
Czech Conspiracy Websites as Agents of Illiberalism: Case study of Parliamentary Elections 2021

Jonáš Syrovátka

<https://doi.org/10.14712/25704893.2023.2>

Abstract: In the past several years, conspiracy websites emerged as relevant actors in Czech uncivil society. The article uses the lens of the concept of illiberalism to explain their ideological position, relation to the liberal democratic system and understanding of politics. The analysis of their reporting about the Czech Parliamentary elections 2021 allowed the article to uncover their allies and enemies and describe the role they want to play in Czech politics.

Keywords: conspiracy websites; Czech politics; parliamentary elections 2021; illiberalism; ideology

Abstrakt: V minulých letech se konspirační weby etablovaly jako relevantní aktér české ne-občanské společnosti. Článek za pomoci konceptu iliberalismu osvětluje jejich ideové pozice, vztah k liberální demokracii a chápání politiky. Prostřednictvím analýzy jejich publikační činnosti před parlamentními volbami 2021 článek definuje jejich spojence a protivníky a popisuje jako roli by tyto aktéři chtěli hrát v české politice.

Klíčová slova: konspirační weby; česká politika; parlamentní volby 2021; iliberalismus, ideologie

Received: 28 February 2022

Accepted: 11 November 2022

Mgr. Jonáš Syrovátka, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University
e-mail: jonassyrovatka6@gmail.com

© 2021 The Author. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>).

Introduction¹

In the past decade, global politics has undergone significant changes manifested by democratic backsliding, a fragmentation of the international order, and a reversal of economic globalisation. These trends were associated with the emergence of new political actors questioning the existing status quo and arguing for significant revision of the current institutional setting as well as the ideological principles guiding their functions. Political scientists trying to make sense of these developments came up with several theoretical frameworks describing the nature of newly emerging political forces.² This article would like to position itself within the framework of illiberalism which proved to be particularly useful for encapsulating the article's main topic – the ideological positions of conspiracy websites. The concept of illiberalism proved useful, especially due to its ability to pinpoint positive values that newly emerging political actors aim to achieve, allowing for their more nuanced and less normatively biased analysis.

Concurrently, the space in which political debate is held has also changed due to the transformation of the information space. The public debate has become significantly democratised due to the widespread online connection, the emergence of social media, and the decline of traditional gatekeepers such as the mainstream media.³ This development meant not only a change in the distribution and processing of information but also influenced how political forces get organised in society. The possibility of creating an online community with similar values and seeking to achieve the same goals also opened the doors for social forces criticising the existing liberal democratic system. In the Czech context, the notable actors of such an “uncivil society” are conspiracy websites which have become one of the crucial topics of the domestic public debate in the past several years concerning disinformation.⁴

The article aims to interconnect the topics mentioned above and try to understand the ideological positions of Czech conspiracy websites in the framework of the concept of illiberalism. Such an approach helps to cover the blind spots of both areas since, in the Czech context, the term illiberalism was used primarily for political

¹ The data were gathered within the framework of the research project „Czech Elections in the Era of Disinformation“ (see JONÁŠ SYROVÁTKA, and KRISTÝNA ŠEFCÍKOVÁ, „České volby v éře dezinformací: Parlamentní volby 2021“ [online], *Prague Security Studies Institute*, December 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/9417_parliamentary-elections-2021-analysis.pdf). Since several analysed websites were blocked, the access to original articles might be limited.

² GREGOR FITZL, JUERGEN MACKERT and BRYAN TURNER (eds), *Populism and the Crisis of Democracy*, London: Routledge 2018. 194 p.

³ POMERANTSEV, PETER, *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality*, New York: PublicAffairs 2019, 288 p.

⁴ JAKUB JETMAR, „Jakub Eberle: „Spousta lidí nálepkuje jako dezinformace cokoliv, co se jim nelíbí“ [online], *Mediář*, June 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.mediar.cz/spousta-lidi-nalepkuje-jako-dezinformace-cokoliv-co-se-jim-nelibi/>.

parties⁵, and conspiracy websites were perceived mostly in the context of the Russian influence operations.⁶ The article will expand upon existing knowledge by providing a different context for interpreting the ideological position of conspiracy websites and putting these political actors into the broader context of developments in the region. The article uses the Czech Parliamentary elections 2021 as the context for conducting this analysis since conspiracy websites became involved in the debate about the election, and it was possible to evaluate their ideological position based on their approach to the political parties.

The article will proceed to present its findings as follows. Firstly, it will describe the evolution of the concept of illiberalism, which served as an underlying theoretical framework for the analysis, and highlight its intersection with the dissemination of conspiracy theories. Secondly, the article elaborates on the definition of conspiracy websites in the context of the Czech information space, which allows for defining the units of analysis. The third section deals with the research method and explains the underlying rationale for selecting particular websites and texts included in the researched dataset. Finally, the article will elaborate on findings about the understanding of Parliamentary elections 2021 by conspiracy websites. The sections focused on the overall framing of the event, the role of the conspiracy websites in relation to the electoral process and the depiction of positive and hostile political forces. These steps will help underline the usefulness of the concept of illiberalism in understanding the ideological standing of Czech conspiracy websites.

Illiberalism, populism and conspiracy theories

The end of the Cold War accelerated the so-called “third wave of democratisation”, which meant the dismantling of authoritarian regimes all over the world and the introduction of the norms of liberal democracy.⁷ However, this process varied significantly among various countries, and therefore political scientists started to contemplate how to label states in transition which were neither fully democratic nor authoritarian. The text most relevant for the purposes of this article is Zakaria’s paper from 1997, in which he suggested that such states which held elections but lacked an institutional system of checks and balances or disregarded human rights should be called “illiberal democracies”. While the term itself did not really catch at the time, his central premise – the separation of democratic processes from the endorsement

⁵ For example VLASTIMIL HAVLÍK and VÍT HLOUŠEK, „Differential Illiberalism: Classifying Illiberal Trends in Central European Party Politics“, In ASTRID LORENZ and LISA H. ANDERS (eds.), *Illiberal Trends and Anti-EU Politics in East Central Europe*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, p. 111–136.

⁶ For example „Čeští elfové“ [online], *Cesti-elfove.cz*, 2022, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://cesti-elfove.cz/>.

⁷ SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON, “Democracy’s third wave.” *Journal of Democracy* 2 (2, 1991): p. 12–34.

of liberal values – served as fertile ground for the debate about political movements that started to emerge around a decade and a half later.⁸

Interestingly, the term was not rediscovered by academics, but Prime Minister Viktor Orbán used it in a speech in 2015 when he labelled the regime he would like to establish in Hungary as an illiberal democracy. Some researchers utilised this trend to describe the changes in countries' governmental practices and institutional settings, namely in Central and Eastern Europe.⁹ For others, this term was not as interesting as a tool for describing the political regime but for defining the ideology that emerged globally as an alternative against the dominating liberalism. Szelényi and Csillag defined illiberalism as a “post-communist neo-conservative ideology” which “emphasises the value of patriotism, religion and traditional family values.” While they derived their conclusion primarily from the Hungarian case, they also noted that this thinking strongly resembles the opinions of socially conservative neoconservatives in the USA.¹⁰ Therefore, it is unsurprising that this concept also proliferated in the US when it was developed, particularly by Marlene LaRuelle. She further contextualised it by placing the emergence of illiberalism into a specific moment of crisis of liberal democracy in the second decade of the 21st century. In LaRuelle's opinion, this fluid ideology develops as an alternative to the dominating liberalism in countries which experienced failure when applying its recipes for the development of society. The alternative approach championed by proponents of illiberalism advocates for the majoritarian principles in politics, a respect for traditional hierarchies, and a nation-centric and sovereign state. An important feature of this ideology – which is different from traditional conservatism – is its radicality since it advocates for a shift from the current liberal political order and a return to the past.¹¹

LaRuelle's active mapping of existing research initiatives operating with the term illiberalism also allows us to see trending research themes in this field.¹² Some researchers focusing on Central Europe also took into account the impact of changing political situation on the information space.¹³ However, a link with another trending research topic was missing – the emergence of conspiracy theories in the online information space. This is quite surprising, given that illiberal politicians often use conspiracy theories in their communication. Orbán endorsing the conspiracy theories

⁸ FAREED ZAKARIA, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy”, *Foreign Affairs* 76 (6, 1997): p. 22–43.

⁹ YASCHA MOUNK, *The People vs. Democracy*, Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press 2018, 393 p.

