The Freedom of Speech Argument in the Face of Digital Legislation:

An Analysis of the French Far-Right Discourses

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Abstract: This thesis examines how the policies and media discourse of the French radical right mobilize the argument of freedom of expression in response to the European Union's attempts to regulate the digital space, particularly through the Digital Services Act. In a context marked by the fragmentation of the information space, the rise of populism, and post-truth dynamics, the study questions the discursive strategies that allow regulation to be presented as a form of ideological censorship. Based on a corpus of parliamentary discourse analyses and press articles, the analysis tends to use the critical discourse analysis methods developed by Teun A. van Dijk, articulating this approach with a number of theoretical contributions, in particular those of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Wendy Brown. The results highlight a set of recurring processes: lexicalized alarmism, the moral reversal of democratic principles, and a populist grammar that pits "the people" against "Brussels technocracy." Far from being anecdotal, these discourses are experienced as efforts to destabilize an order or a project in which the defense of freedom of expression constitutes, in a context of public regulation of digital technology, a counteroffensive.

Keywords: DSA – Freedom of expression – Digital regulation – Far-right discourse - Populism

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1. Introduction

1.1. From digital utopia to informational disillusionment

The Internet is yet another invention born of military experience. Its development took place against the backdrop of the Cold War, with the appearance of APRANET[1] (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), designed to guarantee exchanges in the event of nuclear war (Castells, 2002, p.12). It was in a spirit of openness to the world that researchers and engineers seized upon these remnants of infrastructure, developed in wartime, to propose an Internet that was intended to be free, participative and above all universal, thus proposing Berners-Lee's World Wide Web in December 1990 (Castells, 2002, p.15). Through this computer and collaborative development, there was a profound hope of changing the world through computer communication.

The first decisive step in the history of online communities occurred in the 1980s with the emergence of Bulletin Board Systems (BBS)[2]. Although technically rudimentary, these early systems nonetheless sparked growing interest in computer-mediated communication. What really drove this shift was the rise of easier-to-use visual interfaces, paired with the spread of the World Wide Web (Biały, 2017, p. 69). Suddenly, interacting online didn't feel technical or obscure, it became something people could navigate with ease. As these tools became part of everyday life, more and more people started paying attention to what it meant to communicate through a screen[3]. Social networks therefore gradually shifted from being technical tools to extend offline sociability to becoming new digital public spaces—interactive, participatory, and globally connected (Biały, 2017, p. 69). These social networking sites multiplied rapidly, attracting millions of users and becoming an integral part of the everyday lives of people worldwide (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 210).

They evolve from being merely an extension of sociability to becoming the pulsing centre of a new digital public space. Humankind is entering an age of radical shifts in communication modes: text, images, sounds and speech are uniting in real time on globalised interactive devices. This technological mutation marks a historically significant cultural shift (Castells, 2009, p.356–357).

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[1] ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) was the very first computer network to use packet switching, designed in 1969 in the United States under the name DARPA. Although it was developed during the Cold War, its development was essentially entrusted to civilian researchers and its initial objective was to facilitate communications between scientific institutions. It formed the technical basis on which the Internet would later be developed (Castells, 2002, pp. 12-14).

[2] BBS (Bulletin Board Systems) functioned as early virtual gathering spaces where users could share files, such as games, and post messages for others. While they clearly fostered a form of social exchange, the interaction remained constrained and sluggish due to the technological limitations of the time. More notably, the social connections were largely anonymous and unpredictable, as users had no way of knowing who was on the other end of the line (Biały, 2017, p. 69).

[3] The launch of the website SixDegrees.com in 1997—often regarded as the first true official social network—marked a turning point. This site allowed users to create personal profiles and explicitly build their networks of contacts (Biały, 2017, p. 69). It thus laid the foundations for social networking sites that would soon permeate users' social lives.

Everyone with a computer and an internet connection has the ability to create, share, express themselves, socialise and identify themselves in a connected digital space. The internet is often referred to as a limitless virtual world. The rise of social media has profoundly changed our relationship with reality, blurring the boundaries between the digital sphere and lived experience. These platforms are not merely parallel virtual spaces; they extend our social identities and modes of interaction. The "online world" and the "real world" are intertwined, offering everyone the opportunity to participate in transnational projects, undertake remote actions, and expand their social circles beyond spatial and temporal constraints.

As the years went by, the Internet and social networks developed and became symbols of an even freer, even more capitalist world. However, the promise of a freer world is gradually beginning to reveal its own contradictions. As the power of platforms continues to grow, critical voices are being heard: who really acts in these digital spaces? Is this degree of freedom real for everyone? Thus, at the heart of the utopia of an open world, another world is gradually emerging: a world marked by increased concentration of power, commodification of exchanges, and increased exposure to information manipulation.

In this context, 2016 appears to be a turning point. The world could only watch in amazement as Donald Trump was elected president of the United States and Britain voted to leave the EU. In 2016, obervers, scholars and citizens realised that perhaps, the Internet was not perfectly understood or controlled. With hindsight, public opinion and academic analyses have expressed alarm at the scale of disinformation campaigns that have impacted reality so greatly: influencing voting behaviour, triggering major political decisions and contributing to the long-term reconfiguration of the institutional and social frameworks within which our societies evolve. This marks a shift from "networked empowerment" to what scholars have termed an era of "post-truth politics," where affect and identity often outweigh facts in shaping public discourse (Revault d'Alonnes, 2018, pp. 27-28). It has since becom clearer that the the Internet and social media once celebrated during the Arab Spring as vehicles of liberation were not merely instruments for circumventing censorship. At the time, they were praised for enabling citizens to bypass state control, coordinate protests, and bring their struggles onto the global stage. The digital promise of empowerment, it turns out, has paved the way for new forms of extraction and behavioural control, what Zuboff (2015, p. 81) calls "surveillance capitalism," a logic of accumulation based on the commodification of personal data and the prediction of human behaviour.

In 2019, the terrorist attack in New Zealand that was broadcast live on Facebook revealed flaws in the moderation and regulation of major platforms once again. Later, the advent of the pandemic has catalyzed the digitalisation of the world (Kudyba, 2020, p. 284). While the pandemic has paralysed the global economy, big tech companies have reaped the benefits of this global crisis (Hossain et al., 2023, p. 7), with their CEOs enjoying status similar to certain heads of state.

Faced with these uncontrolled and uncontrollable phenomena, European authorities are struggling to react. Until now, moderation policies on platforms have been decided by the platforms themselves: essentially through 'notice-and-takedown' systems, automatic moderation filters based on machine-learning techniques, or human moderation (De Streel et al., 2020, p.10). Several authorities are warning of the failure of platforms to moderate illegal content while respecting users' fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression or the right to information (De Streel et al., 2020, p.10). Thus was born the Digital Services Act (DSA)[4]: adopted in 2022 and came fully into effect in 2024. This regulation introduces a clear set of obligations for some of the most significant platforms regarding the timely removal of illegal content, transparency, and the management of systemic risk. The aim is to address the existing imbalance between the daily users, the companies, and public authorities and to ensure that fundamental rights are at the heart of the European digital space. When it was first proposed in 2022, the bill seemed to be relatively well received by European member states, despite already generating some opposition. When it came to a vote, the same voices expressed outrage. By 2024, discussions about tightening and revising the DSA had taken a completely different turn, given the transformation of the Western political context.

The European elections of June 2024 indeed usher in a new Europe—one marked by a strengthened conservatism. In France, the far right parties such as Rassemblement National, Reconquête (along with their allies including Marion Maréchal Le Pen and her future party, Identités-Libertés) are gaining ground not only within the European Parliament but also within the national public debate. This context encourages a hardening of oppositional discourse toward European digital regulation, particularly the DSA. What is noticeable is that these arguments are structured primarily around the theme of freedom of expression.

This discourse strategy does not emerge in a vacuum. In France, a similar process is taking place at the national level, where the regulation of audiovisual content by the ARCOM[5] (the French Regulatory Authority for Audiovisual and Digital Communication) is regularly criticized by the conservative right and the far right. Members of the Rassemblement National and Reconquête parties have accused the ARCOM of stifling pluralism, silencing dissenting opinions, and promoting "dominant discourse." These accusations come at a time when French audiovisual media is

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[4] The Digital Services Act (DSA), or Regulation (EU) 2022/2065, is a text adopted by the European Union in October 2022 that came into full effect in February 2024. It is a major reform of the legal framework governing platforms, particularly very large platforms such as social networks, marketplaces, and search engines. The aim is to increase the responsibility of stakeholders in regulating illegal content and systemic risks. The regulation imposes obligations such as the rapid removal of certain information, transparency on algorithms, and regular assessment of the risks associated with disinformation or polarization. *For further details, see* European Parliament & Council of the European Union (2022).

[5] ARCOM (Autorité de régulation de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique) is an independent French administrative authority created in 2022, resulting from the merger of CSA (Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel) and HADOPI. It is responsible for ensuring pluralism of opinion in the audiovisual media, protecting freedom of expression, combating hate speech, and supervising the moderation of online content on major digital platforms (Autorité de régulation de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique, 2022).

increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few billionaires, sparking public debate about editorial bias and the lack of ideological diversity on mainstream platforms. Under pressure from both the left and the right, ARCOM is beginning to strengthen its regulation and investigations. These tensions are fueling a growing perception, particularly among far-right groups, that public regulatory bodies are instruments of ideological control. This perception is consistent with the discursive strategies analyzed by Schilk (2025, pp. 3-6), who shows how the European 'New Right[6]' constructs a worldview in which institutions are presented as ideologically captured and fundamentally hostile to the people. In this narrative, institutional regulation is not perceived as neutral, but as the expression of a hegemonic agenda; opposing it then becomes an act of cultural resistance.

The national perception that audiovisual regulation is a form of censorship directly echoes opposition at the European level to the DSA; together, these perceptions contribute to a wider discourse opposing institutional interference in the public sphere, at both the national and transnational levels.

At the same time, on the international stage, the re-election of Trump in November 2024 and the termination of the collaboration between Meta and fact-checkers contribute to a climate conducive to digital space deregulation. In France, within this broader trend, claims of creeping censorship denounced by ultra-conservative actors under the pretext of Brussels' leadership further strengthen the movement. In response, the European Union clings to what it sees as its most valuable democratic asset: digital public authority, where factual truth and fundamental rights still have a place.

1.2. Research questions and objectives

The aim of this study is to analyze how far-right political and media actors in France mobilize the argument of freedom of expression to challenge European reforms in digital regulation, particularly the DSA. Can we speak of a real concern about the potential weakening of that fundamental freedom, freedom of expression? Or can we speak of concern at attempts to regulate tools which, by their increasingly Manichean nature, serve to propagate, among other things, conservative and even ultra-conservative ideas? Through this study, I attempt to deconstruct the far right's argumentation in order to understand its underlying logics and foundations in the context of an electric Europe, especially in the context of an uncontrollable digital landscape. This work also aims to study these discourses through fundamental notions that are indispensable to the treatment of the

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[6] According to Schilke (2025, pp. 2-5), the New Right presents itself less as a traditional political movement than as a community of storytellers engaged in a long-term cultural battle. It operates on the margins of discourse, strategically disseminating structured and repetitive narratives of crisis in order to shape an anti-liberal worldview that could gradually establish itself as dominant cultural knowledge.

subject: the question of freedom of expression, in a context of post-truth fueled by an information disorder.

At a time when post-truth dynamics are shaping political communication, it is important for the future of democracy in Europe to understand and resituate this notion of freedom of speech in a context where digital platforms constitute a relatively new space for public debate in human history. By analysing French far-right political and media discourse, this study aims to show whether opposition to stricter reforms of the digital giants stems from a genuine concern for democracy and fundamental rights, or whether it serves more to protect unregulated information flows.

This study contributes to the literature on digital governance, political communication and post-truth politics by examining the ways in which French ultra conservative actors in Europe use free speech-related terminology to oppose digital regulation, and in particular the DSA. It uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine how post-truth narratives legitimised in political discourse and the media.

This leads to the following research question:

How do far-right political and media actors in France use the argument of freedom of speech to contest the European Union's efforts to regulate digital platforms?

This indirectly involves understanding: How does criticism of the DSA mobilize the vocabulary of censorship, and according to what discursive logic? What types of arguments or representations are used to question the legitimacy of European institutions in the digital sphere? How does the reference to freedom of expression relate to other ideological or political issues promoted by the far right? To what extent do these discourses fit into a broader context of institutional mistrust, media polarization, and blurring between truth and opinion?

