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**The Exhaustion of the «Liberal Vaccine»: Mimetic Authoritarianism and the Fragmentation of Post-Liberal Political Realities**

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**Abstract.** This article examines the contemporary crisis of liberal democracy through the metaphor of the «liberal vaccine»—a set of institutional safeguards established post-1945 to prevent the recurrence of totalitarianism. We argue that this systemic immunity is currently undergoing a process of exhaustion, driven by the inherent fluidity of modern ideologies and the accelerating pressures of digital communication. Central to this analysis is the application of the «Zero-Sum Red Queen» hypothesis, derived from the work of Acemoglu and Robinson. In the digital political ecosystem, ideological actors find themselves in a desperate race where they must radicalize simply to maintain their relative influence, hollowing out the «Narrow Corridor» of stable, deliberative governance.

The study highlights how the radical intensification of the «Left turn»—characterized by substantive moral re-engineering within key institutions and the promotion of fluid social identities—has created a fertile ground for an equally radical Right-wing reaction. This «balancing act» of the system, driven by fears over immigration and the perceived ideological indoctrination of the next generation, has moved political discourse from the stable center to the fragile edges. By analyzing the chronological radicalization of Ben Shapiro’s discourse and the rise of «mimetic authoritarianism», the paper explores how the external forms of democracy are being used to dismantle their substantive content. We compare the Western experience of institutional fatigue with the «counter-revolutionary» experiences of Eastern Europe, identifying a dangerous fragmentation of political reality. The research concludes that the resulting polarization, while a desperate attempt to balance the system, risks tearing it apart at its center. Only by reconstructing a «reflective infrastructure» can democracies hope to transition from zero-sum antagonism back to a sustainable deliberative core.

**Keywords:** mimetic authoritarianism; Zero-Sum Red Queen; liberal vaccine; ideological fluidity; digital radicalization.

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**Relevance of the topic.** The relevance of investigating the radicalization of political discourse today stems from the alarming speed at which established democracies are drifting toward institutional paralysis. For decades, the «liberal vaccine»—the post-war consensus on pluralism and human rights—served as a reliable prophylaxis against the «virus» of autocracy. However, we are now witnessing a systemic failure of this immunity. The current historical moment is defined by a «collision of rules», where the traditional frameworks of liberal governance are no longer capable of mediating between increasingly antagonistic camps. This is not merely a cyclical fluctuation in political preference but a structural acceleration toward the poles.

Technological shifts have played a primary role in this intensification. As digital communication platforms prioritize high-arousal, divisive content, they have institutionalized a «Zero-Sum Red Queen» dynamic. In this environment, political actors cannot afford moderation; to stand still in the center is to be rendered invisible by algorithms that reward outrage. This necessitates a constant «running» toward the radical edge. Furthermore, the topic is made urgent by the «reactive balancing» of the political system. The aggressive push for progressive social re-engineering—targeting fundamental concepts like gender and education—has triggered a massive counter-force. This reaction is not just about policy; it is an existential defense of cultural and familial «balance» by a Right-wing movement that feels pushed to the precipice. Understanding this mechanism is vital for national security and social stability, as the «middle ground», once the anchor of the democratic system, becomes too fragile to bear the load of these opposing radical forces. If the center fails to hold, the «Narrow Corridor» of liberty may collapse into either anarchy or a new form of techno-authoritarianism.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** The scholarly investigation into the decline of liberalism is increasingly divided between those who view it as an economic failure and those who see it as a cultural and

epistemic crisis. Francis Fukuyama, in *Liberalism and Its Discontents*, provides a foundational defense of classical liberalism while acknowledging that its «neoliberal» and «identity-politics» extremes have hollowed out its legitimacy. Fukuyama's work aligns with Fareed Zakaria's (2007) earlier warnings regarding «illiberal democracy», where the procedural elements of elections remain, but the constitutional protections of individual liberty are eroded [22].