¹⁰ IVAN SZELÉNYI, and TOMÁS CSILLAG, “Drifting from Liberal Democracy: Neo-Conservative Ideology of Managed Illiberal Democratic Capitalism in Post-communist Europe”, *Intersections* 1 (1, 2015): 18–48.

¹¹ MARLENE LARUELLE, „Illiberalism: a conceptual introduction”, *East European Politics* 38 (2, 2022): p. 303–327.

¹² MARLENE LARUELLE (ed.), *Conversations on Illiberalism: Interviews with 50 Scholars*, Washington, D. C.: The George Washington University 2022, 289 p.

¹³ VÁCLAV ŠTĚTKA, JAROMÍR MAZÁK and LENKA VOCHOCOVÁ, “Nobody Tells us what to Write about: The Disinformation Media Ecosystem and its Consumers in the Czech Republic”, *Javnost – The Public* 28 (1, 2021): p. 90–109.

about the influence of Jewish billionaire George Soros is a case in point.¹⁴ However, it is possible to step aside and take advantage of another term that emerged to describe new political forces – populism. While currently, this term is discarded by most scientists as overly vague, in the past was used to describe mostly the same political actors as illiberalism does.¹⁵ Moreover, since scholars studying populism also focused on conspiracy theories, using their findings to draw hypotheses about the relation between this phenomenon and illiberalism is beneficial.¹⁶

In fact, the trope of populist rhetoric – a conflict between good people and the corrupted elite – is similar to the assumptions of conspiracy theories about hidden conspirators running various evil schemes. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that so-called populist politicians and their supporters often tend to promote conspiracy theories to achieve various objectives.¹⁷ Since illiberalism also operates with the notion of majoritarian support and presents itself as a radical alternative against the current elite – which is not understood not only as political but also cultural and intellectual – it is reasonable to assume that the tendency for endorsing conspiracy theories will be similar. The article supports this concept by providing a case study of Czech conspiracy websites, which can combine both themes in their content when talking about political developments.

Conspiracy websites, uncivil society and Czech politics

In the past several years, Czech expert – and partly also public – debate dedicated significant attention to disinformation. Research in this area generated a list of websites spreading falsehoods, anti-system narratives, and pro-Russian messages. This segment of the Czech information space – consisting of roughly 50 websites and associated profiles and groups on social media – turned into an interconnected ecosystem whose readers, content, and adherence to journalistic standards are significantly distinct from the consumers of mainstream media.¹⁸ In research, these platforms were labelled differently depending on the broader topic – over the years, the same

¹⁴ PETER PLENTA, “Conspiracy theories as a political instrument: utilisation of anti-Soros narratives in Central Europe”, *Contemporary Politics* 26 (5, 2020): p. 512–530.

¹⁵ LARUELLE, “Illiberalism: a conceptual introduction”, p. 303–327.

¹⁶ BRUNO C. SILVA, FEDERICO VEGETTI and LEVENTE LITTVAY, “The Elite Is up to Something: Exploring the Relation between Populism and Belief in Conspiracy Theories”, *Swiss Political Science Review* 23 (4, 2017): p. 423–43.

¹⁷ EIRIKUR BERGMANN, *The Politics of Misinformation*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan 2018, 152 p.

¹⁸ JONÁŠ SYROVÁTKA, JULIE VINKLOVÁ, LINDSAY WOJTULA and ALENA ZIKMUNDOVÁ, “Dezinformace jako byznys”, [online], *Prague Security Studies Institute*, March 2020, accessed March 2022, available online at https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/8207_751-dezinformace-jako-byznys.pdf.

platforms were called anti-system¹⁹, pro-Russian²⁰, disinformation²¹, or conspiracy websites²². While all these terms reflect certain features of their natures, none can fully grasp their positioning towards Czech politics. For the purpose of the article, the author decided to use the term “conspiracy websites” to label the analysed platforms since this term seemed like the most logical choice given the nature of the journal’s focus and not as problematic and controversial as other alternatives.²³

Conspiracy websites, however, should be perceived in a more nuanced way than only as actors of information space – “alternative media” – producing content contrarian to the mainstream media. This perception is one-dimensional and ignores the fact that most authors publishing on these platforms are highly politically engaged and have the ambition not only to comment on ongoing events but actively shape them through their actions. However, they do not intend to do so primarily by entering into the political competition – with the notable exception of editor-in-chief of *Nová Republika* Ivan David, who ran on the ballot of the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) party in the European elections of 2019 and eventually was elected into the European Parliament²⁴ – but by actively promoting particular ideas in the information space.

A notable example is the so-called lithium affair that occurred in 2017 during the campaign before the Parliamentary elections. The website Aeronet published the article claiming that the Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) was plotting with an Australian mining company to steal the Czech lithium stock. The article framed this situation as a repetition of the corrupt privatisation of the 1990s and the precious metal as the ultimate solution for all the troubles of the Czech economy.²⁵ The opponents of ČSSD then picked up the story – mainly the populist movement ANO – and used it

¹⁹ ROBERT MALECKÝ, “Mapa českých webových médií. Hlavní proud, bulvár, investigace, dezinformátoři a ti druzí” [online], *Hlídací Pes*, November 2018, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://hlidacipes.org/mapa-ceskych-webovych-medii-hlavni-proud-bulvar-investigace-e-dezinformatori-a-ti-druzi/>.

²⁰ PATRIK URBAN, “Dezinformacím se v Česku daří. Proruské internetové zpravodajství ovládá pár hráčů, dohromady se vyrovnají největším serverům v zemi” [online], *Hospodářské noviny*, February 2019, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://domaci.hn.cz/c1-66477660-dezinformacim-se-v-cesku-dari-proruske-internetove-zpravodajstvi-ovlada-par-hracu-dohromady-se-vyrovnavaji-nejvetsim-serverum-v-zemi>.

²¹ “Výroční zpráva o stavu české dezinformační scény pro rok 2021” [online], *Bezpečnostní centrum Evropské hodnoty*, June 2022, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://europeanvalues.cz/cs/annual-report-on-the-state-of-the-czech-disinformation-scene-for-2021/>.

²² „Atlas konspirací“ [online], *Altaskonspiraci.cz*, 2022, accessed March 2022, available online at https://ataskonspiraci.cz/Hlavn%C3%AD_strana.

²³ Terminological debate in detail in JONÁŠ SYROVÁTKA, “Dezinformační Babylon II. – jak (ne)nazývat šířitele dezinformací?” [online], *Aktuálně*, July 2019, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://blog.aktualne.cz/blogy/jonas-syrovatka.php?itemid=34417>.

²⁴ “Autoři: MUDr. Ivan David, CSc.” [online], *Nová Republika*, 2022, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.novarepublika.online/author/david>.

²⁵ MARTIN EHL, „Střed Evropy Martina Ehla: Aféra lithium – z proruských serverů až do sněmovny“ [online], *Hospodářské noviny*, November 2017, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://archiv.hn.cz/c1-65955890-stred-evropy-martina-ehla-afera-lithium-se-zrodila-na-konspiracnim-proruskem-serveru-pres-babise-se-dostala-do-snemovny-a-zrejme-ovlivnila-volby>.

to boost their election campaign and attract potential voters of the Social Democrats.²⁶ Aeronet continued to be actively involved in politics and expressed support primarily for the SPD. However, something happened in 2019, and the websites started to be very critical towards the SPD chairman Tomio Okamura.²⁷ The situation escalated further before the European elections in 2019 when Aeronet launched a negative campaign against several candidates on the SPD ballot. On the other hand, the website expressed support for Hynek Blaško – who was also running for SPD – which probably helped him get enough preferential votes to enter the European Parliament despite being on the bottom of the candidate list.²⁸ The approach of other conspiracy websites towards political events was definitely less expressive than in the case of Aeronet, but they also provided voting recommendations and regularly commented on current events.²⁹

These examples illustrate that the authors publishing on conspiracy websites perceived themselves as public intellectuals challenging the existing status quo and advocating for specific political agendas. To better understand the multifaceted nature of conspiracy websites, it is useful to revisit the concept of uncivil society, which was introduced in the early 2000s. This concept aimed to address the fact that freedom to organise in a democratic society also opens this possibility for forces hostile to the liberal political system, such as neo-Nazi movements.³⁰ Czech conspiracy websites were also considered in this conceptual framework since Guasti mentioned the website Protiproud in his account of movements protesting against migration from Muslim countries in 2015.³¹ The similarity with the underlining assumption of illiberalism – mainly a challenge to the existing political system and its ideological framework is obvious. However, as far as the author is aware, in the context of Central and Eastern Europe, the research on illiberalism was mostly limited to political parties and did not investigate its proponents in a broader social and intellectual milieu yet.³² The

²⁶ KATEŘINA ŠAFAŘÍKOVÁ, „Poslední váhající voliče vechnalo do náruče ano lithium“ [online], *Respekt*, October 2017, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://www.respekt.cz/politika/posledni-vahajici-volice-vechnalo-do-naruce-ano-lithium>.

