vulnerable journalism. [Peruško, Croatia, 2025](#).

In practice, political communication often moves through a circuit: a politician makes a statement; a broadcaster or portal selects it; supporters and opponents circulate excerpts; online controversy generates further journalistic coverage; the politician responds to that coverage.

The power to influence this circuit can belong to several different actors. A party may originate the message, a journalist may identify its significance, and an unofficial account may give it much greater reach. Counting only the final circulation point can therefore misidentify where political influence originated.

Andrew Chadwick’s *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power* (2013; second edition 2017) provides an appropriate general framework. It emphasizes the power of actors capable of combining older and newer communication practices. Applied to Croatia, it directs attention toward interactions among television, portals, party communication teams, activists and individual personalities. This is an application of Chadwick’s comparative theory, rather than a finding from a Croatian case study by him. Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System*.

Croatia’s digital expansion has also preserved older inequalities within the media system. The European University Institute’s **Media Pluralism Monitor 2026**, assessing developments in 2025, identifies continuing concerns about political influence over HRT and HINA

governance, litigation against journalists, concentration in audiovisual markets, and inadequate monitoring of digital advertising and online news distribution. It also records an improvement in transparency through the media ownership and financing database launched in April 2025. Media Pluralism Monitor, Croatia 2026.

The analytical implication is that moving communication online does not remove dependence on resources. Digital publishers still need revenue; investigative work requires staff and legal support; distribution depends partly on platform decisions. Local online media can be particularly exposed when their advertising markets are small.

Thus, Croatia’s political communication has become more accessible at the point of publication while remaining unequal in the ability to sustain reporting, purchase attention and maintain public visibility.

The most direct evidence about the relationship between platforms and electoral power comes from the 2024 TikTok campaign. Matej Mikašinović-Komšo’s study for Gong examined 76 accounts and 2,259 posts published between 1 March and 24 April 2024. Official political accounts accounted for 58.3% of recorded video plays, and unofficial accounts for 41.7%. Much unofficial content recirculated politicians’ statements.

Ivan Pernar had the largest following among the mapped political accounts—149,691 followers—and the highest number of video plays, but failed to enter parliament. Three of the ten most-followed political accounts represented unsuccessful electoral contenders. These are observations from a particular campaign sample, rather than population-wide audience measurements. [Mikašinović-Komšo, TikTok campaign study, 2024](#).

This evidence supports two propositions simultaneously. Outsiders can obtain substantial visibility. Established politicians also remain important producers of the material circulating through apparently decentralized networks.

The conversion problem deserves emphasis. A viewer may be a supporter, a critic, a curious spectator, a minor, or someone outside the relevant electorate. Even a sympathetic eligible voter may prefer another candidate when making an electoral choice. An audience becomes politically consequential through further steps that platform metrics alone do not reveal.

The principal Croatian political currents use this environment in different ways. The following is an analytical map of overlapping tendencies, rather than a claim that each constitutes a centrally coordinated bloc.

Political current	Principal organizing ideas	Relationship to parties and digital communication
HDZ’s governing conservatism	State continuity, national legitimacy, European integration, governing competence	Combines established territorial organization with professional communication
SDP and the parliamentary centre-left	Social fairness, secular public life, opposition to HDZ, institutional reform	Retains party structures but shares its potential audience with newer movements and prominent personalities

Political current	Principal organizing ideas	Relationship to parties and digital communication
Možemo! and the green municipal left	Public services, urban commons, ecology, equality, participatory politics	Converts civic networks and policy expertise into electoral organization
Most and conservative anti-establishment politics	Accountability, opposition to established elites, socially conservative positions	Combines local political credibility with highly personalized public communication
Homeland Movement and nationalist challengers	National sovereignty, identity, historical memory, criticism of mainstream conservatism	Mobilizes to HDZ's right, while coalition participation creates pressures for compromise
Conservative religious activism	Family, religious freedom, parental authority, opposition to secularizing reforms	Uses civic associations, campaigns and direct-democracy mechanisms to influence parties
Individual anti-establishment and influencer projects	Distrust of political elites, personal authenticity, issue-specific protest	Can achieve visibility quickly; organizational continuity and electoral conversion vary considerably

HDZ's continued importance comes partly from its capacity to combine different sources of legitimacy. National identity and European integration can be presented as mutually reinforcing: Croatia's statehood receives recognition and practical benefits through its place in European institutions. At the same time, a governing party can emphasize continuity, administrative experience and its ability to deliver projects.