To answer these questions, the research is divided into four major parts. The second chapter outlines the theoretical framework articulating the notions of post-truth, populism and digital fragmentation is proposed to resituate the analyzed discourses in their ideological ecosystem. The thrid chapter presents the chosen methodology, by detailing the composition of the corpus and the principles of critical analysis of discourse. The fourth chapter addresses the analysis of the results by focusing on the argumentative logics and rhetorical processes implemented by the French far-right movement.

2. Theoretical Framework

Understanding how the French far right uses the argument of freedom of expression against European digital regulation requires analytical perspectives that bring together discursive dynamics and the broader reconfiguration of our information space. Within the following framework, five interdependent subsections are constructed, each exploring a key dimension of the current communicative ecosystem in which this discourse takes place.

The first of these subsections recalls the historical and strategic trajectory of the far right, emphasizing how it is gradually becoming mainstream. This contextualization is important in that it gives us the keys to understanding how a political class is able to put forward seemingly liberal arguments, such as the defense of freedom of expression, while remaining within a deeply reactionary ideological framework.

The second part deals with the phenomenon of fragmentation in the digital space. Several dynamics are characteristic of this phenomenon, including ideological polarization, content personalization, and the creation of echo chambers by algorithms. These actors exploit dynamics that value emotion, and they seem to consider rational deliberation an outdated process.

The third section allows us to deepen this reflection by articulating populism, disinformation, and conspiracy theories, which are both the products and drivers of this deregulated communicational order. Populist discourse thrives on the opposition between "the people" and "the elites" and on the systematic questioning of institutions. These dynamics are often exploited by the far right to oppose any regulation, positioning themselves as the last defenders of freedom against an oppressive technostructure.

The fourth section focuses on the growing discrediting of truth, the normalization of doubt, and discussions and debates about facts themselves: the decline of debate based on factual truths. The far right is not only a spectator to the crisis of truth, it is one of its main actors.

Finally, the fifth section looks at freedom of expression, not as an abstract legal category but as a field of conflict, performative and ideologically marked. Supposedly in the name of this same fundamental freedom, many far-right actors are attacking the legitimacy of the Digital Services Act. However, as critical thinkers such as Foucault, Butler, and Brown have pointed out, the invocation of fundamental rights is almost never neutral: it is a weapon in the battle to legitimize certain statements and discredit others.

2.1 The strategic evolution of French far-right

Following the May 1968 uprisings, largely driven by left-wing movements, Jean-Marie Le Pen, a former deputy and a figure of the nationalist far right in postwar France, found himself in a

period of uncertainty. He could either engage politically on the side of Charles de Gaulle and then oppose his long-time enemies on the left. Or he could stand with the Gaullist regime. Ultimately, he chose the latter. This represented a schism within the French far right, as Le Pen refused to support left-wing movements (Igounet, 2014, p. 9). The tipping point came in March 1972 with the establishment of the Front National, just a few months after Charles de Gaulle signed the Common Programme of the Left. The goal at the time was to rally all French people, whether nationals or nationalists, and Jean-Marie Le Pen was appointed president of this party—the Front National (Igounet, 2014, pp. 9–10).

The Front National thus followed a dual path: on the one hand, it participated in the democratic process, seeking recognition as a legitimate political party; on the other hand, it promoted radical, anti-system, protest-oriented ideals that it aimed to normalize and "de-demonize" (Dézé, 2012, p. 27). Even at that time, recurring themes were already visible in the political discourse delivered during campaign rallies: insecurity, immigration, and abortion. In the 1973 legislative elections, the Front National ran under the slogan "Defend the French!" This revealed the general line that would guide the party's actions in the years to come: a strong executive, proportional representation in parliament, protection of agriculture, reaffirmation of family and school values, a foreign policy serving French interests, a confederated Europe respectful of national differences, the creation of a special commission on voluntary termination of pregnancy, and the limitation of "illegal immigration," particularly from the African continent (Delwit, 2012, pp. 13–14). The desire to return to family and agricultural values, a vision of a strong central French state, and a rejection of immigration in favor of national priority are clearly observable.

This discourse fits into a rhetorical strategy identified by Pierre-André Taguieff, in which national-populism relies on a deliberate simplification of reality designed to trigger emotional rather than rational adhesion. The FN thus mobilizes figures of threat (such as insecurity, immigration, moral decline, etc,…) to reinforce a sense of identity crisis and legitimize a collective defensive reaction, often invoking so-called "common sense" against "cosmopolitan elites" (Taguieff, 1984, pp. 114–117). This rhetoric is all the more effective as it activates dominant social passions, shaped by a strongly oral and emotional discourse. In this logic, the FN's discourse operates as an ideological naturalization of inequality and implicit racialization, without explicitly referencing a racist doctrine (Mayer, 2002, pp. 508–509).

In January 2011, Marine Le Pen, Jean-Marie Lepen's daughter, was elected president of the Front National with over 80% of the vote at a party congress. The section of the party platform on the EU was titled 'For a Europe of Free Nations': the intention was clear : national sovereignty comes at a cost. After consulting with party members about the restructuring process, Marine Le Pen changed the party's name to 'Rassemblement National' in 2018, though its core political stance remained largely unchanged. This strategy of partisan normalization, initiated during Marine Le Pen's early years of leadership, gradually aligned with new modes of mobilization and discourse dissemination,

particularly on social media. The recent rise of the French far right must be understood within a broader reconfiguration of the digital media landscape in which it has steadily taken root. As Abdine et al. (2022, p.7) point out, support communities for Éric Zemmour, another key figure of the identitarian far right, and Marine Le Pen on Twitter form two distinct political clusters, structured by emotionally charged campaign hashtags like #zemmourpresident or #dimanchejevotemarine, which account for nearly all their respective interactions.

This phenomenon is part of a broader dynamic of ideological structuring within the online media space. According to Cointet et al. (2021, p.9), far-right identitarian websites such as *Fdesouche*[7] occupy a "counter-informational space" at the periphery of the media system, but they possess their own ecosystem of amplifiers on Facebook and Twitter, especially during periods of intense social conflict. This configuration creates the conditions for an informational bubble, where legitimacy no longer stems from traditional media but from interpretation and internal resonance within their own communities.

The recent electoral results of these parties—just under 35% of the combined vote share for RN and cête! in the 2024 European elections[8] (Ministère de l'Intérieur, 2024)—should thus not be seen as a surprise, but as the outcome of a long-term discursive strategy. The French far right has succeeded in placing its core themes at the heart of the political agenda by combining emotional content, "outrage marketing"[9] strategies, and digital disintermediation through everyday communication channels (Abdine et al., 2022, p. 5).

2.2 A fragmented digital information space

Vehemence and impulsiveness are observable across the political spectrum. Such rhetorical intensity is also commonplace on television talk shows that seek high audience ratings, and is

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[7] FDeSouche (short for Français de souche, or "ethnic French") is a far-right news aggregation blog created in 2006, known for relaying anti-immigration content and highlighting crimes allegedly committed by immigrants. It plays a central role in the French identitarian ecosystem, shaping online discourse through selective media curation and implicit racial framing. (Cointet et al., 2021, p. 10)

[8] In the 2024 European elections, the two far-right French lists: La France revient ! led by Jordan Bardella and Marine Le Pen (RN), and La France fière led by Marion Maréchal (Identité Libertés) liberté and supported by Éric Zemmour (Reconquête), together gathered around 9.1 million votes, representing more than 33% of valid ballots cast and securing 35 seats in the European Parliament.
Source: Ministère de l'Intérieur, européennes 2024. Accessible via https://www.resultats-elections.interieur.gouv.fr/europeennes2024

[9] Jeffrey M. Berry and Sarah Sobieraj (2014) have written a book on this phenomenon, which they call the "outrage industry." According to them, this outrage industry is characteristic of a form of political communication marked by the deliberate staging of intense emotions (anger, fear, indignation,…), polarized discourse, personal attacks, exaggerations, and dramatizations, all aimed at reaching the audience and securing its engagement (Berry & Sobieraj, 2014, pp. 6–9).

increasingly visible on social media platforms. The debates surrounding digital regulation are thus taking place within a fractured media and informational landscape that warrants careful analysis.

Several researchers have attempted to describe and conceptualise this ambient polarisation. For instance, Cass R. Sunstein (2018, p.68) argues that deliberating with like-minded individuals can result in group polarization, whereby individuals 'move towards a more extreme position in the direction they were already inclined to take. Sunstein also discusses the balkanisation[10] of discourse (pp. 66–68) and uses historical metaphors of geopolitical fragmentation to describe the increasing ideological segmentation of the public sphere.

The emergence of digital platforms has dramatically increased an individual's ability to personalise their media spaces to various extents. Rather than being presented in a centralised manner, as with television or print media, where individuals consume a stream of information with its supporting conditions and conventions directly in front of them, today's users are inundated with a large flow of fluid, abundant and ideologically diverse content. According to the 2024 Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 66% of users now consume news mainly via short videos on platforms such as youtube, Tiktok, and Instagram[11]. Sunstein (2018, p.67) argues that self-selective exposure of this sort not only promotes niche information ecosystems, but also means that they become increasingly ideologically crystallised.

At the same time, various studies have examined the mechanisms of platforms that promote this process. Hashtags, for example, are intended to facilitate discovery and serendipity (Sunstein, 2018, p. 79), but serve to promote ideological clustering. Yardi and Boyd's (2010) study of pro-life and pro-choice interactions on Twitter, for instance, found that users primarily interacted with like-minded individuals and established group barriers rather than bridging divides (Yardi & boyd, 2010, as cited in Sustein, 2018, p. 81). These processes draw on the concept of homophily[12], which was first theorised by Lazarsfeld in 1955.

Some theorists argue that homophily is now a central aspect of platform design. Lukasik and Galli (2022, p. 116) describe a 'homophilic strategy', whereby platforms actively use similarity to maximise engagement. This finding is supported by Hartmann et al. (2025, pp. 16-17), whose systematic review suggests that algorithmic recommendation systems create echo chambers. While some platforms, such as Reddit, promote a more diverse range of content, others, such as YouTube,

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[10] Sustein borrows the term "balkanization," which first emerged at the end of World War I to describe the violent geopolitical fragmentation associated with the Balkan region (Capdepuy & Jesné, 2012, p. 3). Later, the term was reclaimed by Kwame Nkrumah—this time in the context of African unification—as a metaphor for political and territorial "fragmentation" (Capdepuy & Jesné, 2012, p. 9).

[11] Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Eddy, K., & Nielsen, R. K. (2024). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024* (p.10). Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024

[12] This is defined as the tendency to associate with similar others. Contemporary scholarship still addresses the idea of homophily (Baccara & Yariv, 2013), and it is algorithmically multiplied through digital infrastructures.

have amplified content from far-right ideologies and fostered ideological closure (p. 17). The review also finds that psychological tendencies (e.g. avoidance and self-censorship) and sociocultural contexts contribute to echo chambers (pp. 16–17), in addition to algorithmic factors.

These closed contexts produce measurable outcomes. A full one-third of the 129 studies reviewed by Hartmann et al. established a link between echo chambers and increasing polarisation (p. 18). Other studies have linked echo chambers to an increased belief in misinformation as it circulates unchallenged and in an emotionally charged manner within homogeneous settings (Del Vicario et al., 2016, p. 556). Furthermore, Choi et al. (2020, p.4) found that virality often originates from highly engaged clusters of users. Several studies highlight the role of echo chambers in exacerbating populist and extremist tendencies (Hartmann et al., 2025, p. 19). For instance, Boutyline and Willer (2017, p. 553) observe that conservative or radical users are more likely than moderates to create ideologically homogeneous networks, resulting in increased polarization and political mobilisation. Similarly, Bright (2018, pp.18-20) finds that users with extreme views are much less exposed to dissenting information, which compounds ideological silos.

While the above position illustrates some psychological and algorithmic mechanisms of polarisation, other researchers present ideological and structural mechanisms of polarisation. For example, political theorist Jodi Dean (2009, p.51) developed the concept of 'communicative capitalism' to describe how political expression is commodified and neutralised by digital infrastructures. According to Dean, ideals of participation, access and inclusion are overshadowed by a logic of circulation, in which circulation is prioritised over the reasons for gathering and thinking collectively. Visibility, engagement and affect then become a form of political subjectivity in their own right. However, her framework shifts attention from individual behaviour to the conditions, pressures and incentives that encourage performativity rather than deliberation.

Dean's analysis is useful for understanding how far-right actors strategically leverage freedom of speech. It provides an opportunity to consider such discourses as being structurally rooted in platform logics rather than as simply deviant ideological expressions. The amplification of outrage, the weaponisation of speech are not merely rhetorical adaptations; they are expressions of a digital context that prioritises visibility and affect over political expression itself. This will aid the development of the analytical approach presented in the empirical chapters.

