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PAPP VICTOR *

The Foreclosure of Contestability: Algorithmic Curation and Democratic Revisability

2/1. rész

Abstract: Part One defined *foreclosure* as a condition in which democratic capacities remain possible in protected or deliberately constructed settings, yet the prevailing architecture of the public sphere no longer ordinarily reproduces them or composes dispersed instances at the scale of binding political decision. This second part performs the second of the five falsification tests stated there and specifies how the remaining four could be assessed. It examines three communicative dimensions of political judgement: sustained attention, shared epistemic validation, and protected reflection. Across all three, successful correction depends on actors and resources that do not govern the allocation of visibility, supporting the claim that these capacities remain possible without being ordinarily reproduced by the prevailing architecture. Adversarial recognition is treated separately, as an organisational precondition whose carriers predate algorithmic curation. Composition asks whether dispersed political claims stay traceable, remain recognisable through reformulation, and connect to institutional responses that return to public scrutiny. Comparative indicators specify how the untested conditions could be assessed, with democratic significance kept relative to the standard employed. A deliberative account treats the dimensions as constitutive, and polyarchy registers them in part. A minimalist account may place them outside its scope until electoral competition itself is affected. The final sections distinguish objective function, optimisation objective, and optimisation regime, then apply that distinction to strategic control and to national and European regulation. National initiatives intervene at the input layer. European regulation supplies the direct test. The Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act, and the Artificial Intelligence Act constrain transparency and data access, risk governance, and market conduct. Article 38 of the Digital Services Act addresses the ranking logic itself and secures an alternative to profiling without replacing the governing objective.

* *Stefan cel Mare University, Suceava, Romania*
Email: victor.papp@student.usv.ro
ORCID: 0009-0007-3432-5304

None of these instruments replaces the optimisation objective organising visibility. Technological fatalism is rejected; the second falsification condition remains unmet.
Keywords: Deliberative democracy, digital public sphere, algorithmic curation, *foreclosure,* Epistemic validation, platform regulation, optimisation, collective will-formation.

Összefoglalás: Az első rész a *foreclosure* fogalmát olyan helyzet leírására vezette be, amelyben a demokratikus képességek védett vagy tudatosan kialakított terekben továbbra is fennmaradhatnak, miközben a nyilvánosság meghatározó architektúrája rendes működése során már nem termeli újra őket, és a szétszórtan megjelenő kezdeményezéseket sem kapcsolja össze a kötelező erejű politikai döntéshozatal léptékében. A második rész az ott megfogalmazott öt falszifikációs feltétel közül a másodikat teszteli, és meghatározza, miként válhat a fennmaradó négy empirikusan vizsgálhatóvá. A politikai ítélet kialakulásának három kommunikációs dimenzióját vizsgálja: a tartós figyelmet, a közös episztemikus validációt és a védett reflexiót. Mindhárom esetben az látható, hogy a sikeres korrekció olyan szereplőkre és erőforrásokra támaszkodik, amelyek nem rendelkeznek hatalommal a nyilvános láthatóság elosztásának szabályai felett. Ez alátámasztja azt az állítást, hogy e képességek fennmaradhatnak anélkül, hogy a meghatározó kommunikációs rendszer működése önmagában újratermelné őket. Az ellenfél demokratikus szereplőként való elismerését a tanulmány külön kezeli, olyan szervezeti előfeltételként, amelynek intézményi hordozói megelőzik az algoritmikus kuráció kialakulását. Az összekapcsolódás vizsgálata arra irányul, hogy a különböző helyeken megfogalmazott politikai igények nyomon követhetők maradnak-e, újrafogalmazásuk során továbbra is felismerhetők-e, és kapcsolódnak-e olyan intézményi válaszokhoz, amelyek ismét nyilvános megítélés tárgyává válnak. Összehasonlító indikátorok jelölik ki a még nem tesztelt feltételek vizsgálatának módját, miközben demokratikus jelentőségük mindig az alkalmazott normatív mércéhez viszonyítva értelmezendő. A deliberatív demokrácia e dimenziókat konstitutívnak tekinti, a poliarchikus megközelítés részben érzékeli őket, míg egy minimalista felfogás mindaddig saját vizsgálati körén kívül hagyhatja ezeket, amíg maga a választási verseny nem sérül. A tanulmány utolsó szakaszai megkülönböztetik az objektív függvényt, az optimalizációs célt és az optimalizációs rezsimet, majd e különbségtételt alkalmazzák a stratégiai kontroll, valamint a nemzeti és európai szabályozás elemzésére. A vizsgált nemzeti kezdeményezések elsősorban a bemeneti szinten avatkoznak be.
A közvetlen falszifikációs próbát az európai szabályozási gyakorlat szolgáltatja. Az uniós digitális szabályozási keret az átláthatóságot, az adatokhoz való hozzáférést, a kockázatkezelést és a piaci magatartást szabályozza, míg a DSA 38. cikke már magát a rangsorolási logikát is érinti. Ez azonban a profilalkotással szemben választható alternatívát biztosít, nem pedig a rangsorolást meghatározó általános irányadó kritériumot. A vizsgált szabályozási eszközök egyike sem váltja fel a láthatóság elosztását meghatározó optimalizációs célt. A technológiai fatalizmus ezért nem tartható fenn, a második falszifikációs feltétel ugyanakkor továbbra sem teljesül.