The 2024 election illustrates the persistence of this organizational position. The HDZ-led coalition won 61 seats, the SDP-led coalition 42, the Homeland Movement-led coalition 14, Most's coalition 11, and Možemo! 10. Other lists won five seats, while eight seats represented national minorities. These are election results, not a statement of parliamentary group membership in September 2026. [Official State Electoral Commission report](#).

HDZ subsequently formed a government with the Homeland Movement, securing Andrej Plenković's third term. This demonstrated the continuing importance of coalition compatibility and parliamentary arithmetic after the campaign's public confrontations. [Reuters, government formation, 17 May 2024](#).

HDZ has also adapted to adversarial digital communication. In another Gong study, Mikašinović-Komšo examined 4,269 posts on its official Facebook account during 2020–2022, classifying 429 as denigrating. The study documents recurrent efforts to discredit political opponents through hostile characterizations. Its findings establish a communication pattern; they do not prove that hostility caused electoral support. [Mikašinović-Komšo, HDZ Facebook study, 2023](#).

This matters because digital confrontation is available to governing parties as well as challengers. An established party can present institutional competence to one audience while using aggressive partisan language to mobilize another.

Most illustrates the difficulty of translating anti-establishment legitimacy into participation in government. Marijana Grbeša and Berto Šalaj, in *"Populism in Croatia:*

The Curious Case of The Bridge (Most)”, analysed its early development and described it as a combination of centrist populism and anti-establishment reformism. Most condemned existing elites as incompetent or corrupt while also proposing cooperation with them to implement reforms.

Their distinction between anti-elitism and anti-establishment reform is valuable: criticism of existing politicians does not necessarily imply rejection of representative institutions or belief in a morally homogeneous people. Their classification concerns early Most and should not be projected unchanged onto its later development. [Grbeša and Šalaj, 2017 volume, published 2018](#).

My interpretation is that such parties face a recurring organizational dilemma. Remaining outside government protects the credibility of their criticism but limits their capacity to implement change. Entering government increases practical influence while exposing them to accusations of accommodation.

Personalized online communication can sharpen this dilemma. A politician builds support by demonstrating uncompromising opposition; coalition government then requires compromise. Followers accustomed to immediate confrontation may find negotiated outcomes less convincing.

The nationalist right also competes over ownership of national legitimacy. Its opportunity arises when some voters judge HDZ’s governing pragmatism or European orientation insufficiently protective of national priorities. Historical memory, sovereignty and cultural questions can then become grounds for challenging a party that itself claims strong national credentials.

Yet nationalist politics remains territorially embedded. **Mislav Stjepan Čagalj’s 2024 spatial study of the Homeland Movement’s 2020 electoral support** demonstrates the importance of examining local social characteristics and geographic variation. Its usefulness here is methodological: national online visibility cannot explain support without attention to where voters live and the social environments in which messages resonate. [Čagalj, 2024](#).

Coalition participation introduces a further distinction between public radicalism and governmental influence. A relatively small party may obtain significant bargaining power because its representatives are needed for a majority. Conversely, a large online constituency may bring little institutional influence if it does not produce seats or viable coalition relationships.

Conservative religious activism is one of Croatia’s clearest examples of political organization beyond electoral parties. Antonija Petričušić, Mateja Čehulić and Dario Čepo’s “Gaining Political Power by Utilizing Opportunity Structures” (2017) studies *U ime obitelji*—“In the Name of the Family”—within a broader religious-political movement.

They examine how conservative activists use civic organization and direct-democracy institutions to intervene in policy, alongside connections with international conservative initiatives. Their analysis shows that organized religious politics can influence legislation and public debate without depending exclusively on control of a major party. [Petričušić, Čehulić and Čepo, 2017](#).

The organizational significance is broader than any single campaign. Associations can formulate an issue, recruit participants, gather signatures, publicize arguments and create pressure that parties must answer. Digital communication extends these activities, but their effectiveness also depends on trust, repeated cooperation and recognizable organizational responsibility.

The Catholic Church, conservative civic organizations and right-wing parties should therefore be examined as interacting institutions. They have different responsibilities and interests; Catholics themselves do not constitute a uniform electorate. Treating them as one commanded network would obscure the actual mechanisms of influence.