The concept of the «Narrow Corridor», developed by Acemoglu and Robinson (2019), is essential for understanding the precarious balance between state power and social mobilization [1]. Their «Zero-Sum Red Queen» framework describes a situation where the state and society compete so fiercely that they eventually exhaust the very institutions intended to protect them. This exhaustion is echoed in R.R. Reno's *Return of the Strong Gods* (2019), which argues that the post-war «anti-imperatives»—designed to prevent strong identities from causing war—have left a vacuum that is now being filled by radical nationalism and populism [16].

In the realm of digital politics, Paolo Gerbaudo's (2024) analysis of «Digital Populism» examines how the organizational logic of political movements has shifted toward a more direct, yet more manipulative, digital engagement. It also demonstrates how digital platforms catalyze populism by eroding society's shared factual basis. These technological drivers facilitate what Volodymyr Yermolenko (2018) describes as «fluid ideologies», in which political ideas are no longer stable platforms but shifting weapons in a constant struggle for power [23].

Furthermore, Minakov's (2024, 2025) reflections on the «Post-Soviet Human» and the «Dark Enlightenment» bridge the gap between Western institutional decay and Eastern European experiences [11, 12]. Minakov explores how the «counter-revolution» in the East serves as a precursor to the «Age of Will» in the West, where rational Enlightenment values are replaced by techno-authoritarian hierarchies. This is supported by the psychological profiling in *Dark Politics* by Nai and Maier (2024), which links populist success to «dark» personality traits and negative campaigning tactics [15].

Finally, the radicalization of the American Right is best tracked through the evolving bibliography of Ben Shapiro (2019–2025). His trajectory from defending «Reason and Moral Purpose» [17] to declaring an «Authoritarian Moment» [19] and finally a war between «Lions and Scavengers» [20] serves as a primary case study of the «Red Queen» in action—a mainstream intellectual forced into an existential radicalism to survive the very polarization his discourse helps to sustain.

**The primary objective of this article** is to map the mechanics of ideological radicalization in established democracies, focusing on the symbiotic relationship between «Left-fluidity» and «Right-reaction». While much of the existing literature treats populism as an isolated pathology, this study seeks to demonstrate that current polarization is a systemic response—a desperate, albeit destructive, attempt to restore balance in an environment where the «liberal vaccine» of the 20th century has reached its expiration date.

Specifically, we aim to apply the «Zero-Sum Red Queen» hypothesis to the digital political discourse. We intend to show that the acceleration of radical narratives is not merely a choice made by «bad actors» but a systemic requirement for political survival in a fragmented media landscape. By tracking the shift in the intellectual output of influential political philosophers, we will illustrate how even those who claim to defend institutional stability are drawn into a «race to the bottom» that fragments political reality into irreconcilable camps.

Furthermore, the article seeks to analyze the rise of mimetic authoritarianism. We will investigate how the «external form» of democratic participation—elections, scientific discourse, and media debate—is being mimicked by populist and techno-monarchist movements to advance fundamentally illiberal agendas. The ultimate goal is to provide a diagnostic framework for understanding why the «Narrow Corridor» of democratic liberty is hollowing out and to propose the necessity of a «reflective infrastructure» to de-escalate the zero-sum race and preserve the system from a total collapse into authoritarianism.

#### **Presentation of the research material and its main results.**

The institutional architecture of the late twentieth century was characterized by a concerted effort to establish a systemic «immune response» against the totalizing ideological pathogens that catalyzed the global conflicts of 1914–1945. This study conceptualizes this defensive framework as the «liberal vaccine»—a socio-political prophylaxis designed to neutralize «strong» collective identities—such as radical nationalism and dogmatic utopianism—through the promotion of institutionalized pluralism and individual autonomy [16]. This post-war consensus was founded upon a series of «anti-imperatives» (anti-fascism, anti-totalitarianism, and anti-racism) which functioned as a normative barrier intended to keep autocratic impulses in a state of permanent suppression.