Kulcsszavak: Deliberatív demokrácia, digitális nyilvánosság, algoritmikus kuráció, *foreclosure,* episztemikus validáció, platformszabályozás, optimalizáció, kollektív akaratképzés.

Introduction

Part One defined foreclosure as a specific condition in contemporary political communication. Democratic capacities may survive in mini-publics, universities, journalism, courts, and other protected settings even when the dominant communicative architecture ceases to reproduce them through ordinary operation. Three conditions must coincide. The architecture no longer reproduces the capacity at issue. Corrective arrangements remain local or provisional, or depend on resources that do not govern the architecture. No reliable mechanism carries dispersed instances to the scale at which democratic practice binds. The third condition separates survival from composition: repeated local existence does not by itself make a capacity a property of the political system.

The definition must remain exposed to contrary evidence. Treating every local success as exceptional and every failure as confirmation would insulate the diagnosis from refutation. Part One therefore stated five conditions, any one of which would require revising or abandoning the account: (1) scalable deliberative infrastructures, (2) a durable replacement of the optimisation objective governing curation, (3) endogenous correction arising within the architecture itself, (4) collective learning at political scale, and (5) comparative cases in which engagement-oriented optimisation coexists with the ordinary reproduction of the capacities at issue. Here, those failure conditions are stated in empirically testable terms. Section 3.2 performs the second. Section 2.8 specifies indicators for the remaining four.

The causal claim is deliberately limited. Part One located the mechanism producing foreclosure in an optimisation regime, and the claim applies to that regime alone. Digital communication falls outside it. Four properties identify the mechanism: recursive behavioural feedback (loop closure), an institutionally selected optimisation objective, individuated informational environments, and rapid revision. I call these the four threshold properties. Platforms need not create every source of democratic disorder for the mechanism to matter. Elite strategies, partisan identities, commercial pressures, legacy-media asymmetries, and the decline of intermediary organisations have causal histories of their own. Algorithmic curation selects among these materials, distributes them through adaptive systems, and makes their effects mutually consequential. Differences in ownership or governance should alter the severity of the diagnosis, and if the same curation logic reliably reproduced the capacities across such arrangements, the causal account would have to narrow further.

The empirical analysis focuses on three communicative dimensions. Sustained attention keeps a political object in view long enough for interpretation.

Shared epistemic validation concerns publicly recognisable objects and procedures for checking claims across political divisions. Protected reflection permits hesitation and provisional belief when a person can examine a political object without expecting observation to alter it. The three do not exhaust democratic judgement. Each faces pressure through a distinct mechanism, allowing separate assessment.

Part One defined composition through traceability, recognisability, and return. Political claims raised locally must stay traceable as they move across scales, participants must be able to recognise their reformulation, and responses by public institutions must return to public scrutiny in a form open to renewed judgement. This demands less than a unified national conversation and less than informational uniformity. The question is whether differentiated publics become mutually consequential within a continuing political process. Sections 2.5 to 2.8 examine composition across networked mobilisation, differentiated and hybrid publics, political scale, historical time, and observable indicators.