Možemo! represents a different route from civic organization into public office. Its emergence is closely connected with the accumulation of environmental activism, struggles over urban development, student mobilization and other forms of civic engagement.

Danijela Dolenec, Karin Doolan and Tomislav Tomašević's "Contesting Neoliberal Urbanism on the European Semi-periphery: The Right to the City Movement in Croatia" (2017) is foundational for understanding this background. The authors connect urban conflicts with wider questions about political economy and democratic control. Tomašević's later political role also makes it important to recognize the overlap between scholarship and participation in the movement. Dolenec, Doolan and Tomašević, 2017.

Martin Sarnow and Norma Tiedemann subsequently examined Zagreb alongside Barcelona in *"Interrupting the neoliberal masculine state machinery?"* Their research documents how Zagreb je NAŠ! combined online programme development with discussions involving local residents, drawing on years of activism and international municipalist exchanges. They also analyse the constraints encountered inside public institutions, including centralized authority and bureaucratic practices. Their interpretation is explicitly materialist and feminist. [Sarnow and Tiedemann, 2023](#).

The resulting political mechanism can be understood as a conversion of civic experience into governing capacity. Activists acquire knowledge of planning procedures, public budgets, environmental disputes and administrative weaknesses. Communication makes this expertise publicly recognizable. Electoral organization then provides a route into institutions.

Once in office, the basis of legitimacy changes. Demonstrating that an existing administration has failed is different from maintaining transport, waste collection, public facilities and other services. Digital audiences become audiences of governmental performance.

Tomašević's reelection as Zagreb mayor in June 2025 demonstrates the durability of this municipal political project beyond its initial breakthrough. It does not establish that the same organizational model can be transferred easily to every Croatian locality or to national government. [City of Zagreb, mayor's biography](#).

For the SDP, the analytical implication is competition over who can credibly represent demands for change on the left. An established party can no longer assume that dissatisfaction with HDZ will automatically reinforce its position. New movements may have stronger credibility on particular issues, while established parties retain resources and recognition that remain useful for wider electoral coordination.

Personalized leadership creates another route through the political system, and Zoran Milanović is especially revealing. His reelection in January 2025, with approximately three-quarters of the valid runoff vote, illustrates the breadth that a presidential personality can achieve. That result cannot simply be treated as an equivalent parliamentary mandate for the party supporting him. [Official presidential biography](#), [Reuters, presidential election, January 2025](#).

The same person may attract voters through different combinations of opposition to the government, perceived independence, rhetorical style and judgments about the presidential role. Those combinations need not survive a change in office, election type or coalition arrangement.

Silvija Vuković and Nico Carpentier’s 2023 study of Facebook followers of Milanović and Miro Bulj helps explain the relationship involved. Based on twenty qualitative interviews, it identifies a combination of “vertical” expectations of exceptional leadership and “horizontal” identification with an ordinary person. Followers can value both authority and perceived closeness. This is qualitative evidence about a relationship, rather than a population-wide estimate of voting effects. [Vuković and Carpentier, 2023](#).

This suggests that direct communication can personalize authority without making decision-making more participatory. A follower may experience greater closeness to a leader while having little influence over that leader’s choices.

The Croatian evidence therefore raises a question about the internal distribution of power: when personal audiences become valuable political resources, how much authority moves from party bodies toward recognizable individuals?

The intellectual background also includes struggles over the institutions that define credible knowledge. Universities and scholarly journals remain important, but ideas reach politically relevant audiences through publishers, broadcasters, news portals, civic organizations and individual communicators. Some actors develop arguments; others translate them into accessible language; still others give them emotional force or repeated visibility.

A particularly revealing Croatian case concerns Wikipedia. The **Wikimedia Foundation’s 2021 assessment** concluded that a group of administrators exercised undue control over Croatian Wikipedia during at least 2011–2020, distorting material in ways aligned with radical-right narratives and obstructing dissenting contributors. It also recorded subsequent corrective changes. [Wikimedia Foundation, Croatian Wikipedia assessment](#).

This illustrates political influence through the apparent background knowledge of society. A person need not encounter explicit electoral propaganda to absorb a politically shaped account of history. Control over reference material can affect what later arguments appear plausible.