2.3 Populism, conspiracy theories, and misinformation

On X (formerly Twitter), Thierry Breton, a key player in the design and promotion of the DSA, stated that "The #DSA is here to protect free speech against arbitrary decisions, and at the same

time protect our citizens & democracies." This statement clearly illustrates the desire of the initiators of this regulation to protect European democratic principles from infringement. This is a legitimate desire when the systematic review of almost 500 studies examining the links between media use and various dimensions of democratic functioning carried out by Lorenz-Spreen et al. (2022) is considered. In their review, they warn about the double-edged nature of digital media and the impact it can have on the health of our democracies. On the one hand, clear evidence shows that digital media are associated with considerable progress in terms of political participation (p.83), while other, slightly less clear evidence also suggests an increase in political knowledge and greater exposure to different points of view (p.83). On the other hand, there are mixed signals showing an increase in hatred, polarization, and populism associated with social media. Lorenz-Sreen et al. (2022) warn of the general trend: "digital media use is associated with eroding the 'glue that keeps democracies together': trust in political institutions" (p. 83).

The close links between social media and populism are not a myth; they are now well established. The more we immerse ourselves in a digital world, the more populism seems to gain momentum. Some researchers and politicians do not hesitate to describe this phenomenon as the globalization of populism (N'Dah-Sékou & Lavat, 2024, p. 1). The term "populism" or "populist" is used in many ways but remains difficult to define. Few claim to be populist, and even populists recognized by researchers, such as Juan Domingo Perón or the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, who was assassinated in 2002, did not identify with populism (Mudde, 2017, p. 15). Clarifying the term is important because of its recurrence in analysis. The approach chosen is Mudde's (2017) ideationalist approach. According to him, "populism is a 'thin ideology that views society as divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elite', and asserts that politics should be the expression of the general will of the people'" (p. 19).

 In his ideational approach, Cas Mudde (2017, pp. 19-20) defines populism as a "low-density" ideology that pits a morally pure people against a corrupt elite, while asserting that politics should express the general will of the people. This definition has the advantage of showing that populism has no ideological content of its own: it can be linked to various ideologies, both left-wing and right-wing, depending on the context. It is precisely this plasticity that makes its uses so transversal across the political spectrum. However, this research focuses on a specific form: far-right populism, as expressed in the discourse of the French radical right. The latter is based on an ethno-cultural conception of the people, hostility towards transnational elites, and a rhetoric of fear. As Wodak (2015, pp. 2-4, pp. 6-7) points out, right-wing populist parties in Europe systematically resort to figures of threat, discursive victimization strategies, and narratives of exclusion that fuel an imaginary of permanent crisis. These discursive processes will be at the heart of the analysis.

It is through this perpetual recontextualization of the elite that populism draws its strength via social media. Every event, every news item becomes a pretext for comments and reactions. Political leaders quickly understood that social media constituted exceptional vectors of ideological diffusion,

and have seized this opportunity to expand their influence—particularly parties with extremist ideologies that previously lacked visibility in traditional media.

A windfall for populist practitioners: the promotion by recommendation systems on major platforms of controversial and negative content. This is, in any case, what Chavalarias et al. (2023, pp.2-3) observe through an analysis of platform recommendation systems that account for human cognitive biases. Indeed, the premise of their study is based on a well-known psychological phenomenon developed by Paul Rozin and Edward Rozyman in 2001: the negativity bias. It is a cognitive phenomenon that leads humans to focus more on negative information than on positive or neutral information (p. 2). Controversial and toxic content would therefore logically generate more engagement from users, and would consequently be recommended more often. Chavalarias et al. confirm this: "as soon as users have a slight negativity bias, recommender systems that seek to solely maximize users' engagement lead to an overexposure to negativity, a phenomenon called algorithmic negativity bias" (p. 3). This phenomenon, combined with homophily and other explanatory factors, partly accounts for a generalized polarization, but also demonstrates the reasons behind the success of populist narratives rooted in opposition and distrust.

2.4 The discrediting of truth

A prosperous period for the populist surge was one marked by distrust, by a generalized atmosphere of doubt: the Covid-19 pandemic. Among many citizens, a prudent sense of reserve evolved into a deeper mistrust toward established institutions. As noted by Stecula and Pickup (2021, p. 2) (focusing on the United States), this mistrust—sustained by the selective consumption of conservative media—facilitated adherence to conspiratorial narratives regarding the origin or treatment of the virus.

Social media completed the picture, helping cement certain beliefs into fully formed alternative realities, disregarding factual updates and expert arguments. These conspiratorial beliefs had concrete consequences: conspiracy theorists tended to not rigorously adopt the behaviors recommended by experts (pp. 6–7). That said, Uscinski et al. (2022, p.17) temper the idea of an explosive rise in conspiracism resulting from the Covid-19 period. Through their comparative longitudinal analysis of conspiracy theory beliefs, they assert that belief in conspiracy theories has not increased globally. However, the authors do warn of the worrying ubiquity and persistence of conspiracism (p. 17).

Conspiracism transforms beliefs into alternative realities. While, according to Uscinski et al., it cannot be definitively stated that adherence to conspiracy theories has risen in recent years, there is nonetheless a general trend of distorting reality—often for political or ideological ends—making a

noticeable comeback. This trend is accompanied by a broader, more complex phenomenon, widely studied and highly discussed in recent years: post-truth. This notion holds particular relevance to our research, as it is within this context of an epistimic crisis.

In his book The Post-Truth Era (2004), Ralph Keyes already called for a discursive space of imprecision and ambiguity, which he described in essence as follows: in the past, a distinction was made between truth and falsehood; now, truth, lies, and dubious statements coexist, so anecdotal that they escape evaluation as false statements (Keyes, 2004, cited by Revault d'Allonnes, 2018, p. 28). Myriam Revault d'Allonnes (2018) describes the age of "post-truth" as:

The blurring of boundaries between true and false, honesty and dishonesty, fiction and non-fiction. From this arises a fragile social structure built on distrust. When a certain number of individuals begin to spread fictions as if they were real facts, society is struck at its very foundations. And it would completely collapse if we were to assume at every moment that others are just as likely to speak falsehoods as to speak the truth.[13] (p.29)

In other words, the post-truth era is characterized by a marked tendency toward absolute relativism (everything is equal), which allows factual evidence to be swept aside and leads to a form of indistinct diversity, in which statements no longer need to be supported or justified by concrete facts. If opinions are only considered valid when they are based on concrete facts, the post-truth era destroys this approval and leads to confusion between truth and falsehood (p.15).

Donald Trump is the standard-bearer for this new way of doing politics: what matters is no longer the reality on which to build a political project, but rather serving up flattering emotions to a specific, targeted audience in order to generate support. The truthfulness of the discourse is irrelevant, as long as it pleases people. The manipulation of truth is a constant feature of all powers throughout history. The problem is that truth is elusive. If reality means anything, we only have access to interpretations of it through our perceptions and our capacity for understanding. This is all the more true in a context as complex as today's world. The surplus of information makes sorting through it extremely complicated. This avalanche of information and cognitive saturation is reminiscent, to a certain extent, of what Hannah Arendt (1990) identified in totalitarian systems: the creation of a unified fictional world, a refuge from the instability of reality (Arendt, 1990, cited by Revault d'Allonnes, p. 91). Myriam Revault d'Allonnes follows this line of thought and points out that a desire for fiction persists despite the defeat of totalitarianism in our democracies. In our democratic societies, this desire no longer takes the form of a centralized ideology, but manifests itself through truth games, comforting beliefs, simplistic stories, sometimes fueled by conspiracy theories. Because

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[13] Translated from the original: "Voilà ce qu'est l'âge de la «post-vérité »: le brouillage des frontières entre vrai et faux, honnêteté et malhonnêteté, fiction et non-fiction. D'où procède un édifice social fragile reposant sur la défiance. Lorsqu'un certain nombre d'indi- vidus en viennent à colporter des fictions comme s'il s'agis- sait de faits réels, la société est atteinte dans ses fondements. Et elle s'effondrerait complètement si nous présupposions à chaque instant qu'autrui est tout aussi susceptible de dire le faux que le vrai."

the world has become too complex, too mobile, and too unstable, we seek points of reference, even at the cost of renouncing the demand for truth. This is where what Foucault (1994) calls a "regime of truth" comes in, that is, a set of techniques, procedures, discourses, and actors that designate what is to be considered true (Foucault, 1994, cited by Revault d'Allonnes, 2018, p. 92). However, this regime is now fractured. Truth is no longer a common good; it is fragmented, disputed, and privatized, which pushes everyone to retreat into it according to their emotional or ideological affinities, thus reigniting the process of withdrawal and fragmentation. Refuge is no longer a state doctrine, but our algorithmic bubble of certainty.

2.5. Freedom of expression: between liberal ideal and instrument of power

The 20th century marks the advent of an entirely new nature of freedom of expression. Indeed, radio broadcasting—a brand new mass medium capable of uniting an anonymous population around the same message delivered simultaneously—profoundly altered the legal constraints imposed on this freedom. Radio broadcasting is, from the outset, a vector of ambivalence: it is both a potential source of democratic mobilization and a channel for chaos and propaganda, capable of both serving and undermining democracy (Olivesi, 2000, para. 22). The imperative then became that of structural control over diffusion (through regulation of transmitters), dissociating freedom of expression from content (programme service) and subjecting it to state regulation of transmission (airwave service) (Olivesi, 2000, para. 31).

In a somewhat similar way, the Digital Services Act is a legitimate attempt to establish structural control—this time in response to the excesses of the digital sphere. Faced with this effort to reintroduce order into the surrounding informational chaos and the relativism that undermines our societies and all forms of collective governance, freedom of expression is once again at the heart of the debate. Why is freedom of expression being seized upon by an entire segment of the political spectrum to oppose the DSA? It is legitimate to ask the following questions: What are we free to say or not say on the internet? Where do we draw the line? But at its core, the issue lies elsewhere. The stakes seem broader, more global.

This study does not aim to explore what can or cannot be said online. Rather, it seeks to understand how and why freedom of expression is brandished as a banner by an entire political class. Michel Foucault, in this regard, offers an insightful perspective through his reflection on the conditions of discourse production, helping us to better understand the defense of freedom of expression in conservative discourse. In *The Order of Discourse* (1971), Michel Foucault emphasizes that all discourse is traversed by mechanisms of control: certain statements are authorized, others are disqualified, and some speaking positions are valorized, while others become inaudible. For Foucault, discourse is of course not a simple reflection of social reality—it is itself an object of struggle:

"Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but the very thing for which, and by which, there is struggle"[14] (Foucault, 1971, p. 12). If we apply this approach to the contemporary debate on freedom of expression, we should therefore question the very relevance and legitimacy of discursive enunciation itself. Instead of asking what may or may not be said (in the name of freedom of expression), we ought to interrogate the space in which it becomes possible, in a given situation, to articulate certain discourses—within the framework of a struggle.

Discourse is not a game; speech is precious, and it is a tool far from insignificant. It is from a perspective closely aligned with Foucault's reflections that Judith Butler (1997) questions the notion of freedom of expression in *Excitable Speech*. Like Foucault, she does not conceive of it as a right to be free to speak, but rather as a situated speech act, uttered in relation to articulations of power. For her, to speak is to act; it produces an effect and influences the social world. "Language is thought of mostly—as agency, an act with consequences; an extended doing, a performance with effects." (Butler, 1997, p. 7). In this sense, speech is never neutral: it implicates positions, identities, and relations of hierarchy. Butler argues that the performativity of language does not operate uniformly for everyone, but depends on the power relations that determine who is able to be heard, recognized, or legitimized as a speaking subject. Some voices are invited to speak; others are silenced or disqualified in advance. The speaking subject never entirely escapes the discursive norms that structure their utterance (Butler, 1997, p.5). One might read here a form of metaphor: the autonomy of the speaking subject corresponds to a mastery of the idioms that give them the illusion of being apparently free—echoing Foucault's own reflections on "positions of speech," where every utterance is situated, and the right or capacity to speak depends on prior inscription within structures of legitimation.

The relevance of these works is crucial to reposition and recontextualize freedom of expression within the digital sphere, where we observe, for example, a rise in hate speech (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2022, p. 83). Judith Butler (1997) relocates freedom at the heart of a conflicted terrain, where social relations are already structured by power dynamics that socially shape speech—its production, form, content, and reception—granting different performative forces to different utterances. Language has never been a neutral tool; it acts, but the performativity of each utterance cannot always be uniformly recognized or effective. It is not speech that performs power relations, but rather power relations that render some speech acts performative and effective in their imposition (p. 49).