However, current empirical trends suggest that this prophylaxis is undergoing a phase of systemic exhaustion. This crisis is not fundamentally a failure of liberal principles in their classical form, but rather a result of their distortion into doctrinaire extremes through hypertrophy that undermines the structural stability of democratic states. As Fareed Zakaria argues, the over-extension of democratic and liberal impulses beyond their functional institutional bounds leads to a hollowing out of authority. Zakaria notes that when every institution—from the media to political parties—is forced into an «open and freewheeling» system, they lose their moral authority and become vessels for sheer populism. Francis Fukuyama further posits that liberalism is currently «at

war with itself», as its core tenets of individual autonomy and economic liberty have been pushed to ideological frontiers where they jeopardize social cohesion [4]. On the Right, economic liberalism has devolved into an uncompromising neoliberalism that has eroded the state's capacity for social mediation; simultaneously, on the Left, the absolutization of individual autonomy has facilitated a fragmented identity politics that challenges the universalist foundations of the liberal project.

This internal erosion is accelerated by what Volodymyr Yermolenko identifies as the inherent fluidity of ideologies. Historically, the concept of «ideology» emerged as a scientific endeavor to systematize ideas (the «science of ideas»), yet it rapidly mutated into a «banner of global struggle», characterized by a transition from rational systematization to instrumentalized mobilization [23]. In the contemporary context, it has led liberal institutions to be no longer perceived as neutral arenas for deliberative pluralism, but rather as contested terrains for competing radicalisms. While the original intent of the post-war order was to utilize pluralism as a stabilizing mechanism of checks and balances, the current environment has repurposed it to justify the epistemic fragmentation of the public sphere into irreconcilable discursive silos [6].

The exhaustion of this «vaccine» is marked by a fundamental shift in the faculty of political engagement: the transition from «Reason» to «Will». Where the classical Enlightenment emphasized rational deliberation as the primary mechanism for democratic governance, the emerging «Age of Will» signals a departure from the reflective infrastructure of democracy toward a more visceral, tribalistic political ontology [11]. Fareed Zakaria identified the early markers of this trend in the rise of «illiberal democracy», noting a divergence where the procedural «form» of democracy (elections) is preserved while its constitutional «substance» (the rule of law and minority protections) is systematically hollowed out [22].

This state of exhaustion is intrinsically linked to the decay of shared epistemic authority. A functioning liberal democracy requires a «deliberative core»—a set of communicative norms that ensure inclusive and consequential discourse [2]. As «Truth Decay» erodes the factual foundations of public life, the institutional capacity to neutralize radical narratives diminishes [6]. The resulting hyper-reactivity of the political system resembles an autoimmune response, where the liberal order begins to attack its own foundational norms through mechanisms of «canceling» and internal purges, inadvertently fueling the radicalization of the opposite pole.

This systemic fatigue is further complicated by divergent path-dependencies in Western and Eastern Europe. While the Western «vaccine» was a response to the traumas of World War II, Eastern European nations experienced a prolonged historical «complication» under Soviet totalitarianism. This extended exposure to radical Left-wing collectivism (Marxism-Leninism) produced a distinct set of social «antibodies». Consequently, the current «Left turn» in Western discourse—focusing on gender fluidity and affirmative action—is perceived in Eastern Europe not as a progressive evolution, but as a recurrence of the ideological virus they previously defeated. This divergence creates significant «blind spots» in European security and political integration, where the proposed cure in one region is classified as a lethal threat in another [9].

The exhaustion of the liberal prophylaxis has thus created a structural vacuum, permitting the return of the «strong gods» of exclusionary politics, which is not a random ideological drift but a predictable outcome, as the radicalization of one pole necessitates an equalizing force on the other to prevent the collapse of the political actor's systemic influence.

The erosion of the liberal prophylaxis is not merely a consequence of ideological drift but a structural outcome of a competitive race for political survival, which Acemoglu and Robinson conceptualize through the «Red Queen» effect [1, p. 33-73]. In its original formulation, the Red Queen describes the necessity for both the state and society to increase their capacities simultaneously to maintain a balance within the «Narrow Corridor» of liberty; however, when this process decouples from institutional constraints, it devolves into a «Zero-Sum Red Queen» race. In this state, political actors are forced into a relentless escalation—running «as fast as they can» to preserve their relative power—only to find that the institutional ground beneath them is disintegrating [1, p. 390-426].