²⁷ JONÁŠ SYROVÁTKA, „Aeronet, SPD a konec jednoho přátelství“ [online], *Aktuálně.cz*, March 2019, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://blog.aktualne.cz/blogy/jonas-syrovatka.php?itemid=33684>.

²⁸ JONÁŠ SYROVÁTKA, FILIP LUKÁŠ and NIKOS ŠTĚPÁNEK, „České volby v éře dezinformací: Evropské volby 2019“ [online], *Prague Security Studies Institute*, June 2001, accessed March 2022, available online at https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/8412_705-evropske-volby-2019-analyza.pdf.

²⁹ Compare JONÁŠ SYROVÁTKA and JAROSLAV HROCH, „České volby v éře dezinformací: Prezidentské volby 2018“ [online], *Prague Security Studies Institute*, February 2018, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.pssi.cz/publications/32-czech-presidential-election-2018>.

³⁰ SIMONE CHAMBERS and JEFFREY KOPSTEIN, “Bad Civil Society”, *Political Theory* 29 (6, 2001): p. 837–865.

³¹ PETRA GUASTI, “Same Same, but Different: Domestic Conditions of Illiberal Backlash Against Universal Rights in the Czech Republic and Slovakia”, in ASTRID LORENZ and LISA H. ANDERS (eds.), *Illiberal Trends and Anti-EU Politics in East Central Europe*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan 2021, p. 179–206.

³² For overview of the field see LARUELLE, “Conversations on Illiberalism”, 289 p.

article aims to bridge this gap and argues that Czech conspiracy websites are one of the actors of an uncivil society guided by this ideological framework.

Research approach

While analysing the manifestations of illiberalism on conspiracy websites, the article used the dataset collected within the framework of the Parliamentary Elections 2021 in the Era of Disinformation project conducted by the think-tank Prague Security Studies Institute. The project aimed to map the content of articles published by Czech conspiracy websites related to political developments four weeks before the Parliamentary elections held on October 7th 2021. The dataset consisted of articles mentioning political parties participating in the elections published on selected conspiracy websites whose wider reach allowed them to shape the discussion in certain segments of the Czech information space.³³ The article utilises the part of the dataset – excluding the Russian propagandistic outlet Sputnik CZ due to its different nature – and focuses on eight websites run by Czech citizens – AC24, Aeronet, CZ24 News, Česko aktuálně, Nová Republika, New World Order Opposition (NWO), Pravý prostor, and Protiproud. These websites are also notorious for their ambition to comment on or even shape the Czech public debate, and therefore it was natural to expect that they would try to play an active role before the Parliamentary elections.

In total, the analysed websites published 343 articles mentioning political parties participating in the elections. Upon reading them closely, one could identify the conspiracy websites' position towards specific parties and better understand their overall interpretation of politics. The analysis was informed by the conceptual framework of illiberalism as described above. Therefore, the main themes represented in the observed texts were the interpretation of the nature of the elections and the position of this event in relation to politics in general and the portrayal of negatively and positively perceived political forces, such as Czech political parties or other actors influencing the elections. Focusing on this area allows constructing the ideological map of the analysed conspiracy websites' attitudes. Importantly the article does not attempt to present the position of each of the websites individually but understands them as a coherent opinion group. At first glance, this approach might be problematic since it means that it groups quasi-media mimicking regular news outlets (like AC24 or CZ24 News) and opinionated websites with one dominating author (such as Aeronet) or multiple authors (for example Pravý prostor) together.³⁴ This diversity, however, does not mean that conspiracy websites promote radically different opinions, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter.

³³ SYROVÁTKA and ŠEFČÍKOVÁ, „České volby v éře dezinformací“, https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/9417_parliamentary-elections-2021-analysis.pdf.

³⁴ For more nuanced view on identity of conspiracy websites see SYROVÁTKA et al., “Dezinformace jako byznys”, https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/8207_751-dezinformace-jako-byznys.pdf.

Moreover, it is possible to identify a certain sense of community in some of the articles on all conspiracy websites. For instance, Lubomír Man, in an article published on the website NWOO, claimed that the Czech media space is divided into two worlds that formed along the lines of the supporters of the opposing candidates in the Presidential elections 2018. However, in his mind, the world of Jiří Drahoš supporters controls the majority of the mainstream media, which means that the voices of supporters of Miloš Zeman remain underrepresented. Man claimed that alternative media – despite their limited financial and human resources – have to play the role of spokesmen of the silent majority and contribute to “awakening” society.³⁵ Recurring comments as such justify treating the selected group of conspiracy websites as the unit of analysis.

The selection of the period before the Parliamentary elections 2021 was rather pragmatic since this event was central to Czech political life, which means conspiracy websites focused on this specific topic. They also got the opportunity to clearly manifest their viewpoints while commenting on individual political parties participating in the elections. This fact was even more important since the political dynamic before the election suggested that it would be possible to observe a struggle over the leading position in the far-right part of the political spectrum as the dominant SPD was challenged by the newly established parties Tricolour and Volný blok.³⁶ As the next section shall explain, this competition was far less fierce than initially anticipated. However, its interpretation by conspiracy websites demonstrated that they were careful to get involved only with individual political actors and try to act as mediators and bridges between political actors. Such positioning reaffirms the notion that conspiracy websites are not solely information sources but seek to shape political development actively, and therefore it is logical to perceive them through the lens of uncivil society.

Parliamentary elections 2021 through the lens of conspiracy websites

The Czech parliamentary elections of 2021 can be perceived along several main conflicting lines. On one level, they represented a contest between the populist party ANO, led by billionaire and former Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, and his opponents gathered into two coalitions – the right-wing SPOLU (composed of the Civic Democrats (ODS), Christian Democrats, and TOP 09) and the centrist coalition of the Pirate Party and the Mayors and Independents. The conflict between these two camps

³⁵ LUBOMÍR MAN, “Jsme před volbami. A kdo jediný to do nás hustí?” [online], *Parlamentní listy*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/nazory-a-petice/Lubomir-Man-Jsme-pred-volbami-A-kdo-jediny-to-do-nas-husti-678381>.

³⁶ MICHAELA RAMBOUSKOVÁ, “Volný blok jde do voleb s Dělnickou stranou. Okamura kandiduje sám” [online], *Seznam Zprávy*, June 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/volny-blok-jde-do-voleb-s-delnickou-stranou-okamura-kandiduje-sam-167843>.

was fierce. Babiš was depicted in the campaigns of both coalitions as the ultimate threat to Czech democracy, which might even endanger its affiliation with Western institutions such as the European Union (EU).³⁷ On the contrary, the party ANO launched a smear campaign against the Pirate Party, claiming that its representatives wanted to open the Czech Republic to migration from Muslim countries.³⁸ In the end, the coalition SPOLU won the elections by a very close margin and formed the government with the Pirate Party and the Mayors and Independents.³⁹

As mentioned in the previous chapter, another conflict defining the 2021 Parliamentary elections concerned the representation of anti-system voters. In the previous electoral cycle, this group was represented by the Communist Party and the SPD. However, before the elections, several parties competing for the same voters emerged – Tricolour, formed by former members of the ODS and presenting itself as the defender of conservative values; Příklad led by a former policeman who became famous due to his investigation of high-profile corruption cases; and Volný blok formed around the anti-vaccination movement.⁴⁰ For a while, it seemed that it would be possible to see a significant reshaping of the parties representing the anti-system sentiments in the Czech Parliament. In the end, skilful political campaigner and SPD chairman Okamura managed to maintain the SPD's position as the strongest anti-system party by gaining almost 10% of all votes. Other political subjects did significantly worse since none exceeded the 5% threshold for entering the Parliament. Therefore around 650 000 voters favouring anti-system parties did not get representation in the Parliament, which may have further exacerbated their frustrations with the democratic system.⁴¹ Both anti-system parties and conspiracy websites can significantly benefit from this situation.