As a consequence, the call for an "absolute" freedom of expression overlooks the distances and asymmetries that pervade the field of social discourse. This is particularly evident in hate speech, in which it is precisely the speech act itself that produces effects of exclusion, injury, or silencing. In

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[14] Translated from the origianl: "*le discours n'est pas simplement ce qui traduit les luttes ou les systèmes de domination, mais ce pour quoi, ce par quoi on lutte, le pouvoir dont on cherche à s'emparer.*"

this sense, freedom of expression cannot be understood as abstract, egalitarian, and universal, as certain uses are inherently ambiguous. Thus, defending speech acts in the name of freedom of expression does not merely serve to prevent censorship—it can also participate in relations of domination. "Language constitutes the subject in part through foreclosure, a kind of unofficial censorship or primary restriction in speech that constitutes the possibility of agency in speech" (Butler, 1997, p. 41). Butler names this *foreclosure*, a form of symbolic censorship: certain words or discourses are not formally prohibited, but they are simply deemed inadmissible—excluded from the public space. In this sense, defending certain speech acts in the name of freedom of expression may reinforce an unequal discursive order, as it amounts to defining not only what can be said, but also who has the right to be heard—thus instituting the normativity of ordinary speech, designating who can speak and express themselves in a "neutral" manner, and within which frame.

In some cases, the defense of speech itself can become an act of power aimed at fixing and stabilizing its reach: the order of what may be said becomes the power to speak in accordance with dominant norms, determining what must be said—no more, no less. Judith Butler places the question of freedom of expression within a conflictual framework, emphasizing that social relations are always already traversed by power dynamics, which structure both speech and its reception. Language is never neutral: it acts, but this action—this performativity—is not uniformly recognized or effective. It is not language that performs power relations, but power relations that render certain utterances more performative than others (Butler, 1997, p. 49). Thus, to claim an "absolute" freedom of expression is to ignore the fundamental asymmetries of the discursive space—particularly evident in the case of hate speech, where it is the speech act itself that produces effects of exclusion, injury, or silencing. In this logic, freedom of expression cannot be considered an abstract, egalitarian, and universal right. Butler underscores the ambiguity of certain uses: the defense of speech acts in the name of freedom of expression does not only serve to prevent censorship—it can also participate in relations of domination.

Let us imagine a scenario in which freedom of expression on the Internet corresponds to the one advocated by John Stuart Mill in 1859—an ideal still largely fantasized by some contemporary neoliberals. In *On Liberty*, Mill (1859, p.16) defends the position that any restriction on freedom of expression is harmful to the advancement of truth: even false or shocking opinions may contain a kernel of truth or contribute to the health of public debate[15]. This logic continues today in certain libertarian approaches to freedom of speech, such as that defended by Nadine Strossen (2018). In the tradition of Mill, she advocates for the most radical application of the First Amendment. She argues that even hate speech must be protected, grounded in a foundational skepticism toward the state. According to her, "Encountering 'unwelcome' ideas, including those that are hateful and

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[15] Thus, according to him: "If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind" (Mill, 2001, p. 16).

discriminatory, is essential for honing our abilities to analyze, criticize, and refute them." (Strossen, 2018, p. 2). The solution does not lie in some form of external intervention, but in the very nature of public debate.

In contrast to these ultra-liberal perspectives, a broader critique has been proposed by Wendy Brown (2015, pp. 17-18). Although she does not address the topic of freedom of expression directly, she shows how this notion—like other fundamental rights—is transformed by a neoliberal rationality. According to her, this rationality tends to reframe political categories such as freedom, equality, and popular sovereignty within an economic lexicon (p. 17). Freedom thus becomes a non-political capacity—not to participate in the definition of the common good, but to govern oneself as capital.

In this perspective, rights are no longer considered instruments of collective emancipation, but as strictly individual protections that facilitate performance in a competitive market (Brown, 2015, pp. 37–38). In this semantic and functional reconfiguration, the aim is not to abolish rights that are formally maintained, but to alter their meaning so as to render them compatible with forms of governance that are not necessarily democratic in the strong sense—particularly within the duality of politics and economics.

3. Methods

3.1 General Approach

This qualitative research adopts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach in order to answer the primary research questions, as well as the secondary questions that arise from them.

The research draws in particular on the analytical framework developed by Teun A. van Dijk (1995, p. 11), who understands political discourse as a situated social practice, structured by power relations and specific conditions of enunciation. The aim is to go beyond a literal reading by interrogating the role of language in the construction of symbolic order and the legitimization of political positions. The analysis adopted here is constructivist and interpretative: political discourse does not reflect reality, it produces and legitimizes it. Van Dijk (1995, p. 15) reminds us that "the study of political discourse should not be limited to the structural properties of text or talk itself, but also include a systematic account of the context and its relations to discursive structures." To recontextualize, therefore, is to decipher the logics of imposition and the power relations at work. This research seeks to unpick discourse, to access the implicit, and strategies of legitimation mobilized by situated actors.

This research examines the discursive strategies deployed by the French far right against European digital regulation. However, needles to say that these statements do not constitute a homogeneous or even stable whole: they are evolving, sometimes contradictory, but reveal a particular relationship to norms, authority, and the public. It is precisely the resulting tensions that justify studying them. The aim is not to establish a rigid typology of the french far-right rhetoric, but rather to identify recurring features, such as argumentative procedures, lexical choices, figures of authority mobilized, and modes of enunciation. Attention is focused on the deployment of discourses on freedom of expression, which are part of a logic of legitimization.

These discourses do not merely express "dissent," but also contribute to a broader struggle to impose meaning in the historical context of a public sphere marked by polarization, institutional skepticism, and disinformation. An interpretative approach is required, one that takes into account the conditions of enunciation and the discursive arrangements in which the power relations of contemporary ideological conflicts are replayed. The analysis aims to show how the French far right, through its language, is participating in the redefinition of the boundaries of democratic legitimacy within the current political ecosystem of the Internet.

This research does not require the collection of personal or sensitive data, nor does it involve interaction with human participants. The materials analyzed are exclusively political and media statements that are accessible to the public. Nevertheless, partisan framing in the broad sense and the consequences of quoting far-right discourse have been given particular attention. As the objective is

strictly analytical and the excerpts have been taken from their original context, the aim is to avoid any amplification of the discourse out of context or any implicit approval of such discourse.

3.2 Scope of analysis and time frame

This study is based on two pillars: institutional and media policy. On the one hand, parliamentary discourse provides direct access to the rhetorical and ideological strategies employed by far-right elected officials in an institutional setting, allowing us to observe the work of legitimizing the positions defended, influencing the legislative process, and framing opposition to a European legislative project such as the Digital Services Act. On the other hand, press articles provide insight into how this institutional discourse is relayed, reformulated, and sometimes even amplified in the public sphere, which demonstrates not only the contribution of ultra-conservative media in disseminating political arguments, but also the opportunity to reconfigure them according to the emotional, narratives, or anachronistic classifications specific to the latter. This dual focus allows us to analyze part of what has shaped the construction and circulation of discourse around freedom of expression in the context of digital regulation.

The research focuses on the French far-right movement has taken a major turn recently since the last French presidential elections in 2022, and especially since the 2024 European parliamentary elections, which were a huge success for the French far right.

This is the reason why the observation period try to cover May 2019 to June 2025. This period allows us to track the evolution of the French far right's discourse on digital regulation, from the institutional beginnings of discussions on disinformation to recent debates on the application of the Digital Services Act (DSA). The starting point (the 2019 European elections) corresponds to the start of a new legislative term in the European Parliament, in which far-right forces are asserting themselves and beginning to organize their discourse around freedom of expression and the threats to it in the digital space.

The end point, June 2025, comes after the 2024 European elections and in the first months of a new term, which sees a new surge of the far right in the hemicycle. This final milestone allows us to account for a possible shift in French conservative discourse, while also taking into acount structuring events, such as accusations of Russian interference via TikTok in the Romanian elections, or suspicions of influence by the X network on the German elections. By also taking into account pre- and post-election positions around June 2024, the analysis will then be able to report on the strategic adjustments made by the French far right in response to a changing political landscape, as well as to the new configuration of regulatory issues and transformations in the European information space.

3.3 Corpus description and selection criteria

3.3.1 Parlementiary speeches

The selection of parliamentarians' speeches was based on the following empirical protocol: keyword searches, on the one hand, and qualitative verification of the content of the selected speeches, on the other. The aim was to isolate the speeches of French far-right politicians who publicly took a position on discussions relating to digital regulation at European level, particularly in the context of the Digital Services Act (DSA), by critically invoking freedom of expression.

A systematic search was first conducted in the archives of the European Parliament's plenary debates, using these five key words: "DSA," "digital services," "disinformation," "social media," and "freedom of expression." This research identified sessions dealing with issues related to the DSA or broader topics such as platform regulation, combating online hate speech, foreign interference via social media, etc. All contributions by French far-right MEPs in these debates were collected. This initial filtering identified 36 statements[16].

A second manual and qualitative screening was then carried out according to specific exclusion criteria: speeches that did not refer to freedom of expression (in the sense that they did not include any explicit or implicit reference to it), speeches that were off-topic or purely procedural in nature, speeches that referred exclusively to the DMA, and speeches that expressed explicit support for the need to regulate content at the European level, particularly during the early stages of the legislative process. After this double filtering process, the parliamentary corpus selected consists of 22 far-right speeches delivered by French MEPs belonging to three European political groups (PfE, ECR, ESN), focusing on criticism of digital regulation in the name of defending freedom of expression. These texts vary in length from 128 to 433 words. The average length is around 260 words, which is relatively concise but rich in rhetoric, making it ideal for in-depth discourse analysis.

This corpus makes it possible to track the evolution of the positions taken by the French ultra-conservative movement over time through speeches made in the European Parliament. Although belonging to different political forces, French identitarian forces share the same guiding principles on many issues, and this targeted corpus will, in part, enable us to answer our research questions.

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[16] Between 2019 and 2024, the French nationalist right was therefore only represented in the chamber by members of the Rassemblement National belonging to the ID (Identity and Democracy) group. After the 2024 legislative elections, the French far-right is represented not only by the Rassemblement National, but also by two new French identitarian political forces: Reconquête and Identité Libertés (which had joined forces for the European election campaign). MEPs affiliated with the Rassemblement National party are mainly represented within the PfE (Patriots for Europe) group, while Identité Libertés representatives are all in the ECR (European Conservatives and Reformists) group and the sole representative of Reconquête (Sarah Knafo) sits with the German nationalists in the ESN (Europe of Sovereign Nations).

3.3.2 Media outlets

The selection process for press articles is qualitative and based on an initial empirical identification, combined with a posteriori validation of content, in line with the work of Ruth Wodak (2015). Her analysis of far-right populist discourse has helped to clarify the criteria for identifying the corpus. In this regard, it should be noted that some traditional French media outlets are traditionally recognized as far-right, such as Valeurs actuelles (VA) for example, while others openly display their ideological positioning, such as Frontières. However, this is a complex landscape, where the rise of the internet has seen the development of a large number of new news media outlets, some of which are very recent, born online and distributed in the form of editorial blogs, video channels, and opinion sites. In addition, even regional or local identity-based media outlets have managed to grow and develop online, becoming quite popular.

Exploring this shifting landscape therefore requires theoretical work that defines the characteristics of far-right media. The literature notes, in particular, an editorial line driven by a set of identity, nationalist, or security themes, as well as a strong distrust of democratic institutions and the so-called "mainstream" media, and a tendency to use polemical, sensationalist, and even conspiracy theory rhetoric (Wodak, 2015, pp. 3-6).

Given that the selection of media outlets was initially based on an article in Le Monde (2023) mapping certain conservative or sovereigntist online media outlets (without this constituting validation), an exploratory survey was conducted in a second phase. This investigation made it possible to examine how each media outlet defines itself in its own output (themes, tone, ideological positions), then cross-reference this information with the Media Bias/Fact Check[17] (MBFC) database, commonly used in other research, in order to locate the media outlets on a political axis and confirm their radical right-wing or ultra-nationalist leanings. Documentary research was also carried out using keywords on search engines and in archive databases: "Digital Services Act" (DSA), "freedom of expression," "censorship," "disinformation,", which made it possible to better define the field of analysis without artificially limiting its scope. Indeed, the inclusion or exclusion of an article was not only justified by its affiliation with a particular media outlet, but above all by its content. Each article selected had to meet several criteria, such as explicit or implicit criticism of the DSA, the use of freedom of expression to express this criticism, or the presence of discursive structures characteristic of the far right (denunciation of European elites, assertions of censored truths, resistance to Brussels technocracy, etc.).