In the contemporary digital landscape, this mechanism is catalyzed by the architecture of algorithmic communication, where the diminishing role of facts and analytical rigor in public life is accelerated by a media environment that prioritizes high-arousal, antagonistic content. This creates a path-dependency where moderation is a losing survival strategy. Political elites, operating within what Bächtiger and Dryzek term «diabolical times», are incentivized to bypass the deliberative core of democracy in favor of direct, emotive mobilization [2]. This is particularly evident in the transition to «digital populism», where the organizational logic of parties shifts toward algorithmic optimization, rewarding those who push the boundaries of the permissible. This cultural trend illuminates something important: the relationship between democratization and marketization. Because people now exist in large measure as consumers and exert their power through that identity, marketization has become the shadow partner of democratization. They are the twin forces propelling the democratic wave. This dual nature of democratization—empowering citizens and consumers—explains why so few dare criticize this transformation of society.

A primary driver of this zero-sum race is the law of systemic balancing under conditions of hypertrophy. As Zakaria observes, the «democratization of everything» often results in the hollowing out of professional and

institutional buffers, leaving an «outer democratic shell» devoid of substantive liberal values [22, p. 199-238]. When the Left-wing vanguard pushes liberal tenets of autonomy to a hypertrophied extreme—transitioning from the pursuit of legal equality to the enforcement of fluid social identities and positive discrimination—it creates a vacuum of cultural stability. This radical «Left-fluidity» is perceived by significant segments of the citizenry as an existential threat to the foundational structures of the family and the community.

Consequently, the resulting «Right-reaction» is not a return to traditional conservatism but an equally radicalized counter-mobilization. This reaction utilizes a strategic re-assignment of the «Elite» label. While historical populism targeted economic aristocracies, contemporary radicalization targets the «Credentialed Class»—the academics and scientists who serve as the epistemic gatekeepers of the liberal order. By framing these actors as an ideological «caste», the Right utilizes a «conspiracy mentality» as a deliberate tool of delegitimization [10].

This dynamic produces a retroadaptive turn: a mimetic adoption of the Left’s own deconstructive tactics. If the Left utilizes «Science» as a technocratic bypass to avoid democratic debate on social norms, the Right utilizes populist skepticism to fracture the very possibility of objective truth. This creates a state of mimetic isomorphism, where both poles resemble each other in their methodologies—canceling dissent, delegitimizing expertise, and constructing alternative political realities.

The systemic danger of the «Zero-Sum Red Queen» effect lies in the fragmentation of the center. In a healthy democracy, the center acts as the «Narrow Corridor's» stabilizer; under digital radicalization, it becomes a point of fracture. The center is no longer a space for compromise but a target for tribal purges, as moderate actors are viewed as obstacles to existential survival. The ultimate result is a system that remains «in place» regarding its polarized balance, but at the cost of the substantive liberal values—pluralism, tolerance, and factual deliberation—that the «liberal vaccine» was originally designed to protect.

The theoretical framework of the «Zero-Sum Red Queen» finds a salient empirical manifestation in the evolving discourse of Ben Shapiro, a figure whose intellectual output over the last six years illustrates the systemic collapse of the «Narrow Corridor» in American political thought. By applying a chronological content analysis to Shapiro’s primary works—spanning from *The Right Side of History* (2019) to *Lions and Scavengers* (2025)—we can map the transition from a defense of universalist institutionalism to an existential, binary radicalism. This shift is not merely an idiosyncratic personal evolution but a strategic adaptation to the hypertrophy of Left-wing social re-engineering and the resulting systemic imbalance.