Elections as a component of a global ideological struggle

Conspiracy websites suggested yet another way of interpreting the elections. For them, the key development did not occur in the Czech Republic – instead, local elections were merely a minor component of the ongoing global ideological struggle. This Manichean fight took place between two forces – the evil globalists and the good patriots. The globalist forces aimed to undermine the independence of national states

³⁷ “SPOLU odstartujeme velkou změnou” [online] ODS, September 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://m.facebook.com/ods.cz/photos/a.398294272699/10159671934712700/>.

³⁸ DOMINIKA JEŘÁBKOVÁ, “Piráti nabízejí migrantům své chaty a chalupy, osočil Bartoše Babiš” [online], *Novinky*, October 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/domaci-pirati-nabizeji-migrantum-sve-chaty-a-chalupy-osocil-bartose-babis-40373747>.

³⁹ “Fiala představil rozložení budoucí vlády. Spolu bude mít deset postů, koalice STAN s Piráty sedm” [online] *iRozhlas*, November 2021, accessed December 2022, available at https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/vlada-petra-fialy-spolu-pirstan-koalice-rozdeleni-ministerstev_2111022231_kro.

⁴⁰ RAMBOUSKOVÁ, “Volný blok jde do voleb s Dělnickou stranou...”, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/volny-blok-jde-do-voleb-s-delnickou-stranou-okamura-kandiduje-sam-167843>.

⁴¹ “Konečné výsledky voleb” [online], *Seznam Zprávy*, June 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/p/vysledky-voleb/2021/parlamentni-volby/>.

and transfer all decision-making to the international level, to unelected bureaucratic structures – for instance, into the hands of the EU. Another goal was imposing their neo-Marxist cultural and ideological values on nations in Central and Eastern Europe, as they had already successfully done in the West. Against them stood patriotic forces championing national sovereignty, maintaining traditional values, building a strong and populous nation, and preventing migration from countries with different cultural values – meaning primarily Muslim ones. These points apparently resonate with the illiberal ideology's perception of a political struggle.⁴² This overarching framework defined the perception of individual political parties participating in the elections. Conspiracy websites formulated their approach to them based on assessing which side of the struggle between globalists and patriots they took. However, as demonstrated further, the websites were not entirely bound by this worldview and could also use their endorsement pragmatically based on how the political situation developed.

Conspiracy websites did not perceive themselves as impartial observers but openly declared that they were supporters of the patriotic forces. This acknowledged bias informed their understanding of the legitimacy of information sources which was associated with their ability to represent the interest of a particular social group. The most transparent definition of this position was demonstrated by the already mentioned Lubomír Man, who defined the conspiracy sources as the representatives of Miloš Zeman's voters.⁴³ This view also formed the perception of other actors in the information space, who – according to the conspiracy websites – could not stay neutral within the ongoing ideological struggle. The criticism directed at mainstream media – particularly the Czech Television – was motivated not only by their alleged subordination to globalists but also by their dishonesty since they did not admit this ideological position. Conspiracy websites claimed to uncover this trick and called the Czech Television out as one of the interest groups trying to gain more power in the political arena.⁴⁴ As mentioned previously, conspiracy websites felt overwhelmed due to a lack of resources and the domination of mainstream media in the information space. In their view, they were in the defensive position and under the attack of various arms of globalist forces.

However, this position of dissidents seemed to motivate them to persist, although it was sometimes possible to detect their frustration with the political developments.

⁴² VLASTIMIL PODRACKÝ, “Černá totalita začíná lži” [online], *Parlamentní listy*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/nazory-a-petice/Vlastimil-Podracky-Cerna-totalita-zacina-lzi-678341> (The article was published at Pravý prostor).

⁴³ MAN, “Jsme před volbami...”, <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/nazory-a-petice/Lubomir-Man-Jsme-pred-volbami-A-kdo-jediny-to-do-nas-husti-678381>.

⁴⁴ MICHAL SEMÍN, “Předvolební demokratická agonie: Naprogramování moderátorů. Vzhůru do technologického gulagu? Skutečná a zástupná témata voleb. ČT je další stranou usilující o moc. Kdo je tady loutkovodíčem? Budoucnost...” [online], *Protiproud.info*, October 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://protiproud.info/politika/6062-predvolebni-demokraticka-agonie-naprogramovani-moderatori-vzhuru-do-technologickeho-gulagu-skutecna-a-zastupna-temata-voleb-ct-je-dalsi-stranou-usilujici-o-moc-kdo-je-tady-loutkovodcem-budoucnost.htm>.

This feeling was widespread after the announcement of the election results since the coalition government of SPOLU, the Pirate Party, and the Mayors and Independents was the worst possible outcome for conspiracy websites. Since these parties were perceived as globalist puppets, the websites predicted that the new government would pursue their agenda and try to introduce all these terrible things we can see in Western Europe into the Czech Republic.⁴⁵ In order to overcome their frustration from the election results, conspiracy websites claimed that this event was only one – and not very significant – part of the long-term struggle between globalists and patriots. One battle might be lost, but the war was far from over, and the websites could look into the future with a certain optimism. They pointed out that a new government consisting of five parties would be fragile and have to deal with various economic challenges.

On the other hand, patriotic forces would have time to consolidate and – with the help of conspiracy websites – reach out to disappointed citizens and offer them an alternative to the current government.⁴⁶ Interestingly, conspiracy websites still operated within the framework of democratic institutions and did not call for a revolution but planned to wait for the next elections. This attitude shows that their anti-system nature was quite moderate, probably because they believed that they had the majority of the population on their side and their main task was to help them awaken. This self-confidence led to bold predictions according to which, after a catastrophic rule of the current government, patriotic forces would triumph, and the “Prague coffee house (nickname for a liberal segment of Czech politics and elite) will finally die out. For good”.⁴⁷

Fifth column at home and plotting enemies abroad

Conspiracy websites expressed strong negative sentiments about both coalitions. For the most part, they did not distinguish between individual parties and perceived them as a united front under the control of globalists. This approach was quite different from the nuanced analysis of patriotic forces, which will be described in the next section. The most negatively perceived political force was the Pirate Party which was depicted as a shameless representative of a neo-Marxist ideology and the key tool of the globalist conspiracy against Czech interests. This represents a shift in the perception since, in the previous Parliamentary elections in 2017, this position was

⁴⁵ “Sociolog Hampl: Teď přijdou hrůzy. Babiš měl zakročít!”, [online], *CZ24 News*, September 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://cz24.news/sociolog-hampl-ted-prijdou-hruzy-babis-mel-zakrocit/>.

⁴⁶ PĚTR HÁJEK, “1 000 000 ztracených: Výsledky voleb věrně zobrazují naši patafyzickou realitu. Babiš ji už nebude moci skrývat. Kavárna bude vládnout většině. Kdo za to může? A co prezident? Vlastenci do podzemí? Zvrat na obzoru” [online], *Protiproud.info*, October 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://protiproud.info/politika/6068-1-000-000-ztracenych-vysledky-voleb-verne-zobrazuji-nasi-patafyzickou-realitu-babis-ji-uz-nebude-moci-skrivat-kavarna-bude-vladnout-vetsine-kdo-za-to-muze-a-co-prezident-vlastenci-do-podzemi-zvrat-na-obzoru.htm>.

⁴⁷ “Čtyři roky trápení za poznání, že jsou to tluchubové” [online], *NWOO*, September 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <http://www.nwoo.org/2021/10/15/ctyri-roky-trapeni-za-poznani-ze-jsou-to-tluchubove/>.

occupied by the liberal TOP 09.⁴⁸ However, the decline of this party and the increasing popularity of the Pirates – who, at one point, hoped they would be able to win the elections – changed the perspective of conspiracy websites. This development is interesting since it shows that these platforms can adapt their underlying story about the conflict between globalists and patriots to fit current political realities. Another distinct stream of criticism was aimed at the ODS, which was – especially due to the chairmanship of Petr Fiala – perceived as a party that had betrayed its conservative principles and submitted to globalist forces.⁴⁹ However, as was already mentioned, these individual narratives were not crucial and conspiracy websites perceived all parties of both coalitions with the same contempt.