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[17] The Media Bias/Fact Check database is used in academic research to classify media outlets according to their ideological orientation in studies on automatic bias detection or source reliability prediction (see, for example, Nakov et al., 2021). Other studies also draw on this database. Website: https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/

At the end of this research, 10 articles of varying lengths (between 380 and 1,720 words) were selected to form a coherent and representative corpus of criticism levelled by French far-right media outlets against the Digital Services Act.

This approach, which does not claim to be exhaustive, nevertheless makes it possible to build a coherent and representative corpus of the discursive practices of these media outlets, which invoke freedom of expression to criticize European digital regulation policies.

3.3 Corpus limitations

Although both corpora are based on a careful selection protocol combining systematic identification and qualitative verification, their limitations in terms of representativeness and data exhaustiveness must of course be emphasized. For parliamentary speeches, only particular plenary sessions related to the research question of this study were utilised, ensuring greater thematic coherence in the final corpus but potentially excluding some peripheral speeches found in alternative formats, such as debates on AI, fundamental freedoms or cybersecurity, etc, ... Some arguments against the DSA expressed indirectly or from a different perspective may well have escaped analysis.

Also, a more methodological choice, but one that is reflected in the corpus, is the fact that I focus solely on discourse that opposes digital regulation, whereas some—especially at the beginning of the discussions around the DSA legislation—were nuanced and even favorable to regulation: material that I did not take into account because it did not reflect the discourse shared by this same political class today.

Similarly, The media corpus presents equivalent limitations. The selection was carried out qualitatively, with a focus on articles considered illustrative of how conservative or far-right actors voice their opposition to the DSA. However, this bias involves many subjective choices: it is legitimate to regret that some articles, which are undoubtedly relevant but refer to digital regulation in a more indirect way, may have been excluded from the present corpus.

Finally, the corpus does not take into account certain non-textual formats (such as videos, podcasts, or social media tools). Yet these formats are now essential to the circulation of discourse, and not taking them into account complicates our understanding of the communicational dynamics of online strategies.

3.4 Analytical framework

In this research, the analysis follows on from critical approaches to discourse, naturalized within the framework developed by Teun A. van Dijk (1997) to consider political discourse as a place

of production, reproduction, and contestation of power. From this perspective, discourse is invariably engaged: it is structured by an unequal social fabric and cannot avoid questions about the ways in which it is legitimized or challenged. As Van Dijk (1997, p. 11) emphasizes, "critical-political discourse analysis deals especially with the reproduction of political power, power abuse or domination through political discourse, including the various forms of resistance or counter-power against such forms of discursive dominance." It is thus necessary to interrogate the discursive conditions that enable such domination, as well as their social and symbolic effects—particularly in terms of political inequalities, collective representations, and access to legitimate speech.

This approach reveals a certain continuity with a critical tradition that resonates with the reflections of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, who will also play a major role in the analytical process, particularly in examining the relationships between power, normativity, and language. It is part of an appreciation of the analytical necessity of distance and deconstruction, two concepts that aim to shed light on the processes by which discourse contributes to the production of social hierarchies, as in the critical discourse analysis proposed by Van Dijk.

This theoretical posture calls for moving beyond a strictly linguistic reading of the texts. The analysis cannot be limited to the structure of utterances, their syntactic form, or their literal meaning—it must necessarily include a systematic engagement with the context in which such discourse becomes meaningful. This context includes, of course, the institutions of enunciation (parliament, the press), the speaker's status and political position, the configurations of the political sphere, but also the broader ideological tensions in which these discourses are embedded. In this perspective, "the study of political discourse should not be limited to the structural properties of text or talk itself, but also include a systematic account of the context and its relations to discursive structures" (Van Dijk, 1997, p. 15).

This contextualisation is important, particularly in light of the significance of the current European political situation. The parliamentary debates analysed here unfold during a unique political period, characterised by the implementation of the Digital Services Act, renewed concerns over informational interference and, most notably, a significant institutional change following the European elections in June 2024. To understand the speeches delivered in the hemicycle, the new parliamentary context must be taken into account.

While the European context is certainly important, the French national context is equally significant for the public figures, parliamentarians and media personalities considered as part of this study. Audiovisual landscape reform dominated debates in 2024, not to mention the many controversies surrounding press freedom and the regulatory ambitions of the French Regulatory Authority for Audiovisual and Digital Communication (ARCOM), which remained in the spotlight until 2025. This allows us to understand the discursive and political landscape from which criticism of this digital regulation emerges, influencing the positions taken by Parliament and the media.

These parameters influence not only the topics addressed, but also the strategic scope of the utterances themselves: the terms used, the rhetorical figures mobilized, or the oppositions constructed all reflect political positions that cannot be understood without attention to contextual specificity. Contextualizing is not to be seen merely as a methodological prerequisite, but as the fundamental interpretive apparatus that makes it possible to reconstruct the ideological and strategic significance of the positions taken.

3.5 Operationalization and interpretive stance

In addition to semantic and contextual analysis, this work is based on an interpretative reading of discourse. It is not simply a matter of pointing out what is said, but also of seeking to understand how statements are articulated, what they aim to show, and how they fit into a given ideological framework. As a critical operation, each statement is therefore considered to be situated, oriented, and conveying the intentions of the speaker. From this perspective, analyzing speeches produced in French in their original language is particularly important. Furthermore, critical discourse analysis would not have been possible without a fluent command of French, which is necessary to grasp the lexical nuances, cultural implications, and rhetorical effects specific to the political field in question, which are often more subtle than one might imagine. Indeed, understanding them opens the door to understanding the discursive strategies that contribute to producing the interplay of enunciation and opposition that are at the heart of far-right political discourse.

Also, the theoretical framework of the work aim to be used not as a rigid grid, but as a tool for placing discourse in its social and political context. Operationalization is thus based on suggestions for interpreting discourse, developed from recognizable discursive segments in the texts. The goal is not to classify everything, but to identify patterns: recurring themes, rhetorical devices, argumentative tactics, or even effects of emphasis. The analysis is thus guided without being constrained, leaving room for the complexity and originality of certain statements.

It is through the register of post-truth, for example, that we observe the use of emotion (indignation, derision), anecdotes, or generalities, as well as a questioning of what is considered true and imposed. For example, some speeches refer to "hidden revelations" or invoke symbolic figures of authority such as Orwell or Plato, presented as guarantors of an "alternative" truth. Provocative phrases such as "the biggest fake" or "the Ministry of Truth" are emotionally disqualifying, but they also call into question factual benchmarks.

The construction of an antagonistic relationship between "the people" and "the elites" is one of the rationales behind populism. These elements are most often expressed in euphemistic terms, through expressions such as "the side of good," "the technocrats," "the press at your beck and call,"

etc. These oppositions are part of a process of delegitimization that involves caricature or dramatization ("soft totalitarianism").

Freedom of expression, although conceptually complex, is most often used to counter regulatory policies, without its legal status being clearly discussed; it stands above all as a moral symbol opposed to arbitrary or authoritarian power. This topos becomes a vector of polarization, particularly when it is opposed to other principles ("freedom of expression rather than the fight against disinformation") or associated with strong historical references, such as the Berlin Wall or state propaganda.

These methodological options are not intended to produce generalizations, but to encourage careful reading that is sensitive to discursive strategies. This framework provides a better understanding of how certain discourses articulate the framework of democratic debate with new regimes of enunciation affected by emotion, confrontation, or a strong ideological dimension, in which freedom of expression becomes a major strategic lever.

3.6 Methodological limitations

It is important to note certain limitations that are due to methodological choices. The first is related to the deliberate choice of a limited scope of analysis, since only the discourse of French far-right politicians and media outlets was taken into account. This clearly stated bias consists of focusing on a limited part of the debate on digital regulation in order to shed light on the discreet strategies of the actors in this field. It then becomes impossible to make internal comparisons between the different political sensibilities. Putting this into perspective would have made it possible to better characterize the discourse in its specificities.

Another, more structural limitation is also present in any qualitative approach: the analysis is based in part on interpretation, whether in the choice of excerpts, the division of discursive units, or the hypotheses formulated about the intentions or consequences of the actors. The challenge is not to restore a factual or objective truth, but to go beyond a situated reading, consistent with the theoretical framework used, while being aware of its blind spots.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that the material analyzed, namely public discourse in institutional or media arenas, is only a partial source of political reality. The corpus reflects formalized, sometimes strategic, positions that do not necessarily cover all the practices or opinions within the ideological current studied. This work does not therefore aim to be generalist, but rather to explore the dominant discursive logics within a given framework.

4. Results

The first subsection focuses on the parliamentary discourse of the French far right and identifies the argumentation strategies and rhetorical devices used to counter the DSA in the name of freedom of expression. The second part focuses on the analysis of press articles and examines the discursive devices used to discredit digital regulation. The third subsection aims to provide a broader analysis with strong theoretical support. The idea behind this section is to put into perspective the recurrences and connections observed between the first two subsections.

4.1. Parliamentary speeches by the French far right

4.1.1 A rhetorical denunciation of censorship: lexicons of warning and threat

One clear observation arising from the analysis is the use of alarmist rhetoric to oppose the DSA. The vocabulary used is not neutral: it conveys a representation of the DSA not as a regulatory tool, but as a hidden political weapon. The speeches studied reveal a process of linguistic dramatization that considers digital regulation as the implementation of systematic censorship of a repressive nature, or even as an authoritarian drift.

Several members of parliament are engaging in a fundamental semantic shift: "freedom of expression" is described as a value under threat, projected as threatened or lost, and European institutions are designated as responsible for this demise. The vocabulary used explicitly refers to authoritarian regimes or mechanisms for suppressing public speech: "Ministry of Truth," "propaganda," "cordon sanitaire," "attack on democracy," "groupthink." The use of these terms is part of a strategy of discursive delegitimization that proposes a reclassification of the democratic norm: it is no longer a question of defending pluralism of opinion, but of denouncing a "system" perceived as hostile to dissenting voices. This shift is often accompanied by vocabulary that conveys urgency and threat, aimed at raising alarm. Criticism of the DSA is always formulated in an aggressive manner: it is always redefined as a fight against aggression. Virginie Joron (RN MEP, P04) thus makes use of "ever more oppressive tools of control" and "Censorship 4.0"; Angéline Furet refers to a text that "institutionalizes state censorship on a European scale," while Sarah Knafo (Reconquête! MEP, P19) mobilizes the image of "a people muzzled, intimidated, punished." This is an emotional appeal, in which historical figures (Plato, Orwell, Solzhenitsyn) are indirectly linked to repressive regimes.

Reframing regulation as repression

This lexicon of threat is based on the discursive construction that accuses institutions of claiming to be in danger because of platforms or vectors of disinformation. It is in the name of this logic that the discourse turns to calls for freedom to denounce institutions for their alleged authoritarian overthrow. However, it is in this negative construction that part of the performative power of these discourses lies, positioning their authors as victims of an oppressive power that attacks them, while claiming a right to legitimate resistance. The "camp of good" thus denounced becomes the supreme instance of democratic hypocrisy and the DSA, an instrument of illegal control.

The populist grammar of delegitimization

On closer inspection, the alarmist vocabulary used by these politicians is not simply a rhetorical device, but reflects a certain way of thinking about politics that could be called "populist grammar." The European Union is no longer described as a space for democratic compromise, but as an arrangement of technocratic elites who are inaccessible and disconnected from reality. In this context, freedom of expression no longer refers to a legal principle bound by rules of law; it becomes a moral value, almost sacred, that must confront a power perceived as illegitimate. It is at this level that Mudde's interpretation proves enlightening: the ideological center of gravity of radical right-wing populism is fundamentally linked to the ontological divide between the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite," strongly influenced by their worldview and their relationship to institutions (Mudde, 2007, p. 23). We can then begin to understand why criticism of the DSA is no longer limited to the field of regulation: it is part of an opposition to an elite that continues to be perceived as the repository of intrusive power, meddling in everyday life. The debate on regulation is therefore no longer a rearguard action; it has become the symbol of a threat to civilization.

4.1.2 Post-truth and pathos: between distortion of facts and emotional appeals

An examination of parliamentary speeches sometimes reveals a distortion between what is actually claimed and what actually is . Criticism of the text of the Digital Services Act is based sometimes on misinterpretations of its content, sometimes on erroneous assumptions presented as universal truths. Presented in some speeches as a tool of "state censorship" or "mass surveillance," this text actually aims to regulate the obligations of a small number of very large private platforms. It should be noted that the inaccuracy of such a claim would be irrelevant if it did not serve to fuel the political imagination of servitude and oppression.