Structural diagnosis and democratic evaluation operate at different analytical levels. Deliberative democracy treats sustained attention, shared epistemic validation, and protected reflection as conditions of the formation and revision of political judgement. Polyarchy can register some of the same deficits through informed understanding, effective participation, and the conversion of expression into influence. A minimalist account may be largely indifferent as long as meaningful electoral competition and the removability of governments survive. That threshold is contestable. Competition is meaningful only if voters can form and revise judgements about the alternatives before them, so an architecture governing those conditions bears on the minimalist criterion too, at one remove. The structural finding does not settle its democratic significance. Warren's problem-based approach supports this sequence: identify the democratic function at stake before deciding which practices or theoretical standards make it constitutive [1]. Part Three compares the standards under which a shortfall counts as constitutive, partial, or not yet democratic, producing a graded diagnosis that treats disagreement over standards as part of the analysis.

Because the optimisation regime is contingent, regulation is conceptually possible. Section 3.1 separates measures that constrain the conditions of optimisation from measures that alter the purpose governing curation, and distinguishes the technical objective function, the optimisation objective, and the wider regime of ownership, incentives, data access, expertise, and authority. Section 3.2 applies that distinction to national and European regulation.

[1] Warren, M. E. (2017): A problem-based approach to democratic theory. *American Political Science Review,* 111., (1.), pp. 39–53.

Three communicative dimensions and an organisational precondition

The three dimensions approach the same structural relation from different directions. Sustained attention, shared epistemic validation, and protected reflection each identify a capacity needed for political judgement, a distinct pressure exerted by algorithmic curation, and the conditions for reconstruction. Adversarial recognition is treated separately because its organisational carriers predate algorithmic curation. Composition asks whether capacities surviving locally become mutually consequential across publics, scales, and time. Their democratic weight varies by theoretical standard. The empirical analysis concerns ordinary reproduction and composition, neither of which requires a capacity to disappear.

The analysis uses one threshold. A capacity is ordinarily reproduced when its continuation does not require recurrent corrective effort financed, mandated, or organised outside the architecture's governing purposes. Repeated external support preserves possibility without making the capacity a product of ordinary operation.

Sustained attention and the inversion of scarcity

Sustained, voluntarily directed attention is the first requirement. Dominant platforms make sustained attention harder. Advertising and surveillance revenue models turn recurrent activity and behavioural traces into inputs for targeting and prediction, treating captured attention as a saleable commercial resource [2; 3; 4]. Attention directed elsewhere becomes a potential economic loss. Deliberative judgement follows a different temporality, needing continuity, patience with an argument, and some distance from stimuli selected for their likelihood of provoking another interaction. Han describes the conflict through information's short interval of actuality: accelerated and fragmented communication suppresses time-consuming practices of knowledge and reflection, whereas discourse presupposes continuity and duration [5].

The democratic stakes become clearer once scarcity of speech is separated from scarcity of attention. Mill's defence of expression assumes that additional speech expands the range of claims available for public judgement, that error is corrected

[2] Srnicek, N. (2016): *Platform capitalism.* Polity Press.

[3] Wu, T. (2017): *The attention merchants: The epic struggle to get inside our heads.* Atlantic Books.

[4] Zuboff, S. (2019): *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power.* PublicAffairs.

[5] Han, B. C. (2022): Infocracy: *Digitization and the crisis of democracy.* Polity Press.

[6] Mill, J. S. (2011): *On liberty.* Cambridge: University Press.

[7] Roberts, M. E. (2018): *Censored: Distraction and diversion inside China's Great Firewall.* Princeton University Press.

[8] Tufekci, Z. (2017): *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest.* Yale University Press.

through confrontation, and that suppression deprives the public of the process which tests and refines truth [6]. Post links democratic legitimacy to a public discourse sufficiently open to reconcile individual participation with collective self-government.

Digital abundance reverses that economy. Speech can be produced and circulated at minimal cost, whereas human attention is finite, so the scarce resource is access to the attention that gives expression public consequence. Recommender systems allocate it according to predicted engagement, with no stable editorial responsibility and no public procedure of judgement. Additional speech may fragment attention and make informational saturation cheaper than reasoned rebuttal. The common field of argument does not necessarily enlarge [7; 8].

Censorship takes new forms in this environment. Direct prohibition persists, and political information can also be weakened through friction, flooding, and the denial of attention or credibility, leaving it formally available with reduced public consequence [7; 8]. Ranking and recommendation can make speech harder to find, easier to displace, or more difficult to credit without removing it. Counting removals therefore misses the injury.