This negative sentiment was also caused by the fact that these political parties were not independent actors but instead served as the puppets of their globalist masters. In the context of the political competition, they did not represent the interests of a certain segment of the Czech population but the fifth column, thus betraying the nation. Conspiracy websites had quite a clear idea about the goals of globalist forces, such as limiting the sovereignty of the Czech state, promoting neo-Marxist ideology, and supporting migration from Muslim countries. However, the nature of globalists was not specified much. The general consensus was that they were a power operating outside the Czech Republic and, despite its global nature, vaguely associated with the West. In their further specification, individual websites and authors diverged and offered various interpretations with varying degrees of specificity and complexity. This elusive portrayal of the enemy seems beneficial since it allows creating coalitions of different actors and adjusting the story to changing political developments.

In the most specific narrative, globalist forces were associated with the EU, which was acting as their main instrument in the destruction of European states' sovereignty. The European Commission – specifically Commissioner Věra Jourová – was criticised for comments about the dynamic of the elections, which were perceived as interference in domestic political processes. The Commissioner's statement was set in a broader context of alleged efforts to undermine the sovereignty of the Czech Republic.⁵⁰ Conspiracy websites did not feel the need to elaborate on their criticism of the EU and explain why it is a malicious actor in detail. All of them accepted this situation as a fact, and anyone who supported this institution or was not fully committed to the idea of Czexit was automatically considered a globalist agent. This perception

⁴⁸ For comparison see JONÁŠ SYROVÁTKA, “České volby v éře dezinformací: Parlamentní volby 2017” [online], *Prague Security Studies Institute*, October 2017, accessed March 2022, available online at https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/8399_500-parlamentni-volby-2017-analyza.pdf.

⁴⁹ JAN BARTOŇ, “Jak jsou karty k volbám rozdány?” [online], *Neviditelný Pes*, October 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at https://neviditelnypes.lidovky.cz/politika/politika-jak-jsou-karty-k-volbam-rozdany.A211006_125116_p-politika_wag (The article was published at *Pravý prostor*).

⁵⁰ “Tohle je nátlak Bruselu na české volby, paní Jourová?! Petr Žantovský se zhrzil nad slovy eurokomisařky” [online], *Parlamentní listy*, September 2021, accessed December 2022, available at <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Tohle-je-natlak-Bruselu-na-ceske-volby-pani-Jourova-Petr-Zantovsky-se-zhrzil-nad-slovy-eurokomisarcky-678089> (The article was published at CZ24 News).

proved to be fertile ground for the development of conspiracy theories – for instance, Jindřich Kulhavý, in his article in *Pravý Prostor*, claimed that the EU was in charge of a planned depopulation within the framework of the Great Reset.⁵¹

Other depictions of globalist forces were even vaguer and more adjusted to the worldview of the individual author. According to Petr Hájek, editor-in-chief of the *Protiproud* website, the EU was only a tool in the hands of other hidden nefarious actors. Aside from an anti-German slant warning against the establishment of the Fourth Reich,⁵² he warned against a mysterious “THEM” trying to get control over Czech politics. These malicious outside forces – also called “holders of keys” – were Jewish bankers and multinational corporations (including the powerful pharmaceutical industry) controlling the Brussels bureaucracy, which was trying to limit the sovereignty of European states.⁵³ Other authors associated globalist forces with a pre-existing conspiracy theory about the New World Order (NWO), a plot of elites trying to destroy national states and establish an authoritarian global government. Radek Pokorný, in his article on *Protiproud*, suggested that the SPOLU coalition was one of the components of the NWO conspiracy since it was associated with billionaire George Soros who was part of the plotting globalist elite.⁵⁴ An author nicknamed *Myšpule* published an article on the website *CZ24 News* describing in great detail the depopulation of the planet due to malnutrition that was supposed to be part of the NWO conspiracy. This text also appealed to supporters of Andrej Babiš, who was presumed to be part of the globalist circles planning this genocide.⁵⁵ And finally, Jaroslav Tichý at the website *NWOO* criticised political parties advocating pro-Western

⁵¹ JINDŘICH KULHAVÝ, “Proč nevolit neomarxistické liberály?” [online], *inadhled.cz*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available at <https://www.inadhled.cz/uvaha-dne/proc-nevolit-neomarxisticke-liberaly/>.

⁵² PETR HÁJEK, “Odstartováno: Volební podvod v Německu. Opět Hitler, tentokrát s ‘lidskou tváří’? Co naši svazáci nevědí. Vpřed do chudoby! Řízená Vzpouora davů? Máme zkušenost: odpor, odboj, oběti. Nic nekončí, jedeme dál!” [online], *Protiproud.info*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://protiproud.info/politika/6044-odstartovano-volebni-podvod-v-nemecku-opet-hitler-tentokrat-s-lidskou-tvari-co-nasi-svazaci-nevedi-vpred-do-chudoby-rizena-vzpouora-davu-mame-zkusenost-odpor-odboj-obeti-nic-nekonci-jedeme-dal.htm>.

⁵³ PETR HÁJEK, “Volební fraška na dohled: Vítěz je znám. Všichni jsou totiž stejní. Hra na demokracii již nebude dlouho trvat. Proměna mlčící většiny. Zmizela během covidu jako chřipka? Blíží se největší šance. Nebojme se prohrát!” [online], *Protiproud.info*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://protiproud.info/politika/6020-volebni-fraska-na-dohled-vitez-je-znam-vsichni-jsou-totiz-stejni-hra-na-demokracii-jiz-nejbude-dlouho-trvat-promena-mlcici-vetsiny-zmizela-behem-covidu-jako-chripka-blizi-se-nejvetsi-sance-nebojme-se-prohrat.htm>.

⁵⁴ RADEK POKORNÝ, “Zrada v přímém přenosu: Předseda lidovců odvolal pod nátlakem stanovisko proti homonátkům. Volba obou koalic demobloku je pro křesťany nepřijatelná. Pomůžou zvrácené tendence koalic ve volbách vlasteneckým stranám?” [online], *Protiproud.info*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://protiproud.info/politika/6035-zrada-v-primem-prenosu-predseda-lidovcu-odvolal-pod-natlakem- stanovisko-proti-homonatkum-volba-obou-koalic-demobloku-je-pro-krestany-neprijatelna-pomuzou-zvracene-tendence-koalic-ve-volbach-vlasteneckym-stranam.htm>.

⁵⁵ “HUNGER GAMES JE TADY – GLOBÁLNÍ POTRAVINOVÝ KARTEL ODHALEN! MASIVNÍ VYHLADOVĚNÍ POPULACE A SNIŽOVÁNÍ POČTU OBYVATEL JAKO DALŠÍ KROK GLOBALISTŮ” [online], *CZ24News.cz*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20211009070613/https://cz24.news/hunger-games-je-tady-globalni>

foreign policy and argued that cooperation between Slavic nations could help to stop the realisation of the NWO plans in Central Europe.⁵⁶

While the definition of globalists differed, all conspiracy websites agreed that they were attacking state sovereignty, traditional values, and the ethnic homogeneity of society. The intersection with illiberalism is apparent since political actors associated with this ideology understand the goals of their opponents in a similar manner. Moreover, proponents of illiberalism claim that they are fighting not only domestic political forces but a broader coalition of intellectual elite and media inspired by foreign models. The only difference – reflective of the conspiratorial thinking of the studied websites lies in the semantics. While illiberalism represents a negative attitude towards liberal values, conspiracy websites claim that they are against globalists promoting neo-Marxism. However, a closer look shows that despite the difference in vocabulary, the understanding of the political struggle is the same.

Realistic evaluation of the patriotic camp and pragmatic alliances

Since conspiracy websites perceived the parties of both coalitions as puppets of foreign interest, they did not pay much attention to ideological differences among them, nor were they focused on a nuanced analysis of their actions. Their attitudes towards the patriotic parties – SPD, Tricolour and Volný blok – were completely opposite since they were perceived as independent political actors with their own agenda. They also were keen on supporting their political campaigns, for instance, by providing the space for publishing op-eds and statements of candidates of these parties. A special case was Nová Republic which is, through its editor-in-chief Ivan David, closely related to SPD and, therefore, before the election, turned into one of the instruments of the campaign of this party. Even though, on a general level, conspiracy websites saw them positively since they were part of the same ideological camp, this did not mean automatic and full endorsement.