From factual inaccuracy to emotional resonance

This leads us to reflect on the notion of "post-truth" in the strongest sense of the term. In this discursive register, it is no longer just a matter of spreading lies or deliberately distorting the facts. It is a more profound change: truth ceases to be the implicit basis on which public debates are based. As Myriam Revault d'Allonnes (2018, p. 34) points out, we do not live in a world dominated by lies, but in a world where "the distinction between true and false becomes irrelevant". What is being called into question is not only the value of statements, but the very value of truth as a common horizon. This change is based less on sometimes intentional errors than on a growing acceptance of imprecision, emotional emptiness, and assertions that disregard any truth. In the era of "arranged truth," fact-checking is less important than performative discourse. From this perspective, the challenge for elected officials is not to convince, but to create a political atmosphere, a particular mood. Whether or not the European Union is considering imposing censorship is irrelevant, given the rumours suggesting that such a possibility is looming, and that this distortion of the truth is becoming increasingly credible. The reconstituted Assembly, following the June 2024 elections, includes many nationalists and staunch supporters of sovereignty, who frequently employ this tactic to cloud parliamentary debates and obscure certain issues.. It is in this concealment of the truth that the pathos of the post-truth era takes hold, based not on evidence but on the emotional impact of discourse. Consequently, the elected representative is perceived as an accomplice in 'empathising with the people' by forcing themselves to speak on their behalf.

Affective atmospheres and the disintegration of deliberation

This confusion has a formidable political effect: it disables the conditions for rational deliberation. As Revault d'Allonnes shows (2018, p.31), it is not the opposition between opinions that is in crisis, but the idea that disagreement can be resolved by confronting a shared reality. When everyone "handles the truth sparingly" (according to their emotions and beliefs), all that remains is a competitive marketplace of narratives. Debate then becomes a symbolic battlefield in which the most viral narrative replaces a space for deliberation.

The speeches studied bear witness to this: those who speak out do not act by modifying or amending a legislative text, but by seeking to morally disqualify it, tending to attribute malicious intent to it. The problem, therefore, is not the article itself, but the "spirit of censorship" that animates it, a spirit that must be brought to the attention of the population. However, it is precisely this substitution of indignation for argument that characterizes post-truth discursive regimes.

4.1.3. The reversal of freedom of expression: from countervailing power to power to obstruct

In the speeches of French far-right parliamentarians analyzed, references to freedom of expression as a fundamental right under attack by European regulation are frequent. However, the analysis tend to show that it doesn't seem to be a matter of commitment to the defense of civil liberties, but rather a semantic and strategic shift aimed at using freedom of expression as an argument to delegitimize the institutions and legal frameworks of regulation.

This method is particularly noticeable in Angéline Furet's speech (RN MEP, P06) who states that "under the guise of combating disinformation, the DSA institutionalizes state censorship on a European scale. In fact, this text violates one of the fundamental principles of our democracies: freedom of expression."[18] Freedom of expression, a central element of the argument, becomes an immutable dogma (any questioning of it being branded as authoritarianism). This is a rhetorical device that consists of depriving freedom of expression of any historical context or legal complexity in order to make it an immutable, almost sacred principle. What parliamentarians are denouncing, therefore, is not so much a circumstantial concern as an absolute principle erected against any form of public intervention.

From legal principle to ideological shield

Parliamentarians repeatedly use this rhetoric to condemn an authoritarian drift of which the European Union is allegedly guilty. Jean-Lin Lacapelle (RN MEP) states:

The only thing you talk about is the fight against hate speech and disinformation, which, for you, are nothing more than political opinions that you don't agree with. Hate speech is a concept imported straight from the United States, which is totalitarian, arbitrary, and ideological.[19]

This excerpt illustrates a reversal strategy: it is the very concept of hate speech that is discredited here because of its alleged ideological function. Socratic reasoning is used here. Not only would certain opinions no longer be tolerated, but this disqualification, which occurs against a backdrop of democratic ideals, would also be the result of a hidden ideological agenda.

This interpretation is part of a more general tension, which is also found in Gilles Lebreton (RN MEP, P08): the latter fears that the fight against disinformation will lead to an official truth and fuel hidden intolerance. He explicitly draws on case law, quoting the European Court of Human Rights: "They (digital platforms) take advantage of it to enforce the rule of conformism by ruthlessly censoring all ideas that offend, shock, or disturb— in violation of the Handyside ruling by the

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[18] Translated from the original : *"(…) sous couvert de lutter contre la désinformation, institutionnalise une censure d'État à l'échelle européenne. En effet, ce texte bafoue l'un des principes fondamentaux de nos démocraties: la liberté d'expression."*

[19] Translated from the original : *"La seule chose dont vous parlez, c'est la lutte contre les discours haineux et la désinformation, c'est-à-dire en clair contre les opinions politiques qui ne vous plaisent pas. Le discours de haine est une notion, importée tout droit des États-Unis, qui est totalitaire, arbitraire et idéologique."*

European Court of Human Rights, which explicitly protects them."[20] This reference to the law aims to legitimize his argument while creating a contrast, because, in his view, the European Union is violating its own basic principles. However, he adds a national dimension to his argument by contrasting European regulation with that of the Avia law, which was censored by the Constitutional Council, thus instrumentalizing this French case in a warning that Europe is caught in the same trap as the French Parliament. In line with this type of example, we can see that this framework allows freedom of expression to be removed from the regulatory framework of democratic debate and turned into an "inalienable" principle that can be opposed to any regulation whatsoever. The aim here is not so much to discuss the limits of the legitimacy of public speech as to vilify any attempt to regulate speech as an existential threat. This argument echoes certain libertarian theses, such as that of Nadine Strossen (2018), for whom hate speech itself must be protected in order to preserve the proper functioning of public debate (p. 2). While these authors do not explicitly claim this affiliation, their systematic suspicion of any external regulation and their regularly expressed confidence in the self-regulation of public debate echo the motifs of this tradition.

Freedom of expression as tactical leverage

This stance evokes a tactical use of fundamental rights. When Malika Sorel (RN MEP, P12) asserts that the European Parliament "flouts the fundamental principles of democracy" by depriving certain parliamentarians of their responsibilities, she is not only challenging a personal decision, but also asserting, through semantic slippage, that this exclusion is one of the signs of an anti-democratic dysfunction in which pluralism and freedom of expression for members of parliament are no longer guaranteed. The scope of freedom of expression would thus be greatly extended to issues more broadly related to political representation, allowing criticism to be used more generally against European institutions.

The use of absolutism in freedom of expression by certain elected officials seems to freeze the space of what can be said, reversing the stigma. This dynamic, which Judith Butler (1997, p. 41) describes as "foreclosure," refers to a symbolic regime of dictatorship in which the question of what can and cannot be said becomes a question of power relations. By making regulation an issue in the name of defending freedom, speakers are not only defending their own right to express themselves; they are also seeking to control the context in which regulation emerges through speech, a context in which any regulation is perceived as tyrannical.

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[20] Translated from the original: "Elles en profitent pour imposer la loi de faire du conformisme en censurant impitoyablement toutes les idées qui heurtent, choquent ou inquiètent, en violation de l'arrêt Handyside de la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme qui les protège expressément."

4.2. The ultra-conservative opinion press and the DSA

4.2.1 The DSA as an instrument of political censorship: between disqualification and suspicion

One of the hallmarks of the conservative and far-right press's coverage of the Digital Services Act (DSA) is to present it as an instrument, an evil tool of political censorship. Rather than being seen as a technical reform of digital operations, the regulation is widely presented as an ideological tool for restricting opinions deemed undesirable or even threatening. This disqualification of the DSA is based on a twofold mechanism: a dramatic use of language that conjures up images of repression, and widespread suspicion about the true intentions of European institutions.

Lexicons of censorship: deliberate dramatization

The strongly connoted vocabulary used in the articles in the corpus to describe the effects of the DSA (notably the terms "censorship," "authoritarian drift," "muzzling," "information control," and "one-sided moderation") contributes to the perception of regulation as repressive, even liberticidal. The aim is less to discuss the technical details of moderation than to problematize the DSA as an instrument of coercion imposed from above, whose legitimacy is called into question from the outset. In the Causeur article (A01) entitled *In France, freedom of expression is nothing more than an expression* the law is described as "an attempt at ideological control that is as brutal as it is liberticidal," while Breizh Info (A05) refers to it as "an armed wing of information control." The omnipresent Orwellian rhetoric serves as a critical shortcut: by using terms such as "Ministry of Truth" or "woke doxa," these texts transform a technical regulation into a totalitarian aberration. It is also worth noting that the denunciation of censorship seems less concerned with the infringement of freedoms per se than with the right to control certain subjects (immigration, gender, security) that had previously given conservative discourse a monopoly.

Framing the DSA as a diffuse threat

The media discourse is shifting from the DSA as targeted regulation to the DSA as a diffuse threat weighing on the entire public debate. This discursive extension is based on the generalization of cases of censorship and account suspension on social networks, mainly on the right, which reflects the swing of a biased system. In one interpretation of the DSA, the decisions taken by platforms such as Meta or TikTok do not necessarily reflect the legal basis; regulation is becoming disembodied, foreshadowing a regime of soft surveillance, which some media outlets say is already in place, under names that imply suspicion, such as "soft dictatorship" or, more consolingly, "algorithmic censorship".

Valeurs Actuelles (A02) refers to a "wave of mass bans" targeting accounts deemed conservative. This wave allegedly swept away accounts without justification or recourse. In this context, a rhetoric of suspicion is being promoted: deliberately vague requirements, decisions made behind closed doors, regulators under political influence. This sense of illegitimacy, which is indeed present in certain European configurations, is here radicalized to the point of presenting the DSA as the culmination of a punitive depoliticization project, whereas its defenders see it as a guarantee of democratic security.

The vagueness of legal concepts as a lever for mistrust

Another major argument is that the legal categories used by the DSA are too rigid. "Hate speech," "misinformation," "discrimination": these are legal tools with variable geometry, where anything can be used for censorship purposes. They are a recurring bias that is as effective as it is risky as a strategy for delegitimizing the law, where the normative is always suspected of serving an ideological agenda.

Causeur (A01) denounces in particular the notion of "harm" (blessure) which is too subjective to justify restricting the expression of content. Boulevard Voltaire (A04) is concerned about the use of the term "hate," which is too flexible and susceptible to being co-opted by activist projects. What is at issue is the confusion between the strategy of vulnerability to harm and the sensitivity affected, a confusion that plays on the fantasy of a world where the feelings of a minority would be enough to muzzle the public sphere. This can undoubtedly be seen as a reaction to the rise of intersectional struggles, which designate the DSA as the scapegoat for broader social change, that of an attention regime governed more by alleged sensitivity than by objectifiable harm.

Heroic figures and the reversal of stigma

In this account of counter-hegemonic struggle, history features heroic figures of ontological resistance to a technocratic Europe deemed hostile to dissent. In this sense, Elon Musk embodies the ideal protagonist. His confrontation with Thierry Breton, recounted in a section entitled "An ill-informed duel," is a moment of truth in which Musk's colorful language is presented as a form of courage in the face of Brussels' doublespeak. In this milieu, Musk is specifically valued as a "powerful sovereign," in opposition to intrusive state regulation. In the same context, Sarah Knafo and Erik Tegner (French far-right journalist and commentator) are presented as legitimate counter-voices denouncing censorship emanating from accounts deemed "too identity-based" for the current digital environment. This valorization of the individual, elevated to the status of a defender of free speech, is ultimately accompanied by an indictment of institutional power, portrayed as timid and opaque, even complicit. It is significant to note that the act of personalization occurs precisely where

mistrust of intermediaries has become most acute: when, under suspicion, the collective turns to the icon, some say they see it as a refuge.

Requalification of public debate: from technology to ideology.

This call not to question the achievements of the DSA procedure is emblematic of a broader transformation in the debate on digital regulation, a transformation that goes far beyond mere procedure. The DSA thus becomes the battleground for two rival conceptions of democracy: on the one hand, the institutional conception, which is protective but considered arrogant and authoritarian; on the other hand, the absolutist conception, which is just as populist and gives rise to a right to permanent friction in the name of truth. This act of putting the DSA to the test is fruitful because it reveals a crisis in democratic regulation under algorithmic conditions and makes it possible to question it in depth.

This is why, far from being a conservative reflex, the questioning of the DSA reveals a more diffuse and cross-party concern: that of a configuration of the public sphere in which invisible, technical, and therefore highly ideological regulations are taking power. The media in the corpus, with their own partial constructions, must echo this, even if it is clear that they already carry within them a number of intuitions about the eternal changes in the media landscape. Behind the exaggeration sometimes lies a lucidity that institutions would do well to heed.