The paradox lies in how communication is organised. Platform communication may protect formal expression more extensively than earlier media orders and still weaken the conditions that give expression epistemic and political value. Counterspeech retains its logic, but rival arguments no longer meet reliably within a sufficiently shared field of attention. Moderated forums and educational practices protect attention, as do personal discipline and institutional rules in particular settings, and earlier arrangements also required deliberate cultivation and supplied it unevenly. The comparison concerns who bears the burden. Individual participants, and institutions unable to determine how visibility is allocated, now supply resources that ordinary platform operation does not reproduce. Whether this dependence persists across media systems and over time is the decisive evidence.

Reconstructing sustained attention requires more than protection at the point of use. Moderated forums and educational practices operate downstream from an allocation already made. They may shelter particular users, but the rule distributing visibility to everyone else stays unchanged. Two elements are needed. Some portion of public attention must be allocated by a rule other than predicted interaction, and an institution must be empowered to set that rule and defend it against revenue pressure over time.

Public-service broadcasting met both requirements within its jurisdiction through statutory mandates, and contemporary arrangements would have to reproduce the same combination under individuated distribution. Securing that power is harder because a differently ordered feed changes the rule without relocating the power to revise it.

Shared epistemic validation

Political disagreement also needs publicly recognised procedures for assessing competing claims. Traditional gatekeepers exercised selective and frequently exclusionary authority, so their decline carried a democratic promise. Platform-based communication retained hierarchy in a different form. Decisions about visibility and credibility migrated into proprietary recommendation systems directed towards engagement without any requirement of public justification. Recommendation thus performs an editorial function under no editorial accountability [9; 10].

Farrell and Schneier use common political knowledge in a deliberately less demanding sense than the game-theoretic definition. It denotes roughly shared beliefs about how a political system works, who its actors are, and how coordination is possible [11]. The term stops short of unanimity and of a single official account, referring instead to publicly inspectable objects and sufficiently recognised procedures that allow disagreement to be located. Citizens may contest a claim and still know which evidence and standards others invoke. Personalised distributions weaken this background when participants cannot tell whether they inhabit the same controversy, or whether a correction visible in one informational environment has reached another. Farrell and Schneier show that flooding attacks degrade the decentralised map of actors, support, and possible coalitions on which collective action depends [11]. On Lynch's account, networked knowledge rests on standards of evidence and on institutions sustaining critical public discourse, and democracy needs a common public space of reasons in which inquiry stays open [12; 13].

Individuation compounds the difficulty. Citizens receive selections and rankings assembled through proprietary ranking systems, and none can easily inspect the distributions received by others.

[9] Pasquale, F. (2015): *The black box society: The secret algorithms that control money and information.* Harvard University Press.

[10] Napoli, P. M. (2019): *Social media and the public interest: Media regulation in the disinformation age.* Columbia University Press.

[11] Farrell, H.–Schneier, B. (2018): Common-knowledge attacks on democracy. *Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society.* https://cyber.harvard.edu/story/2018-10/common-knowledge-attacks-democracy

[12] Lynch, M. P. (2016): *The internet of us: Knowing more and understanding less in the age of big data.* W. W. Norton & Company.

[13] Lynch, M. P. (2019): *Know-it-all society: Truth and arrogance in political culture.* Liveright.

Arguments continue to circulate. The common object against which competing claims might be assessed loses stability. Verification then leans more heavily on professional journalism, the courts, scientific institutions, and deliberate source comparison, whose purposes remain external to the default incentives of platform circulation.

Generative artificial intelligence adds another layer by presenting synthesised conclusions before the sources from which they might be reconstructed. Traditional search commonly required movement among sources before reaching a conclusion, and generated summaries can reverse that sequence. A 2025 Pew study found lower click-through rates when AI summaries were displayed, though clicks are an imperfect proxy for verification [14]. Lower click-through cannot by itself establish epistemic degradation. It does show how interface design can reduce ordinary occasions for source comparison and concentrate epistemic mediation in systems whose synthesis procedures are difficult to examine.

Public assessability adds a second requirement. Knowledge held in common depends on attributing sources and circulating corrections. A system may produce mostly accurate answers and still weaken the evidentiary relations that make accuracy publicly assessable. Stable conventions of citation and correction would mitigate the problem only if users employ them and only if those conventions remain open to independent scrutiny.