On the contrary, conspiracy websites were closely – and quite objectively – evaluating the situation in the patriotic camp, and they were not afraid to criticise things perceived negatively. The overarching theme was criticising the inability of patriotic forces to form a coalition, which caused a split of the votes and – as conspiracy websites foresaw – meant that a significant portion of non-systemic voters remained unrepresented. They were also very open in criticism of individual parties. Conspiracy websites, for instance, questioned the genuine commitment of SPD chairman Tomio Okamura to the goals of patriotic forces and contemplated whether he was not using its rhetoric to attract voters.⁵⁷ The campaign of Volný blok was criticised

-potravinovy-kartel-odhalen-masivni-vyhladoveni-populace-a-snizovani-poctu-obyvatel-jako-dalsi-krok-globalistu-video-cz-68-min.

⁵⁶ JAROSLAV TICHÝ, “A proč na Západ? To neumíme být sami sebou?” [online], *pokec24.cz*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available at <https://www.pokec24.cz/nezarazene/a-proc-na-zapad-to-neumime-byt-sami-sebou/>.

⁵⁷ PETR HÁJEK, “Poprava Hany Lipovské v přímém přenosu: Mravných a statečných se zbábělci musejí zbavit” [online] *Rýmařovský magazín*, September 2021, accessed 2022, available online at

for an overly narrow focus on the topic of vaccination and an aggressive tone likely to antagonise voters.⁵⁸ Despite these critical remarks showing that conspiracy websites tried to approach the political situation with an analytical detachment, they usually recommended voting for parties of the patriotic camp to their readers. However, it is noteworthy that this decision was not based on passionate commitment but led by the voice of reason.

The realistic assessment of the situation in the patriotic camp led conspiracy websites not only to limit their expectations concerning election results but also motivated them to look for new allies. They found one in the populist party ANO. It is important to stress that this assessment was far from inevitable since its leader Andrej Babiš is a billionaire, which might make him one of the obvious members of the globalist conspiracy. Precisely for this reason, an author writing under the pseudonym Slovanka labelled his party a “chameleon”, an instrument of the globalist conspiracy mimicking the rhetoric of patriotic forces to manipulate voters. She argued that Babiš might use tough words at home, but on the level of the EU, he usually supported globalist agenda.⁵⁹ However, conspiracy websites changed their views of ANO after the Pandora Papers revelations. Around the week before the elections, investigative journalists reported that Babiš belonged to a group of wealthy people who used offshore companies to avoid taxation. This scandal significantly undermined the final stage of Babiš’s electoral campaign, but in the mind of conspiracy websites, this revelation had to be part of a nefarious plan of hidden forces. The question remained: who was to benefit? While the specific stories published on conspiracy websites differed, their underlying assumption was that Babiš had gotten out of the globalist forces’ control and now represented a threat and therefore had to be eliminated. This situation made him a logical partner for the patriotic camp. Billionaire George Soros featured prominently in these stories as the main antagonist.⁶⁰ Given this development, conspiracy websites recommended that their readers consider voting for ANO. In this context, the website Aeronet underlined a difference between voting with one’s heart for patriotic parties and voting with the head for Babiš, who represented the strongest opponents of the globalists. The article argued that only “conceptual” voters who “took the pill” and could see the true nature of the fight between globalists and patriots

<https://rymag.cz/2021/09/poprava-hany-lipovske-v-primem-prenosu-mravnych-a-statecnych-se-zbabelci-museji-zbavit/> (The article was published at Protiproud).

⁵⁸ JINDŘICH KULHAVÝ, “Odvolání Hany Lipovské je neúspěch Volného bloku” [online], *iNadhled.cz*, September 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.inadhled.cz/zajimavosti/odvolani-hany-lipovske-je-neuspech-volneho-bloku/> (The article was published at Pravý prostor).

⁵⁹ “Chameleoni v politice mají jediný cíl – vysát protestní hlasy” [online], *Necenzurovanapravdy.cz*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://necenzurovanapravda.cz/2021/09/chameleoni-v-politice-maji-jediny-cil-vysat-protestni-hlasy/> (The article was published at Pravý prostor).

⁶⁰ KRISTÍNA ŠEFČÍKOVÁ, “Pandora Papers: novinářská praxe a integrita ve střetu s alternativními médii” [online], *Prague Security Studies Institute*, January 2022, accessed March 2022, available online at https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/9485_pssi-perspectives-15.pdf.

could understand why it was important to support Babiš at that moment.⁶¹ Moreover, the alliance with Babiš was not perceived as limited to the 2021 elections but as one that should be cultivated further since the coalition of ANO and patriotic parties was supposed to replace the current government after its expected failure. In this context, it would be especially interesting to observe how conspiracy websites will interpret the Czech Presidential election in 2023, in which Babiš will also be running.

Since conspiracy websites felt part of a patriotic camp, they were more invested in the performance of its representatives – parties promoting traditional values and defending the country against foreign influences. Once again, these are qualities that illiberal political actors tend to attribute to themselves. This personal investment in the struggle made the websites more critical towards the performance of these parties, and they demonstrated their independent nature by suggesting alternative alliances for the patriotic camp – particularly with the populist party ANO. When this step is considered within the framework of illiberalism, it is not surprising since Babiš and conspiracy websites – both in their own ways – subscribe to this ideology.⁶²

Conclusions

The short period of one month before the 2021 Parliamentary elections revealed the ideological position of Czech conspiracy websites to a great extent. This article demonstrated that they connected domestic political events with the broader framework of an ideological struggle between globalists and patriots. While using different vocabulary, illiberal ideology suggests a similar interpretation of political events and therefore proves useful for analysing conspiracy websites. Significantly, the imagined conflict is not only political but has cultural and ideological dimensions as well. The community's power and identity are at stake as patriots defend their countries against the disruptive ideology of neo-Marxism pursued by globalists. This framing clearly allows for a militant interpretation of political life and might easily provoke radicalisation and leads to violence.

Czech conspiracy websites do not seem to be radicalised yet. Instead, they respected existing political institutions and felt the need to get actively involved in shaping politics. It seems they believe that it is possible to generate the energy for the change of the liberal democratic system through its own mechanisms since most of the population agrees subconsciously with their arguments. The role of conspiracy websites lies in trying to awaken society which will lead to a systemic transformation. How-

⁶¹ “Operace Pandora Papers byla spuštěna 5 dní před volbami v ČR s cílem dosadit k moci Pirátskou stranu za každou cenu, v pozadí operace stojí George Soros a jeho Open Society Foundations, která sponzoruje všechny subjekty podílející se na operaci!” [online], *Aeronet.news*, October 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://aeronet.news/operace-pandora-papers-byla-spuštena-5-dni-pred-volbami-v-cr-s-cilem-dosadit-k-moci-piratskou-stranu-za-kazdou-cenu-v-pozadi-operace-stoji-george-soros-a-jeho-open-society-foundations/>.

⁶² VLASTIMIL HAVLÍK, “Technocratic Populism and Political Illiberalism in Central Europe”, *Problems of Post-Communism* 66 (6, 2019): p. 369–384.

ever, while facing defeats such as the one in the 2021 Parliamentary elections, conspiracy websites prepared for a long-term struggle, which they entered in a disadvantageous position since their opponents had almost unlimited means at their disposal.

In order to persist in this struggle, conspiracy websites defined their goal in the long term and took advantage of the vagueness of their ideology, which allowed them to react flexibly to ongoing political events. The level of flexibility was such that they could redefine who their enemies and allies were. A case in point is Andrej Babiš, who turned from a member of the plotting globalist elite into a powerful ally of the patriotic camp. It will be interesting to observe where conspiracy websites will look next for potential candidates for integration into the patriotic camp. The framework of illiberalism can be useful in answering this question since it demonstrates that the intersection of values might be found in surprising places – for example, with more conservative members of the ODS or the Christian Democrats. However, this remains to be seen.