4.2.2 Ideological asymmetry and democratic dispossession: criticism of European technocratic power

A second key focus of the conservative press with regard to the DSA is based on questioning the political and institutional power that is supposed to enforce regulation. The DSA is not only presented as an instrument of censorship; it is also described as the product of a European technocratic system that has become alien and ideologically biased. This criticism is based, on the one hand, on a denunciation of ideological asymmetries in the application of rules and, on the other hand, on a deep mistrust of regulatory institutions, which are perceived as disconnected from the societies they claim to regulate.

Technocratic Europe as an instrument of democratic dispossession

Thus, in the texts examined, the DSA would appear to apply differently depending on the political orientation of the content concerned. This asymmetry would apply in particular to moderation on social media, where right-wing or identity-based accounts would be particularly

targeted, to the benefit of progressive or community discourse. Moderation would therefore be ideologically selective, leading to an implicit hierarchy of users' permissible opinions.

The articles highlight, at the bottom of the page, cases of suspended or deleted accounts (identity groups, right-wing influencers, non-aligned feminist collectives) and contrast them with other profiles (rappers, Islamists, left-wing activists) that have suddenly been spared. This framing gives rise to accusations of "one-sided moderation," most often attributed to institutions such as the ARCOM or digital giants, which are then deemed ideologically biased. Thus, in Boulevard Voltaire, the argument of a minister "at war against hatred " appears delinquent for targeting only certain forms of hate (sexist, racist, homophobic), leaving out equally threatening discourse linked to other cultural or religious subgroups.

However, behind the feeling of informational injustice, an illusory political idea of algorithmic neutrality is developing. This idea is familiar in conservative circles: regulatory authorities have abandoned universalism in favor of a form of moral bias. It would therefore be appropriate to oppose citizens with a normative "living together" rather than democratic disorder. This criticism, sometimes excessively vehement, expresses a sense of unease: the impression that regulation does not serve to defend a common public space, but to organize a discursively filtered scene, in line with power interests.

Regulation perceived as asymmetrical and politically biased

This diagnosis of asymmetry goes hand in hand with harsh criticism of the institutional operator behind the DSA: several articles rail against a decision-making process akin to suffrage, cut off from democratic conflict and regulated by coercive norms rather than representation. The European Union, and the Commission in particular, is thus marked by an image of technocratic coldness, even collusion with the large American companies it intends to regulate. The paradox is highlighted with a certain bitterness: in the name of European sovereignty, control over speech is entrusted to private platforms.

Thierry Breton embodies this tension. In several articles (Causeur (A01, A07), Boulevard Voltaire (A03)), his positions are mocked for their solemn and threatening tone, which sometimes evokes that of an authoritarian prefect lacking electoral legitimacy. His clash with Elon Musk is not interpreted as an act of firmness, but as a demonstration of power with no grip on reality. In this analysis, Europe would enter a rather bleak limbo: neither a place of sovereign counter-power nor a vibrant democratic space, but a normative bureaucracy managing minority sensibilities.

This criticism is sometimes presented in a nostalgic way, as a call for strong, national, and embodied sovereignty, capable of stemming the ideological influence of Brussels and the hegemony of GAFAM. In this context, the DSA becomes the symbol of a Europe that claims to defend its citizens, but in reality deprives them of their capacity for democratic arbitration through depoliticized regulation in the name of supposed preventive security.

It is not a question of doing away with the principle of regulation per se, as several articles recognize the need to combat criminal content (terrorism, child abuse, incitement to murder). What is being challenged is the extension of the filtering logic to opinion content, using criteria that are considered too subjective or vague. More generally, it is also the regulation that finds its basis neither in clear public debate nor in the expressed will of the people, but in a web of technostructures, cabinets, and subcommittees. In a Europe where abstention is becoming institutionalized, this criticism cannot be dismissed with a technocratic wave of the hand.

4.2.3 Mobilizing freedom of expression: a discourse of warning and identity reaffirmation

The latest phase of conservative media discourse on the Digital Services Act (DSA) involves strategically mobilizing freedom of expression, which is presented not only as a right under threat, but also as a symbolic tool for reaffirming legitimacy in the face of what is perceived as illegitimate domination. The DSA is no longer simply criticized; it has become the catalyst for a call to resistance, vigilance, and even the reconquest of a "confiscated" discursive space. The use of denunciation and performativity in discourse aims to launch a cultural counteroffensive marked by figures of exclusion and dissent.

Freedom of expression under threat: a rhetoric of warning

The articles in the corpus construct an alarming narrative in which freedom of expression is structurally threatened by the alliance between European institutions and major digital platforms. The challenge is to give weight to behaviors that we want to make visible in the narrative surrounding these articles, which are often solemn, sometimes dramatic: there is talk of a "wave of bans," "liberticidal abuses," and the "return of censorship." What is highlighted is not so much the occasional failure to comply with certain discourses, but the risk of a lasting shift, namely the impossibility of expressing certain opinions (and in particular of observing the effects of discourse) without exposing oneself to repression, oblivion, or stigmatization.

The DSA is not only analyzed as legislation, but as a symbolic tipping point, a historic threshold beyond which pluralism would be threatened. Calls for mobilization, which are often found in V.A., are addressed not only to governments and institutions, but also directly to citizens, who are urged to "not remain silent" and to "defend their inalienable right to free speech." This type of rhetoric has a long memory: it activates the reflexes of identity-based resistance that have existed throughout history, often linked to the fear of cultural decline or political marginalization.

Reaffirming a conservative voice as a counterweight to power

This warning is accompanied by a rehabilitation of conservative discourse as a minority voice, and therefore all the more legitimate in its demand for absolute freedom of expression. Some articles refer to censored personalities or "silenced" speeches that are said to be inconvenient witnesses to a reality that the system would like to hide: social violence, mass migration, gender ideologies, radical Islamism, etc. These subjects, which have been turned into blind spots in public debate, are reintroduced into a logic of inconvenient truth that the DSA would seek to neutralize.

Freedom of expression is thus a prerequisite for the right to dissent, or even confrontation, against a social peace built on unspoken assumptions. This shift is strategic and allows us to interpret a voice often considered divisive, even stigmatized as hateful, as a courageous voice, while reversing the stigma: what was perceived as controversial could enhance authenticity; what was relegated to the margins becomes the heart of the redefinition of a "real" public space.

In Breizh Info (A05), this attitude translates into a critique of "ideological norms" which, subject to institutions, are promulgated as unbearable dogmas; in Causeur or Boulevard Voltaire, it takes the form of a defense of "democratic friction," a necessary evil for a debated order; and all these media outlets thus set themselves up as the owners of 'true' pluralism, as opposed to "official," expurgated pluralism.

Towards a rhetoric of expressive sovereignty

Through these positions, we are witnessing an implicit redefinition of freedom of expression as a sovereign right, both individual and collective. Implicit support for moderation, and algorithmic control is perceived as an attack not only on the right to express oneself, but also on the right to exist politically, whether one is conservative, Christian, identitarian, or patriotic. In this sense, freedom of expression becomes the last bastion against a broader semantic, cultural, and political dispossession.

The invocation of freedom of expression thus transcends the legal sphere to enter the realm of existential affirmation. It allows heterogeneous critics—anti-European paradigm, anti-GAFAM paradigm, anti-cultural left paradigm—to unite in a unified narrative of resistance. In a saturated information landscape, critical speech is now more than an argumentative exercise: it is an act of presence.

This may seem like a form of rhetorical exaggeration. But this strategy responds to a very real phenomenon: in a situation of fragmentation of public debate, those excluded from the media sphere are attempting to regain visibility through excess, hoping to break through the filter of respectability. The DSA, although it has little direct impact on most of these actors, is becoming the icon of a broader struggle concerning the very conditions of expression in contemporary European democracies.

4.3 A structuring ideological convergence: theoretical reinterpretation of the results

4.3.1 A shared rhetoric of alarm: censorship, threat, dispossession

A cross-analysis of parliamentary speeches and press articles reveals a recurring theme of alarm and dispossession. This is structured around the idea that the DSA is a tool for censoring the status quo. Themes of warning and protest are frequently used to describe a system of digital regulation that is considered illegitimate by French-speaking opponents of this regulation, in both the parliamentary arena and the press, as well as in political and media arenas. Built on a series of tropes, "Ministry of Truth," "groupthink," "speech police", as well as on the existential threat that the DSA would pose to freedom of expression, it is then possible to portray the law as an existential threat to democratic rights, making it a violent and counterproductive practice. The DSA is therefore not simply a technical object in these two bodies of work, but becomes a symbol of political and cultural dispossession.

In this discursive configuration, technological intrusion is often portrayed as the tool of an ideological elite disconnected from the people. This rhetoric relies on simple binary oppositions — people versus elite, freedom versus censorship, truth versus manipulation — which correspond to what Pierre-André Taguieff (1984, pp. 114–117) identifies as a demagogic structure of political imagination: a simplification of reality through the designation of a supposedly threatening enemy embodying the dangerous Other[21]. This classic pattern involves a struggle between, on the one hand, a "naturally free" people and, on the other, a centralizing power whose threat is persistent: a fundamental antagonism that corresponds to Cas Mudde's very definition of populism, namely a "tangible" ideology that pits the pure people against the corrupt elite in a Manichean fashion (Mudde, 2007, p. 23). This binary pattern feeds a rhetoric of self-defense: citizens must defend themselves against a corrupt elite.

In this vein, digital regulation should not be seen as a response to contemporary democratic challenges (disinformation, online hate speech, etc.), but rather as an instrument of ideological control. Taguieff describes this shift throughout his analysis of national-populist rhetoric, which seeks to produce an image of the world based on decadence, shared humiliation, and the threat of possible collective collapse. One could say that pamphleteering discourse functions as a "theatricalization of anger," where skeptical mobilization and performative indignation aim to provide grounds for resistance. This is what we see in the discourse of the elected officials and journalists in our sample,

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[21] In Taguieff's work, demagogic rhetoric is based on a Manichaean simplification of reality, structured by binary oppositions and the designation of a supposedly threatening enemy, the "dangerous Other." This shifting figure brings together various forms of threat (parasite, traitor, infiltrator) and primarily serves to produce an effect of self-defense. It is not a carefully constructed discourse, but rather a pre-existing imaginary that the demagogue reactivates (Taguieff, 1984, pp. 114–117).

where it is as if metaphors of persecution, gagging, and dictatorship were at work in every discourse, through the different variations of a common lexicon.

This a priori anxiety-provoking framing is coupled with an emotional strategy that aims less to attest to the truth than to lend credibility, convince, and/or incite immediate mobilization. Taguieff (1984) reminds us that demagogic discourse "persuades by amplifying certain values of the audience, without concern for verifiability"[22] (p. 114). This emotional dimension is at work in both corpora: the wording is excessive, the conclusions are hasty, and fear is a structuring factor. The principle of freedom of expression is no longer a question to be clarified. It is now a fortress that we must defend. In his analysis of digital dynamics, Cass Sunstein demonstrates how informational disinformation and algorithmic homophily exacerbate this type of emotional rhetoric. Discourse becomes more radicalized due to conditions that favor dissemination on platforms, but also because of the emotional polarization promoted by the digital environment: individuals are exposed only to opinions that confirm their own, which reinforces their prejudices and makes them hostile to opposing views (Sunstein, 2018, pp. 130-132). In such a context, the figure of censorship becomes a catch-all term that crystallizes harmful emotions: indignation, resentment, mistrust, etc... Democratic debate then becomes an emotional clash between two irreconcilable truths.

Thus, the convergence of populist rhetoric, the narrativist approach to emotion, and fear of digital discourse leads to a disintermediation of the register of criticism of the DSA, which is no longer judged for what it is, but for what it represents. Regulation is the lesser evil; the enemy is the "elite" that dominates the people. Needless to say that this phenomenon illustrates a crisis of confidence in institutions, both structural and discursive, in which alerts become automatic. This rhetoric of alarmism is much more than just a stylistic device. It reflects profound changes in our relationship to politics and to truth.

4.3.2. The neoliberal economy of discourse: commodification of speech and depoliticization of conflicts

Far from being limited to a visceral rejection of the Digital Services Act (DSA) in the name of freedom of expression, the media and parliamentary discourse studied is part of a broader neoliberal reformulation of politics, in which public speech becomes a resource to be capitalized on, a vector of identity distinction, and even a competitive product. In this context, it is less a question of denouncing state censorship than of losing control over speech that has become unstable, contested, and

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[22] Translated from the original: *L'art du démagogue se réduit, dans sa fin dernière, à la manipulation: pour faire agir, il faut appliquer des règles rhétoriques sans souci de vérité ou de vérifiabilité du propos.*

deterritorialized, and therefore threatening to the dominant occupants of the conservative discursive space.