Altman argues that generative systems can accelerate citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy yet erode the deliberative conditions that make their outcomes legitimate [15]. He presents "augmented deliberation" as the preferable alternative and proposes institutional and technological guardrails to support it [15]. Kreps and Kriner foreground threats to representation, accountability, and trust, and propose detection tools, platform responsibility, and digital literacy [15]. Their objects differ. Both accounts make the democratic value of generative systems depend on safeguards established beyond proprietary platforms.

Shared epistemic validation must also be assessed function by function. Earlier arrangements supplied inspectable objects unevenly. The professional procedures making claims assessable belonged to particular institutions. The medium itself supplied none. The resources sustaining shared epistemic validation now sit outside platform distribution systems, and no internal procedure supplies them.

Comparability is required. Accuracy alone is insufficient. Even reliably true outputs leave a public unable to determine whether participants address the same controversy without a vantage point for comparing distributions.

[14] Pew Research Center (2025): *Google users are less likely to click on links when an AI summary appears in the results.* https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/07/22/google-users-are-less-likely-to-click-on-links-when-an-ai-summary-appears-in-the-results/

[15] Altman, D. (2026): The AI democracy dilemma. *Journal of Democracy,* 37., (1.), pp. 32–44.

Reconstruction needs two things that individual verification cannot supply. Aggregate distributions must be inspectable by actors other than their recipients, and procedures for checking claims must gain recognition across political divisions. The first is an access problem amenable to design. The second depends on repeated use and contestation over time and cannot be produced by design alone, and that asymmetry limits what institutional reform can achieve.

Surveillance and protected reflection

Sustained attention and shared epistemic validation concern relations within the public sphere. Protected reflection concerns how judgement develops before public articulation. Deliberative democracy presupposes spaces where beliefs can be explored, revised, or abandoned outside continuous exposure. Foucault's account of panopticism isolates the mechanism, since permanent observability whose exercise cannot be verified can induce self-regulation even in the absence of an observer [16]. Penney's case study found an immediate decline and a broader trend reversal in views of terrorism-related Wikipedia articles after publicity surrounding NSA and PRISM surveillance.

The anticipation of observation can enter the formation of judgement itself. Provisional thoughts become oriented towards how they might appear in an observable environment before acquiring stable form, shifting thought from exploration towards performance. The value attributed to a claim is also conditioned by the producer's position within a field in which competing producers confer recognition [17]. Warner adds that counterpublic participation does more than express identities formed elsewhere, since it also contributes to their formation and transformation [18].

Surveillance operates across applications as well as within individual platforms. The Data Broker Files investigation and the ARTE documentary Dangerous Apps show ordinary applications transmitting persistent advertising identifiers and precise location records into transnational markets of intermediaries and data brokers [19; 20]. These sources are investigative reporting and carry the evidential standing of that genre, and the inference here requires only the existence of the trade they document.

[16] Foucault, M. (1977): *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison.* Pantheon Books.

[17] Bourdieu, P. (1975): The specificity of the scientific field and the social conditions of the progress of reason. *Social Science Information,* 14., (6.), pp. 19–47.

[18] Warner, M. (2002): *Publics and counterpublics.* Zone Books.

[19] Dachwitz, I.–Meineck, S. (2025): Data Broker Files: New data set reveals 40,000 apps behind location tracking. *Netzpolitik.org*. https://netzpolitik.org/2025/databroker-files-new-data-set-reveals-40000-apps-behind-location-tracking/

[20] Zierer, M.–Heinhold, F.–Ciesielski, R. (Directors) (2026): *Dangerous apps: How they trade your data* [Film]. Bayerischer Rundfunk; ARTE. https://www.arte.tv/en/videos/123951-000-A/dangerous-apps/

Such records are commonly presented as anonymous and collected for advertising purposes, yet repeated locations can disclose homes, workplaces, associations, routines, and visits to politically or personally sensitive sites. Surveillance in this form does more than register an already constituted subject. It produces an informational representation that makes a person persistently identifiable, classifiable, and available for purposes neither visible nor authorised at collection. Uncertainty runs along the entire chain of access, since citizens may be unable to discover which applications transmitted their data, which intermediaries obtained them, who later purchased them, or which institution could require deletion. Protected reflection weakens when political exploration and association become potentially observable and the routes for contesting that observation stay obscure.