In 2019, Shapiro’s work was anchored in a classical defense of the «liberal vaccine». In *The Right Side of History*, he argues for the synthesis of «Jerusalem and Athens»—the fusion of Judeo-Christian morality and Greek teleological reason as the bedrock of Western stability [17]. At this stage, Shapiro’s rhetoric is characterized by an appeal to objective truth and a rejection of the «subjective perceptions» that lead to «brutal division» [17, p. 4-15]. He critiques the fragmentation of the social fabric, yet his proposed solution remains institutional: a return to shared reason. This period represents a final attempt to operate within the «deliberative core» before the systemic pressures of the «Zero-Sum Red Queen» race necessitated a more aggressive posture.

The mechanism of distortion through hypertrophy becomes the central catalyst for Shapiro’s subsequent radicalization, as he felt that democratic impulses were pushed beyond their functional limits, hollowing out the very institutions they inhabit. For Shapiro, the catalyst was the perceived «Left-turn» regarding gender fluidity and positive discrimination. In *The Authoritarian Moment*, Shapiro shifts to declaring an emergency. He identifies a «technocratic bypass»—what he terms «Science™» [19, p. 97-188]—whereby the Left-wing vanguard utilizes academic and corporate institutions to bypass democratic debate. This work marks the beginning of the Elite-relabeling mechanism: Shapiro redefines the «Elite» not as a functional leadership class, but as an «authoritarian Left» that has weaponized every institution from Silicon Valley to the classroom [19, p. 119-138].

This shift illustrates the Red Queen out of control [1, p. 399-404]. To maintain his position within the «Narrow Corridor», Shapiro is forced to run «faster»—adopting a more combative stance to counteract the Left’s institutional capture. By 2020’s *How to Destroy America in Three Easy Steps*, he begins to categorize his opponents not as misguided fellow citizens, but as «Disintegrationists» who seek to dismantle the American «philosophy, culture, and history» [18, p. 25-60, 79-120, 165-194]. This period represents the hollowing out of the «middle ground»; the center is no longer a space for compromise but a target for existential defense.

The final stage of this radicalization is reached in *Lions and Scavengers* (2025). Here, the language of «reason and moral purpose» is entirely supplanted by a predatory, binary ontology. Shapiro frames the political landscape as a zero-sum struggle between «Lions»—those who produce and defend the West—and «Scavengers»—those who seek to deconstruct it from within [20]. This represents the retroadaptive turn in its most potent form: the adoption of the Left’s own deconstructive and exclusionary logic to create a «united, coalitional hatred» of the ideological opposition. By utilizing the same «fluidity» strategies common among post-Soviet «spin dictators» [7], Shapiro constructs an alternative political reality where the only choices are total victory or total destruction.

This trajectory demonstrates the «Zero-Sum Red Queen» in action. As the Left intensified its «fluidity» agenda—pushing for the deconstruction of gender and the implementation of positive discrimination in schools—Shapiro was forced to accelerate his rhetoric to prevent the total marginalization of his constituency. To stand still in the «Reason» of 2019 was to surrender the «Age of Will» to the opposition. Consequently, Shapiro's evolution from institutionalist to radical reflects a broader mimetic isomorphism; he has adopted the «cancel culture» and exclusionary tactics he once critiqued, reassigning them to the «Scavengers» in a desperate attempt to restore systemic balance.

This demonstrates how epistemic erosion («Truth Decay») creates a feedback loop. When Shapiro reassigns the «Elite» label to the credentialed class, he participates in the dismantling of the shared factual basis necessary for a «reflective infrastructure». In *The Authoritarian Moment*, he explicitly targets «Science™» to delegitimize the institutional gatekeepers who utilize academic rooms for their own doctrine. By doing so, he provides a populist dichotomy—the «People» versus the «Credentialed Elite»—that simplifies complex institutional crises into a visceral struggle for survival.

Furthermore, this chronological drift from «Reason» to «Will» confirms that the current crisis is not a lack of information, but a structural requirement for political survival in an environment defined by infodemics and digital populism [5]. Shapiro's transition from a defender of the Judeo-Christian «Side of History» to a leader of the «Lion Pack» mirrors the transition of the Western political order itself: from a rules-based system of vaccinations to a raw, unmediated clash of wills. The «Narrow Corridor» is hollowing out because actors like Shapiro perceive that the «State» has been captured by the «Scavengers», necessitating a «Lion-led» retroadaptation that mimics the very authoritarianism it claims to oppose.