A neoliberal performativity of discourse

Wendy Brown (2015) has shown that neoliberalism is not just a set of economic policies, but a political rationality that seeks to "configure all aspects of existence in economic terms" (p. 17). This logic can be extended to other discursive uses: in a world hyper-saturated with information, political or media discourse can be subject to other logics of performance, optimization, etc. This trend is reflected in the discourses analyzed by a desire to capitalize discursively on freedom of expression, not to defend its universalist or deliberative nature, which would constitute a desirable future, but to make it a vehicle for ideological distinction, an "asset" that allows one to pose as the guarantor of a threatened order. This echoes Brown's analysis (2015): contemporary subjectivity is being reshaped according to the modalities of the enterprise, where the subject is no longer a citizen with political rights, but an entrepreneur of himself, whose words are only valid if they generate credit, support, and visibility (pp. 22-23). From this perspective, the denunciation of the DSA operates as a discursive branding device that makes the actors appear as defenders of "democratic authenticity" in the face of a dehumanized technocratic power, at the cost of reducing democracy to a privatized freedom of expression, alien to structural power relations.

The institutionalization of discourse as a mechanism of exclusion

This shift from political discourse to individual performance is also discussed by Michel Foucault in The Order of Discourse, in which he begins by noting that "in any society, the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a number of procedures"[23] (Foucault, 1971, p. 10). These procedures include, among other things, prohibition, control of legitimate speech, and regulation of the conditions of access to speech. In other words, far from being spontaneous, freedom of expression is always framed within systems of power. However, academic/scholarly discourse tends to essentialize this freedom by ignoring the power relations that govern its concrete distribution in the public sphere.

Thus, when a member of parliament or editorialist deplores "platform censorship" without questioning the fact that it is the logic of algorithmic moderation, the imperatives of content monetization, and the unequal conditions of access to digital technology that prevent people from being heard, it is the very existence of a largely unequal discursive regime that is being highlighted while at the same time being naturalized. This paradox is all the more striking among actors who

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[23] Tranlasted from the original : *"(...) dans toute société la production du discours est à la fois contrôlée, sélectionnée, organisée et redistribuée par un certain nombre de procédures (...)"*

claim to be defenders of freedom, when in reality they enjoy a dominant position in the struggle for free speech, a struggle that concerns not only content, but also the very conditions that make it possible to express oneself. (Foucault, 1971, p. 12).

Depoliticization through juridification

The tendency to depoliticize freedom of expression in favor of a desocialized individual right is also evident in these discourses. In Excitable Speech (1997), Judith Butler shows that performative utterances, whether hate speech, provocation, or censorship, are always engaged with a conflictual social field: "language acts, but always in a context that makes it possible and gives it its effect" (p. 3). A desocialized individual right is precisely what is proposed in the discourse of conservative actors, who dismiss the question of social, historical, and emotional relationships, which "are increasingly difficult to ignore when accounting for struggles in the contemporary public sphere." In other words, instead of admitting that certain discourses, particularly those involving disinformation or incitement to hatred, could legitimately be subject to democratic regulation, conservative actors avoid the debate. Censorship then becomes a question of public interest or power relations, but also a question of the illegitimacy of denying the supposed "neutrality" of the marketplace of ideas. In this way, they contribute to the naturalization of the existing digital order, without taking into account the mechanisms that govern access to public discourse.

4.3.3. Post-truth, algorithmization, and depoliticized circulation: the conditions that make these discourses possible

The emergence of apparent criticism of digital repression in the name of defending freedom of expression cannot be understood without grasping the radical transformations of the contemporary public sphere in the digital age. These transformations stem from changes in the modes of information production, the material architecture of platforms, and the type of contemporary emotional relationships in which these discourses thrive. The work of Myriam Revault d'Allonnes (2018), David Chavalarias (2023), and Jodi Dean (2005) helps us identify the conditions that make these discourses possible in terms of post-truth, algorithmic polarization, and communicational depoliticization. Confusion of reference points: the post-truth condition

Blurring the lines: the post-truth condition

The first distinctive feature of contemporary discourse lies in what Myriam Revault d'Allonnes refers to as the "post-truth era," which she describes as a blurring of the boundaries between truth and falsehood, sincerity and deception, fact and fiction (Revault d'Allonnes, 2018, p.

28). However, this blurring is more a matter of indifference to the truth, whose central status is weakened or challenged in democratic debate, than a shift toward widespread lying. This question, which is not only cognitive but also ontological and political, seems to be increasingly understood in terms of the adequacy of its terms with the beliefs, emotions, or intuitions of individuals, rather than in terms of criteria that allow it to be evaluated rationally and objectively (p. 32). This phenomenon is at the heart of the media examples manipulated by Revault d'Allonnes, whether it be the uncorroborated rumor surrounding David Cameron that arose during last-minute negotiations, or the false promises of Brexit supporters. This dynamic transforms the information landscape into a saturated and unstable space, where the dominance of narrative over fact prevails. It is no longer just a question of a debate about reality, but of a conflict between competing narratives, all justified in the name of an "authenticity" that is more readily accepted than the constraint of truthfulness. This climate then becomes fertile ground for alarmist, emotional, and apolitical statements, such as those found in the corpus.

From speech to content: political neutralization through circulation

David Chavalarias finds it advantageous to extend this reflection in a desire to counterbalance this staging of algorithms in the configuration of a polarized public space. In his research on the dynamics and logic of online groups, he shows that social media platforms do not simply transmit information, but also organize the circulation of this information based on engagement logic that favors the dissemination of polarizing, emotional, or sensational content (Chavalarias, 2023, p. 11). This algorithmic logic primarily exposes users to content that corresponds to their opinions and accentuates cognitive biases, a phenomenon known as the "echo chamber" or "filter bubble."

In this context, discourse on freedom of expression takes on a different form: it becomes viral, with its effectiveness based on its ability to generate anger, fear, or "outrage" in record time. From a utilitarian perspective, opposition to the DSA is part of a strategy to maximize attention. It is less about defending the veracity of these discourses than about ensuring their circulation, triggering divisions, and initiating a process of mobilization. Truth is lost in an economy of virality that exacerbates binary oppositions and reduces public debate to a confrontation between antagonistic micro-communities.

Technogenic polarization: the role of algorithms

Jodi Dean analyzes this evolution as a sign of a more global change that she calls "communicative capitalism" (Dean, 2005, p. 54). Public discourse no longer aims at argumentative exchange or collective deliberation; it becomes a constant flow of content produced, redistributed, and stored in digital spaces dedicated to political use, at least in theory. What matters is no longer what is said, but what is stated and received. Sharing an article, a tweet, or a slogan is supposed to be an act of

mobilization, but it only neutralizes conflict by making it unassignable, impersonal, or even disconnected from reality.

Jodi Dean (2005, p.61) uses the term "interpassivity" to describe a form of illusory participation in which the circulation of content ensures less the politicization of issues than their disinvestment. In our corpus, this takes the form of a profusion of shock phrases such as "soft totalitarism," "European Ministry of Thruth" , "Truth police" which condense emotions without linking them to a critique of the regulatory mechanisms in place. These statements, which saturate the discursive space, present themselves as semi-viral artifacts intended to signal an ideological stance rather than to express a political position on a specific issue. The defense of freedom of expression is thus transformed into a performative act devoid of any political dimension, proposing "battles" in the literal sense of confrontation, all the more appealing because they are devoid of any complexity.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Main findings

From a corpus consisting of parliamentary speeches and press articles, the study aimed to discover the discursive logics, rhetorical strategies and ideological positions underlying this opposition. The emphasis on freedom of expression, which is not anodyne, is here a central lever of legitimation, at the crossroads of populist movements, post-truth logics and a growing fragmentation of information space.

The analysis identified three main types of discursive processes. First, a lexicon of alarm and threat portrays the DSA as a tool of systematic censorship, denounced as an "authoritarian drift" or a "tool of ideological control." Then, a dynamic of falsification of facts can be observed in the use of emotional figures, exaggerations, or even lies: the aim is no longer to present true assertions, but to provoke indignation. Finally, the principle of freedom of expression, historically a pillar of democratic counter-power, is here used in reverse as a tool of obstruction, not to enrich debate, but to discredit any regulatory intervention perceived as "progressive" or "technocratic."

5.2 Interpretive framework and theoretical implications

These findings are situated within a theoretical framework that combines five complementary dimensions: the strategic evolution of the French radical right, the fragmentation of the digital space, the remediation of populist and conspiratorial rhetoric, the erosion of factual truth in public debate, and the ambiguity of the concept of freedom of expression in contemporary ideological struggles. This research combines several approaches in an attempt to understand why and how certain actors who claim to defend liberty oppose the regulation of platforms that nonetheless disseminate hateful, discriminatory, and false content.

This work does not aim to be exhaustive, but it offers insights into certain discursive logics that are often naturalized or trivialized. Too often, populist discourse is examined solely as a communication tool aimed at winning electoral capital. Yet it must also be analyzed as a vector for the recomposition of the ideological field. The identity-based and nationalist "pieces" are already firmly in place, and one of their main strategies today is to defend a digital landscape that favors them. The informational arena thus becomes a central stake in power struggles.

This reveals a constitutive tension: while digital regulations like the DSA aim to restore a balance between freedom of expression and protection from abuse, their opponents denounce them as political censorship implemented by regulators. Yet this critique of illegitimacy is based on the idea that digital platforms are not private companies playing a major role in democratic dynamics, but

rather broadcasters of "the voice of the people." The paradox is that this "defense of freedom" in fact opposes a certain type of content circulation, by allowing the spread of content that hinges on emotion, outrage, and polarization.

Indeed, the absence of regulation in the informational landscape benefits reactionary content. Everything is designed to capture users' attention: algorithms are configured to maximize engagement, and therefore prioritize divisive discourse, simplistic narratives, and intense emotions. The far right has understood how this digital space operates. It conforms to it and even exploits it. This is precisely why it opposes any attempt to reconfigure this space. The analyzed discourses reflect this dynamic: they are not external to the digital environment; they are simultaneously its products and its producers. They are permeated by the logics of visibility, performativity, and affective radicalization specific to social media. It should be noted that this performativity and radicalization are not limited to far right discourse, but affect a great many speeches in contemporary parliamentary arenas.

5.3 Limits, tensions and normative stakes

This growing polarization has consequences for the very functioning of our institutions. It grants unprecedented power to the extremes, which succeed in setting the agenda of public debate. The Overton window is thereby redefined: topics long considered marginal (such as racialization, contempt for multilateralism, or the relativization of fundamental rights) are now accepted as valid opinions in the public sphere. To rehabilitate what was previously disqualified, the strategy is to shock, to saturate. Break taboos to shift boundaries. It is a dangerous game. That is precisely why we must not yield to the logic of hate.

There is an urgent need to defend a healthy, pluralistic informational space, one that respects the complexity of reality, not to "impose the truth" from above, but to ensure the minimum conditions for democratic debate. This supposes to get out of the illusion of an algorithmic neutrality, to take seriously the performative effects of speeches and to question the regimes of visibility and legitimacy that structure our discussion spaces. Today, when the circulation of information has become an issue of power as much as of technique, any regulation deserves to be debated, and the debate itself should be part of a shared epistemic framework.

5.4 Final reflections

The French case, analyzed here, is not an isolated case. The rise of Eurosceptic, nationalist, and even xenophobic forces is a cross-national phenomenon present in Italy, Germany, Poland, and Hungary, among others. The way in which these actors oppose digital regulations is the pretext for a

broader dynamic: the redefinition of democracy, its rules, its limits, and its exclusions. This work could serve as a springboard for future research that would like to explore the political scene more broadly or compare discursive strategies at the European level.

Finally, it is unacceptable that freedom of expression be co-opted by those who, in the name of freedom, attack democratic principles. It cannot therefore be subordinated to an ideology that would be the only banner, a weapon of rhetorical combat that would instrumentalize it. Freedom of expression is a condition, not a pretext; a demand, not an absolute; a promise never fully fulfilled, which it is our task to keep alive, provided we do not give up on reflecting critically on the ways it is interpreted and, at times, instrumentalized.

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Appendix

The supplementary appendix, which contains information relating to the analysed data, is available as an Excel document (separated file) comprising two spreadsheets: one dedicated to parliamentary speeches and the other to press articles.