The disciplinary analogy reaches its limit once surveillance becomes adaptive. Han extends the panoptic image to voluntary communication and self-exposure, making felt freedom part of the mechanism of control [5; 21]. The panopticon does not learn from those it observes. Contemporary surveillance does, since records of conduct reconfigure the environment of subsequent conduct, joining observation and modification in a recursive process. Zuboff marks the shift through instrumentarian power, describing Big Other as a connected computational apparatus for monitoring and acting upon behaviour [4].

The inherited analogies stop at the same point. Feudal extraction does not model tenants in advance. The panopticon disciplines and does not adapt to what it sees. Colonisation describes systemic media entering domains reproduced through communicative coordination. In an optimisation regime, the products of prior conduct become inputs governing subsequent conduct. Recursion is the discriminating property, and it holds independently of any single analogy.

The infrastructural position of platforms constrains refusal of platform-mediated surveillance. Search, messaging, identification, navigation, payment, and access to public and professional services are increasingly organised through a privately operated platform core. Opting out is technically possible, and van Dijck et al. argue that formal exit remains available but practical dependence makes withdrawal difficult for people participating in social and economic life [22]. This structural dependence differs from the behavioural and clinical literature on problematic smartphone use, though the two may overlap [23]. The smartphone is an increasingly important point of access to social life, and many applications are designed to solicit recurrent attention and habitual engagement [3].

[3] Wu, T. (2017): *The attention merchants: The epic struggle to get inside our heads.* Atlantic Books.

[4] Zuboff, S. (2019): *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power.* PublicAffairs.

[5] Han, B. C. (2022): Infocracy: *Digitization and the crisis of democracy.* Polity Press.

[21] Han, B. C. (2017): *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and new technologies of power.*Verso.

[22] van Dijck, J.–Poell, T.–de Waal, M. (2018): *The platform society: Public values in a connective world.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[23] Lu, X.–An, X.–Chen, S. (2024): Trends and influencing factors in problematic smartphone use prevalence (2012–2022): A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking,* 27., (9.), pp. 616–634.

Consent to data collection weakens when data relations attach to services people need and when curtailing access places users in positions of subordination or vulnerability [24; 25]. Citizens are formally free to disconnect. The price may be partial exclusion from the environments where social and political participation now occurs.

Platform surveillance also intersects with state interests. Public authorities can depend on private informational infrastructures and seek access to the data they hold [26]. The injury is structural, and privacy understood as an individual preference does not describe it. Protected reflection supports the hesitation and revision that make autonomous political judgement possible. As those protections weaken, independence rests more heavily on legal safeguards and privacy-preserving practices external to the default platform environment. Earlier arrangements afforded unobserved inquiry unevenly and, for some populations, hardly at all. Protection now rests on instruments unable to govern the data practices that erode it.

Protected reflection posits no sovereign private self untouched by social influence, since reflection draws on languages and institutions acquired from others. Privacy matters because provisional orientations can be entertained before being incorporated into a permanent behavioural profile or a public reputation. Its democratic value lies in the interval between exposure to a claim and the demand for a settled position, and data-intensive environments may narrow that interval without any censor prohibiting inquiry.

Reconstructing protected reflection confronts a distinct difficulty. The interval precedes articulation, so procedures operating only on public expression arrive too late. Consent at collection is also insufficient, since the injury may arise from onward transfer along a chain the person consenting cannot inspect.

On a deliberative standard, protection would require limits on retention and transfer binding at the system level, together with a body able to reconstruct the chain of access and terminate it for people unable to locate their own position within it. Both elements shift responsibility away from the individual data subject. Fiduciary and public-utility approaches are the candidates that would have to carry that burden, and Part Three assesses whether the standard licensing this requirement can itself be defended against polyarchal and minimalist rivals.

[24] Couldry, N.–Mejias, U. A. (2019): *The costs of connection: How data is colonizing human life and appropriating it for capitalism.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

[25] Rahman, K. S. (2018): The new utilities: Private power, social infrastructure, and the revival of the public utility concept. *Cardozo Law Review,* 39., (5.), pp. 1621–1692.

[26] Schneier, B. (2015): *Data and Goliath: The hidden battles to collect your data and control your world.* W. W. Norton.