Ultimately, the case of Shapiro illustrates that in a fragmented media landscape, the «Narrow Corridor» of liberty cannot be defended by moderation alone. When the «liberal vaccine» is exhausted through distortive hypertrophy, the resulting systemic imbalance drives actors into an inorganic acceleration of discourse. This confirms the «Zero-Sum Red Queen» hypothesis: in a race where both sides must radicalize to stay in place, the center eventually tears apart.

The culmination of systemic hypertrophy and the subsequent «Red Queen» escalation is the emergence of what may be termed «mimetic authoritarianism». Unlike the overt, revolutionary dictatorships of the twentieth century, which sought to explicitly dismantle the formal structures of the state in favor of a new order, mimetic authoritarianism operates as a parasite within existing democratic frameworks. It preserves the «outer democratic shell»—the rituals of voting, the language of rights, and the presence of judicial bodies—while systematically hollowing out the substantive liberal content that gives these forms meaning. This phenomenon represents a sophisticated institutional mimicry, where the vocabulary of the Enlightenment—progress, freedom, and reason—is repurposed to serve a techno-authoritarian ontology that prioritizes hierarchical efficiency over egalitarian participation [11].

This shift is not merely a change in policy but a fundamental reorientation of the political faculty from «Reason» to «Will». Central to this transition is the ideological influence of the «Dark Enlightenment» (or Neoreaction), a movement that provides the philosophical legitimation for a return to pre-liberal power structures under the guise of technological pragmatism. Thinkers within this sphere, such as Curtis Yarvin (Mencius Moldbug) [13, 14] and Nick Land [8], argue that the «liberal vaccine» has failed because it incentivized an unsustainable expansion of the «credentialed elite»—a group they derogatorily term «the Cathedral». From their perspective, this elite class uses its control over media, academia, and the civil service to enforce a «woke» hypertrophy that stagnates social and technological progress.

Thiel's critique of Enlightenment rationalism is particularly instructive for understanding the mimetic turn. He posits that true freedom can no longer be secured through democratic processes, which he views as inherently compromised by the «zero-sum» demands of mass participation and redistribution [21]. Instead, he advocates for an alternative vision where freedom is secured through technological advancement and corporate-monarchist structures [11, p. 117-122]. This is the quintessential retroadaptive turn: the use of twenty-first-century digital infrastructure to restore a seventeenth-century conception of the «sovereign will». In this model, the state is reimagined not as a social contract among citizens, but as a high-functioning startup managed by a «techno-monarch» who is accountable to efficiency rather than an electorate.

The case of J.D. Vance's rhetoric at the Munich Security Conference serves as a critical empirical anchor for this analysis of mimicry. Vance's appeal to a «model of open market statecraft» mimics the form of liberal economic discourse, yet it signals a profound retreat from the universalist commitments of the post-war order. By framing international alliances and regulatory environments as mere obstacles to American «techno-leadership», Vance utilizes a mimetic strategy to delegitimize the institutional buffers of established democracy. This rhetoric echoes the «spin dictator» model identified by Guriev and Treisman, wherein modern autocrats avoid the «bloody» aesthetics of 20th-century tyranny [7]. Instead, they use the appearance of market-based pragmatism and «common sense» to justify a shift toward a more autocratic, unmediated form of leadership that bypasses the traditional «deliberative core».

This mimetic process is deeply rooted in the «fluidity of ideologies» [23]. As the Left-wing vanguard utilizes its «credentialed» authority to enforce new social orthodoxies, the Right responds not by re-establishing neutral rules, but by adopting the same tactics of institutional capture for opposite ends. However, the Right's mimicry is fundamentally subversive because it adopts the *form* of scientific or legal debate only to dismantle the *norms* that make such debate possible. If the Left is accused of using «Science™» as a technocratic bypass to silence dissent, the Right-wing retroadaptive turn responds by creating a «counter-science» and «counter-media» that mimics the aesthetic of authority while operating as a purely ideological weapon.