Leon Cvrtić’s “Truth Politics and Social Media: Towards a Foucauldian Approach” (2024) provides a relevant theoretical perspective. He examines how institutional and technological arrangements organize the conditions under which claims acquire visibility and authority, using Facebook’s News Feed as an example. His article is a theoretical contribution, rather than a measurement of Croatian electoral effects. [Cvrtić, 2024](#).

The importance of this perspective is that “direct” communication remains mediated. Editorial selection may be partly bypassed, but platform ranking, account administration, recommendation systems and audience practices still structure what becomes visible.

These changes affect the functioning of the Croatian state through several distinct mechanisms. First, the public agenda becomes more open to interventions originating outside government and established party leaderships. A local grievance can obtain national recognition before institutions have prepared a response.

Second, political actors face pressure to answer quickly and personally. This can improve responsiveness, but it can also favour symbolic confrontation over the slower work needed to resolve administrative problems.

Third, issues acquire different forms as they move between arenas. A campaign may express a demand as a moral imperative; a ministry must translate it into a rule, budget or administrative procedure; a court may assess whether the resulting measure is legally permissible. Political communication influences these transitions without eliminating their institutional differences.

Fourth, small organized groups can remain influential even when mass attention is elsewhere. Electoral publicity is only one route into policy.

A valuable demonstration comes from **Petra Đurman, Anamarija Musa and Tereza Rogić Lugarić’s study of Croatian e-consultations in fiscal matters (2023)**. Their research found limited participation—an average of seven participants per Ministry of Finance consultation in 2016–2018—but also relatively organized and informed contributions associated with administrative responsiveness. These are historical observations from the study, not current participation figures. [Durman, Musa and Rogić Lugarić, 2023](#).

This identifies another consequence of digitalization: specialized organizations can use electronic channels to intervene in policymaking. Expertise and sustained participation may matter more in this arena than follower counts.

Fifth, governing institutions continue to distinguish between different kinds of electoral authority. A presidential mandate, a municipal victory and a parliamentary majority provide different powers. Public prominence cannot make them interchangeable.

Extra-party mobilization remains significant in the most recent evidence. On 5 September 2026, Reuters reported tens of thousands participating in Zagreb’s “Walk for Lika,” demanding action over waste stored near Gospić. The participation of actor Rade Šerbedžija also illustrated the connection between civic protest and cultural visibility. The report establishes substantial mobilization around an environmental grievance; it does not establish that social media caused it. [Reuters, 5 September 2026](#).

The political significance of such events depends on what follows: sustained organization, a specific policy response, electoral recruitment, or dissipation after the immediate controversy. Demonstration size alone cannot determine which trajectory will occur.

For a systematic reading programme, the Croatian literature is most useful when its different explanatory levels are combined.

Research problem	Most useful authors and works discussed above
Persistence of inherited political divisions	Henjak and Čular, <i>Old Cleavages and New Parties</i>
War experience and electoral geography	Glaurdić and Vuković, <i>Voting after war</i>
National memory and legitimate political speech	Jović, <i>Rat i mit</i>
Local resources and incumbent survival	Vuković, <i>The political economy of local government in Croatia</i>
Populism and anti-establishment reform	Grbeša and Šalaj, <i>The Curious Case of The Bridge</i>
Conservative organization outside parties	Petričušić, Čehulić and Čepo, <i>Gaining Political Power by Utilizing Opportunity Structures</i>
Civic movements becoming electoral organizations	Dolenec, Doolan and Tomašević; Sarnow and Tiedemann
News consumption and media-system change	Peruško's Croatian <i>Digital News Report</i> analyses
Actual platform activity during campaigns	Mikašinović-Komšo's TikTok and Facebook studies
Followers' relationships with political personalities	Silvija Vuković and Nico Carpentier
Digital access to administrative policymaking	Đurman, Musa and Rogić Lugarić
Platforms and the production of authoritative knowledge	Cvrtila, <i>Truth Politics and Social Media</i>

The principal unresolved research task is to connect these levels empirically. Croatia needs more longitudinal evidence following the same individuals from online exposure through political identification, participation and voting, alongside organizational research into how parties and movements recruit people, finance activity and retain supporters.

Such research would distinguish three developments that current discussion often conflates: voters changing their political commitments, voters choosing new representatives for familiar commitments, and existing organizations learning to communicate through new channels. The Croatian evidence examined here is especially strong for the second and third processes; the extent of the first requires more precise measurement.