Interim synthesis

Across the three dimensions, the same pattern recurs. Sustained attention is secured by moderation, educational practice, and surviving public-service mandates. Shared epistemic validation depends on journalism, the courts, scientific institutions, and deliberate source comparison. Protected reflection rests on legal safeguards and privacy-preserving institutions. In each case, successful correction draws on actors and resources that do not govern the allocation of visibility.

Against this threshold, all three dimensions independently support the second clause. Corrective institutions preserve possibility, but recurring external support does not constitute ordinary reproduction. Section 3.2 applies a separate test to regulatory measures.

Affect and adversarial recognition: an organisational precondition

Democratic disagreement requires more than exposure to opposing views, since opponents must remain recognisable as legitimate participants in a shared political process. Intermediary organisations carry that recognition by sustaining conflict for the time that negotiation and representation need. Ranking and recommendation do not produce organisations of this kind. Algorithmic curation therefore operates on a precondition it did not constitute. A decline beginning decades before its emergence is poor evidence for the mechanism, and reform of recommendation systems cannot recreate the missing organisations. Chronology separates intensification from origin.

Engagement-oriented systems privilege material associated with affective activation, and hostility towards opponents is among the most reliable drivers of interaction. Papacharissi describes the affective structuring of networked political engagement and treats affective attunement as a way of feeling one's way into politics [27]. Her account supports the descriptive point and stops short of the normative conclusion she rejects. Political allegiance can adhere more closely to group identity, and disagreement can then shift from contestation among adversaries towards antagonism between collective identities, a development studied empirically as affective polarisation [28; 29].

[27] Papacharissi, Z. (2015): *Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[28] Mason, L. (2018): *Uncivil agreement: How politics became our identity.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[29] Iyengar, S.–Lelkes, Y.–Levendusky, M.–Malhotra, N.–Westwood, S. J. (2019): The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. *Annual Review of Political Science,* 22., pp. 129–146.

Strong echo-chamber claims are unnecessary. Eady et al. found more overlap than divergence between the media accounts followed by the most liberal and the most conservative Twitter quintiles, alongside asymmetric exposure and substantial groups that rarely encountered sources prominent on the other side [30]. Nyhan et al. likewise found that like-minded sources supplied a majority of Facebook exposure and exceeded seventy-five per cent for only about one fifth of users [31]. Bruns describes such patterns as clustering in a porous multiplatform environment [32]. Dubois and Blank find that political interest and media diversity reduce the likelihood of an echo chamber [33]. Bails prism account adds that extreme participants become more visible as moderates withdraw, so that each side appears more extreme than it is [34]. Exposure has no stable democratic value by itself. In a month-long field experiment, Republicans exposed to liberal elite messages became more conservative, whereas the corresponding shift among Democrats was not statistically significant [35]. The relation in which opponents appear matters more than exposure alone.

Evidence on diffusion shows how engagement-oriented systems can intensify that relation. Moral-emotional language travels more widely through social networks, and out-group animosity is a particularly strong predictor of engagement [36; 37]. These findings do not establish that engagement-oriented ranking causes every instance of outrage. They identify a recurrent incentive by which platforms rewarded for interaction can favour material activating partisan identity and hostility.

Mouffe's distinction between agonism and antagonism draws on Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction [38] and seeks to domesticate conflict within pluralist institutions [39].

[30] Eady, G.–Nagler, J.–Guess, A.–Zilinsky, J.–Tucker, J. A. (2019): How many people live in political bubbles on social media? Evidence from linked survey and Twitter data. *SAGE Open,* 9., (1.), pp. 1–21.

[31] Nyhan, B.–Settle, J.–Thorson, E.–Wojcieszak, M.–Barberá, P.–Chen, A. Y.–Allcott, H.–Brown, T.–Crespo-Tenorio, A.–Dimmery, D.–Freelon, D.–Gentzkow, M.–González-Bailón, S.–Guess, A. M.–Kennedy, E.–Kim, Y. M.–Lazer, D.–Malhotra, N.–Moehler, D.–Tucker, J. A. (2023): Like-minded sources on Facebook are prevalent but not polarizing. *Nature,* 620., (7972.), pp. 137–144.

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Algorithmic amplification can preserve conflict yet erode the institutional and symbolic conditions that keep the adversary from becoming an enemy. Deliberative reciprocity and agonistic recognition differ normatively, and both need a public sphere that connects disagreement to common institutions and publicly intelligible rules.