Their flexibility will allow conspiracy websites to adapt to changes in the Czech political debate and interpret them within their vague framework of a struggle between patriots and globalists. Given their long-term perspective, it is unlikely they will depart from the scene soon. On the contrary, social and economic problems on the horizon can bring them new readers and reinforce their position in Czech uncivil society. Therefore, even established political parties appealing to anti-system voters would have to consider them in their calculations. This might easily help them enter into the mainstream public debate. Such a development might be expected, especially if illiberal ideology becomes more established and pronounced in the Czech political mainstream.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- „Atlas konspirací“ [online], *Altaskonspiraci.cz*, 2022, accessed March 2022, available online at https://ataskonspiraci.cz/Hlavn%C3%AD_strana.
- „Autoři: MUDr. Ivan David, CSc.“ [online], *Nová Republika*, 2022, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.novarepublika.online/author/david>.
- BARTOŇ, JAN, „Jak jsou karty k volbám rozdány?“ [online], *Neviditelný Pes*, October 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at https://neviditelnypes.lidovky.cz/politika/politika-jak-jsou-karty-k-volbam-rozdany.A211006_125116_p_politika_wag.
- BERGMANN, EIRIKUR, *The Politics of Misinformation*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan 2018, 152 p.
- “Chameleoni v politice mají jediný cíl – vysát protestní hlasy” [online], *Necenzurovanapravdy.cz*, September 2017, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://necenzurovanapravda.cz/2021/09/chameleoni-v-politice-maji-jediny-cil-vysat-protestni-hlasy/> (The article was published at Pravý prostor).
- “Čeští elfové” [online], *Cesti-elfove.cz*, 2022, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://cesti-elfove.cz/>.
- “Čtyři roky trápení za poznání, že jsou to tluchubové” [online], *NWOO*, September 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <http://www.nwoo.org/2021/10/15/cetyri-roky-trapeni-za-poznani-ze-jsou-to-tluchubove/>.

- EHL, MARTIN, “Střed Evropy Martina Ehla: Aféra lithium – z proruských serverů až do sněmovny” [online], *Hospodářské noviny*, November 2017, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://archiv.hn.cz/cl-65955890-stred-evropy-martina-ehla-afera-lithium-se-zrodila-na-konspiracnim-proruskem-serveru-pres-babise-se-dostala-do-snemovny-a-zrejme-ovlivnila-volby>.
- “Fiala představil rozložení budoucí vlády. Spolu bude mít deset postů, koalice STAN s Piráty sedm” [online] *iRozhlas*, November 2021, accessed December 2022, available at https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/vlada-petra-fialy-spolu-pirstan-koalice-rozdeleni-ministerstev_2111022231_kro.
- FITZI, GREGOR, JUERGEN MACKERT and BRYAN TURNER (eds), *Populism and the Crisis of Democracy*, London: Routledge 2018, 194 p.
- GUASTI, PETRA, “Same Same, but Different: Domestic Conditions of Illiberal Backlash Against Universal Rights in the Czech Republic and Slovakia”, in ASTRID LORENZ and LISA H. ANDERS (eds.), *Illiberal Trends and Anti-EU Politics in East Central Europe*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan 2021, p. 179–206.
- HÁJEK, PETR, “Volební fraška na dohled: Vítěz je znám. Všichni jsou totiž stejní. Hra na demokracii již nebude dlouho trvat. Proměna mlčící většiny. Zmizela během covidu jako chřipka? Blíží se největší šance. Nebojme se prohrát!” [online], *Protiproud.info*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://protiproud.info/politika/6020-volebni-fraska-na-dohled-vitez-je-znam-vsichni-jsou-totiz-stejni-hra-na-demokracii-jiz-nejbude-dlouho-trvat-promena-mlcici-vetsiny-zmizela-behem-covidu-jako-chripka-blizi-se-nejvetsi-sance-nebojme-se-prohrat.htm>.
- HÁJEK, PETR, “Odstartováno: Volební podvod v Německu. Opět Hitler, tentokrát s ‘lidskou tvář’? Co naši svazáci nevědí. Vpřed do chudoby! Řízená Vzpoura davů? Máme zkušenost: odpor, odboj, oběti. Nic nekončí, jedeme dál!” [online], *Protiproud.info*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://protiproud.info/politika/6044-odstartovano-volebni-podvod-v-nemecku-opet-hitler-tentokrat-s-lidskou-tvari-co-nasi-svazaci-nevedi-vpred-do-chudoby-rizena-vzpoura-davu-mame-zkusenost-odpor-odboj-obeti-nic-nekonci-jedeme-dal.htm>.
- HÁJEK, PETR, “1 000 000 ztracených: Výsledky voleb věrně zobrazují naši patafyzickou realitu. Babiš ji už nebude moci skrývat. Kavárna bude vládnout většině. Kdo za to může? A co prezident? Vlastenci do podzemí? Zvrat na obzoru” [online], *Protiproud.info*, October 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://protiproud.info/politika/6068-1-000-000-ztracenych-vysledky-voleb-verne-zobrazuji-nasi-patafyzickou-realitu-babis-ji-uz-nejbude-moci-skrivat-kavarna-bude-vladnout-vetsine-kdo-za-to-muze-a-co-prezident-vlastenci-do-podzemi-zvrat-na-obzoru.htm>.
- HÁJEK, PETR, “Poprava Hany Lipovské v přímém přenosu: Mravných a statečných se zbabelci musejí zbavit” [online] *Rýmařovský magazín*, September 2021, accessed 2022, available online at <https://rymag.cz/2021/09/poprava-hany-lipovske-v-primem-prenosu-mravnych-a-statecnych-se-zbabelci-museji-zbavit/>.
- HUNTINGTON, SAMUEL P., “Democracy’s third wave.” *Journal of Democracy* 2 (2, 1991): p. 12–34.
- “HUNGER GAMES JE TADY – GLOBÁLNÍ POTRAVINOVÝ KARTEL ODHALEN! MASIVNÍ VYHLADOVĚNÍ POPULACE A SNIŽOVÁNÍ POČTU OBYVATEL JAKO DALŠÍ KROK GLOBALISTŮ” [online], *CZ24News.cz*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20211009070613/https://cz24.news/hunger-games-je-tady-globalni-potravinovy-kartel-odhalen-masivni-vyhladoveni-populace-a-snizovani-poctu-obyvatel-jako-dalsi-krok-globalistu-video-cz-68-min/>.

- HAVLÍK, VLASTIMIL, “Technocratic Populism and Political Illiberalism in Central Europe”, *Problems of Post-Communism* 66 (6, 2019): p. 369–384.
- HAVLÍK, VLASTIMIL, and VÍT HLOUŠEK, “Differential Illiberalism : Classifying Illiberal Trends in Central European Party Politics”, In ASTRID LORENZ and LISA H. ANDERS (eds.), *Illiberal Trends and Anti-EU Politics in East Central Europe*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, p. 111–136.
- CHAMBERS, SIMONE, and JEFFREY KOPSTEIN, “Bad Civil Society”, *Political Theory* 29 (6, 2001): p. 837–865.
- JETMAR, JAKUB, “Jakub Eberle: ‘Spousta lidí nálepkuje jako dezinformace cokoliv, co se jim nelíbí’” [online], *Mediář*, June 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.mediar.cz/spousta-lidi-nalepkuje-jako-dezinformace-cokoliv-co-se-jim-nelibi/>.
- JEŘÁBKOVÁ, DOMINIKA, “Piráti nabízejí migrantům své chaty a chalupy, osočil Bartoše Babiš” [online], *Novinky*, October 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/domaci-pirati-nabizeji-migrantum-sve-chaty-a-chalupy-osocil-bartose-babis-40373747>.
- “Konečné výsledky voleb” [online], *Seznam Zprávy*, June 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/p/vysledky-voleb/2021/parlamentni-volby/>.
- KULHAVÝ, JINDŘICH, “Proč nevolit neomarxistické liberály?” [online], *inadhled.cz*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available at <https://www.inadhled.cz/uvaha-dne/proc-nevolit-neomarxisticke-liberaly/>.
- KULHAVÝ, JINDŘICH, “Odvolání Hany Lipovské je neúspěch Volného bloku” [online], *iNadhled.cz*, September 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.inadhled.cz/zajimavosti/odvolani-hany-lipovske-je-neuspech-volneho-bloku/>.
- LARUELLE, MARLENE, “Illiberalism: a conceptual introduction”, *East European Politics* 38 (2, 2022): p. 303–327.
- LARUELLE, MARLENE (ed.), *Conversations on Illiberalism: Interviews with 50 Scholars*, Washington, D. C.: The George Washington University 2022, 298 p.
- MALECKÝ, ROBERT, “Mapa českých webových médií. Hlavní proud, bulvár, investigace, dezinformátoři a ti druzí” [online], *Hlidací Pes*, November 2018, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://hlidacipes.org/mapa-ceskych-webovych-medii-hlavni-proud-bulvar-investigace-dezinformatori-a-ti-druzi/>.
- MAN, LUBOMÍR, “Jsme před volbami. A kdo jediný to do nás hustí?” [online], *Parlamentní listy*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/nazory-a-petice/Lubomir-Man-Jsme-pred-volbami-A-kdo-jediny-to-do-nas-husti-678381>.
- MOUNK, YASCHA, *The People vs. Democracy*, Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press 2018, 393 p.
- “Operace Pandora Papers byla spuštěna 5 dní před volbami v ČR s cílem dosadit k moci Pirátskou stranu za každou cenu, v pozadí operace stojí George Soros a jeho Open Society Foundations, která sponzoruje všechny subjekty podílející se na operaci!” [online], *Aeronet.news*, October 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://aeronet.news/operace-pandora-papers-byla-spustena-5-dni-pred-volbami-v-cr-s-cilem-dosadit-k-moci-piratskou-stranu-za-každou-cenu-v-pozadi-operace-stoji-george-soros-a-jeho-open-society-foundations/>.
- PODRACKÝ, VLASTIMIL, “Černá totalita začíná lži” [online], *Parlamentní listy*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/nazory-a-petice/Vlastimil-Podracky-Cerna-totalita-zacina-lzi-678341> (The article was published at Právý prostor).