Affective polarisation bears on the foreclosure diagnosis when hostility becomes easier to generate than durable adversarial organisation. Mobilisation can be intense despite weak channels of negotiation, representation, and political consequence [8]. The relevant capacity is sustained conflict among actors who can contest one another and still inhabit a common political order.

Mediating institutions are central to that reproduction. Parties, unions, associations, and representative bodies historically translated antagonistic demands into programmes and leadership contests, and from there into negotiation and decision. Their operation was often oligarchic, and it supplied forms that allowed conflict to persist beyond reactive encounters. Negt and Kluge make the organisational dependence explicit by locating proletarian public experience in a wider context of living and in forms of organisation through which that experience acquires collective expression [40]. The insight survives detachment from its class-theoretical framework. Institutions built alongside the public sphere carried a capacity the public sphere did not itself produce. Platform mobilisation can bypass their exclusions and may generate adversarial energy with no organisation able to stabilise responsibility and compromise. Reconstruction requires forms capable of holding conflict open for the duration of negotiation, a slower interval than platform circulation usually sustains.

Composition and dispersed agency

The three dimensions and the organisational precondition concern the formation of judgement. Composition is analytically distinct from judgement formation. It asks whether dispersed political agency acquires force in political decision-making across differentiated publics, changes of scale, and historical time, and whether those relations can be observed empirically.

Engagement-oriented curation can disrupt the three relations without removing political claims from circulation. Traceability weakens when ranking repeatedly reorders and redistributes reformulations of a political claim to different audiences

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according to predicted interaction, leaving no stable public path for reconstructing its movement. Recognisability weakens when individuated distributions prevent participants from inspecting the versions and contexts through which others encountered the same political claim. Return weakens when an institutional response re-enters the same engagement-governed distribution system and is not reliably routed back to the publics whose claims it answers. Continuity fails. Circulation persists, but the chain connecting claim to reformulation, and decision to response, becomes unreliable.

Digital counter-publics are the clearest case. Fraser's subaltern counterpublics provide spaces in which subordinated groups develop and circulate interpretations that contest dominant accounts of their identities and interests [41]. Warner adds that a counterpublic is marked as well by the protocols and modes of address through which its discourse circulates [18]. Platforms can support testimony and coordination across distance, and their vitality demonstrates that digital communication continues to sustain political agency and collective self-interpretation.

Existence does not guarantee public efficacy. Counter-publics operate within platforms allocating visibility according to engagement. Their internal discussion may preserve considerable autonomy. Passage into wider circulation depends on behavioural signals produced by the platforms they contest. A movement can adapt its language and organisational priorities to platform visibility without formal direction by any actor.

Research on networked protest makes the gap especially visible. Digital mobilisation can achieve extraordinary reach before substantial organisational capacity has been built [8]. Movements may then arrive at moments of institutional decision with no established procedures for collective decision and negotiation[8]. Rapid public attention and organisational depth follow different temporal logics.

Bennett and Segerberg challenge this inference directly. Communication itself can perform organisational work and shift part of the burden carried by resource-rich organisations [42], and connective networks can scale rapidly through personalised action frames [42]. Weak formal organisation is therefore insufficient evidence of non-composability. A counterexample would require connective coordination to sustain traceability, recognisability, and return. The foreclosure diagnosis weakens if those relations emerge reliably at political scale. Mobilisation coordinated without them stops short of composition.

[8] Tufekci, Z. (2017): *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest.* Yale University Press.

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The persistence of counter-publics qualifies any claim that digital communication has abolished democratic agency. Whether dispersed formations can enter a common decision-making process with durable effect on political decision-making remains open. Their activity remains compatible with foreclosure when visibility is volatile, wider circulation depends on engagement-oriented curation, and collective energy fails to acquire stable organisational form.

Rosanvallon's counter-democracy describes the pattern more closely than the preceding accounts [43]. Powers of oversight, prevention, and judgement have expanded alongside a weaker capacity to constitute collective political will. Digital technologies enlarge the means to document misconduct, circulate evidence, and hold authority to account. Engagement-oriented infrastructures can also detach distrust from common procedures of verification, making the line between accountability and indiscriminate delegitimation less secure. The foreclosure account explains this imbalance in institutional terms. Exposure and criticism travel readily through systems that reward such circulation, whereas the capacities required for collective will-formation compose less reliably.

To be continued in Part 2/2.