- POKORNÝ, RADEK, “Zrada v přímém přenosu: Předseda lidovců odvolal pod nátlakem stanovisko proti homosňatkům. Volba obou koalic demobloku je pro křesťany nepřijatelná. Pomůžou zvrácené tendence koalic ve volbách vlasteneckým stranám?” [online], *Protiproud.info*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://protiproud.info/politika/6035-zrada-v-primem-prenosu-predseda-lidovcu-odvolal-pod-natlakem- stanovisko-proti-homosnatkum-volba-obou-koalic-demobloku-je-pro-krestany-neprijatelna-pomuzou-zvracene-tendence-koalic-ve-volbach-vlasteneckym-stranam.htm>.
- POMERANTSEV, PETER, *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality*, New York: PublicAffairs 2019, 288 p.
- PLENTA, PETER, “Conspiracy theories as a political instrument: utilisation of anti-Soros narratives in Central Europe”, *Contemporary Politics* 26 (5, 2020): p. 512–530.
- RAMBOUSKOVÁ, MICHAELA, “Volný blok jde do voleb s Dělnickou stranou. Okamura kandiduje sám” [online], *Seznam Zprávy*, June 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/volny-blok-jde-do-voleb-s-delnickou-stranou-okamura-kandiduje-sam-167843>.
- SEMÍN, MICHAL, “Předvolební demokratická agonie: Naprogramování moderátoři. Vzhůru do technologického gulagu? Skutečná a zástupná témata voleb. ČT je další stranou usilující o moc. Kdo je tady loutkovodíčem? Budoucnost...” [online], *Protiproud.info*, October 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://protiproud.info/politika/6062-predvolebni-demokraticka-agonie-naprogramovani-moderatori-vzhuru-do-technologickeho-gulagu-skutecna-a-zastupna-temata-voleb-ct-je-dalsi-stranou-usilujici-o-moc-kdo-je-tady-loutkovodice-m-budoucnost.htm>.
- “Sociolog Hampel: Teď přijdou hrůzy. Babiš měl zakročít!” [online], *CZ24 News*, September 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://cz24.news/sociolog-hampel- ted-prijdou-hruzy-babis-mel-zakrocit/>.
- “SPOLU odstartujeme velkou změnou” [online], *ODS*, September 2021, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://m.facebook.com/ods.cz/photos/a.398294272699/10159671934712700/>.
- SILVA, BRUNO C., FEDERICO VEGETTI and LEVENTE LITTVAY, “The Elite Is up to Something: Exploring the Relation between Populism and Belief in Conspiracy Theories”, *Swiss Political Science Review* 23 (4, 2017): p. 423–43. DOI: doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12270.
- SYROVÁTKA, JONÁŠ, “České volby v éře dezinformací: Parlamentní volby 2019” [online], *Prague Security Studies Institute*, October 2017, accessed March 2022, available online at https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/8399_500-parlamentni-volby-2017-analyza.pdf.
- SYROVÁTKA, JONÁŠ, “Aeronet, SPD a konec jednoho přátelství” [online], *Aktuálně.cz*, March 2019, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://blog.aktualne.cz/blogy/jonas-syrovatka.php?itemid=33684>.
- SYROVÁTKA, JONÁŠ, and JAROSLAV HROCH, “České volby v éře dezinformací: Prezidentské volby 2018” [online], *Prague Security Studies Institute*, February 2018, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://www.pssi.cz/publications/32-czech-presidential-election-2018>.
- SYROVÁTKA, JONÁŠ, and KRISTÝNA ŠEFČÍKOVÁ, “České volby v éře dezinformací: Parlamentní volby 2021” [online], *Prague Security Studies Institute*, December 2021, accessed March 2022, available online at https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/9417_parliamentary-elections-2021-analysis.pdf.
- SYROVÁTKA, JONÁŠ, FILIP LUKÁŠ and NIKOS ŠTĚPÁNEK, “České volby v éře dezinformací: Evropské volby 2019” [online], *Prague Security Studies Institute*, June 2001, accessed

- March 2022, available online at https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/8412_705-evropske-volby-2019-analyza.pdf.
- SYROVÁTKA, JONÁŠ, JULIE VINKLOVÁ, LINDSAY WOJTULA and ALENA ŽIKMUNDOVÁ, “Dezinformace jako byznys”, [online], *Prague Security Studies Institute*, March 2020, accessed March 2022, available online at https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/8207_751-dezinformace-jako-byznys.pdf.
- SYROVÁTKA, JONÁŠ, Dezinformační Babylon II. – jak (ne)nazývat šířitele dezinformací? [online], *Aktuálně*, July 2019, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://blog.aktualne.cz/blogy/jonas-syrovatka.php?itemid=34417>.
- SZELÉNYI, IVAN, and TOMÁS CSILLAG, “Drifting from Liberal Democracy. Neo-Conservative Ideology of Managed Illiberal Democratic Capitalism in Post-communist Europe.” *Intersections* 1 (1, 2015): 18–48.
- ŠAFAŘÍKOVÁ, KATEŘINA, “Poslední váhající voliče vehnalo do náruče ano lithium” [online], *Respekt*, October 2017, accessed March 2022, available online at <https://www.respekt.cz/politika/posledni-vahajici-volice-vehnalo-do-naruce-ano-lithium>.
- ŠEFČÍKOVÁ, KRISTÍNA, “Pandora Papers: novinářská praxe a integrita ve střetu s alternativními médii” [online], *Prague Security Studies Institute*, January 2022, accessed March 2022, available online at https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/9485_pssi-perspectives-15.pdf.
- ŠTĚTKA, VÁCLAV, JAROMÍR MAZÁK and LENKA VOCHOCOVÁ, “Nobody Tells us what to Write about: The Disinformation Media Ecosystem and its Consumers in the Czech Republic”, *Javnost – The Public* 28 (1, 2021): p. 90–109.
- TICHÝ, JAROSLAV, “A proč na Západ? To neumíme být sami sebou?” [online], *pokec24.cz*, September 2021, accessed March 2022, available at <https://www.pokec24.cz/nezarazene/a-proc-na-zapad-to-neumime-byt-sami-sebou/>.
- “Tohle je nátlak Bruselu na české volby, paní Jourová?! Petr Žantovský se zhrzil nad slovy eurokomisařky” [online], *Parlamentní listy*, September 2021, accessed December 2022, available at <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Tohle-je-natlak-Bruselu-na-ceske-volby-pani-Jourova-Petr-Zantovsky-se-zhrozil-nad-slovy-eurokomisariky-678089>.
- URBAN, PATRIK, “Dezinformacím se v Česku daří. Proruské internetové zpravodajství ovládá pár hráčů, dohromady se vyrovnají největším serverům v zemi” [online], *Hospodářské noviny*, February 2019, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://domaci.hn.cz/cl-66477660-dezinformacim-se-v-cesku-dari-proruske-internetove-zpravodajstvi-ovlada-par-hracu-dohromady-se-vyrovnavaji-nejvetsim-serverum-v-zemi>.
- “Výroční zpráva o stavu české dezinformační scény pro rok 2021” [online], *Bezpečnostní centrum Evropské hodnoty*, June 2022, accessed December 2022, available online at <https://europeanvalues.cz/cs/annual-report-on-the-state-of-the-czech-disinformation-scene-for-2021/>.
- ZAKARIA, FAREED, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy”, *Foreign Affairs* 76 (6, 1997): p. 22–43.