The result is a «post-democratic» environment [3], where political life is reduced to a spectacle of participation managed by a small cohort of political technologists and Silicon Valley elites. In this state, the «will» of the leader or the «efficiency» of the digital platform replaces the messy, slow-moving process of democratic consensus. The mechanism of mimicry also extends to the realm of epistemic authority. As discussed in the context of «Truth Decay», the erosion of a shared factual basis allows these actors to construct «alternative political realities». When the citizenry can no longer distinguish between a legitimate institutional process and its mimetic shadow, they become susceptible to what can be described as «manipulative narratives from unscrupulous elites».

While the post-1945 order sought to vaccinate society against the *dictator* by empowering the citizen, the new «Dark Enlightenment» order seeks to vaccinate the *elite* against the *public*. By utilizing algorithmic control and the «Zero-Sum Red Queen» race to keep the populace in a state of permanent polarization, mimetic authoritarians ensure that the «Narrow Corridor» is so cluttered with cultural warfare that it becomes impassable for genuine democratic reform. The «Age of Will» thus becomes an era in which the strong impose their subjective realities through mastery of digital infrastructure, hollowing out the very idea of a universal liberal project.

A key aspect of this «hollowing out» is the redefinition of the «Elite». As the Right adopts the populist dichotomy of «Elite vs. People», they do not seek to abolish the elite, but to replace the «Credentialed Elite» (academics, journalists, judges) with a «Techno-Elite» (founders, engineers, and «lions»). This is where the retroadaptive nature of the movement is most visible: it seeks a return to an aristocratic structure, but one where «merit» is defined by technological mastery and the ability to impose one's will on the «scavengers» of the old order. The democratic shell remains useful for these actors only as long as it provides a veneer of legitimacy for this transition. Once the «inner stuffing» of constitutional liberalism is removed, the transition from a «Shackled Leviathan» to a «Despotic Leviathan» can occur without a single shot being fired, simply through the «spin» of institutional decay [1].

Ultimately, the danger of this mimetic turn is that it is often mistaken for a legitimate «balancing» of the system. Observers may see the Right's aggressive tactics as a necessary corrective to the Left's «hypertrophy». However, as this study suggests, the adoption of illiberal tactics to combat illiberalism does not restore the «liberal vaccine»; it merely introduces a new, more resilient strain of the virus. The retroadaptive turn toward techno-monarchism hierarchies does not resolve the discontents of liberalism; it simply replaces the «Cathedral» of the credentialed class with the «Castle» of the technological sovereign. By the time the public realizes the «form» no longer contains the «substance» of freedom, the infrastructure of the «Narrow Corridor» may already be dismantled, leaving only the «Age of Will» in its wake.

The final stage in the exhaustion of the «liberal vaccine» is characterized by the convergence of distinct regional pathologies that fracture the unified front of the Euro-Atlantic democratic order. While the preceding sections analyzed the mechanics of hypertrophy and mimetic radicalization primarily through a Western lens, a complete diagnostic requires an examination of what Paul Lendvai terms «blind-spot politics».[9] This phenomenon describes a structured ignorance among Western elites regarding the specific historical path-dependencies of Eastern Europe, which has allowed the «virus» of illiberalism to mutate undetected within the very heart of the European project.

For established Western democracies, the post-1945 «vaccine» was a reaction to the catastrophe of right-wing totalitarianism. However, for the nations of the former socialist camp, the historical trauma was extended and intensified by decades of Soviet-imposed Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. As Mikhail Minakov observes, the «post-Soviet human» carries a specific psychological and social burden—a deep-seated immunity to Left-wing collectivism that is often misread in the West as simple reactionary conservatism [12, p. 86-120]. This «extended experience» of totalitarianism means that when Eastern European societies observe the current «Left-turn» in Western institutions—characterized by the promotion of fluid identities and state-mandated positive discrimination—they perceive it not as a progressive evolution, but as a recurrence of the ideological pathogen they previously defeated at great cost.

This divergence creates a systemic imbalance that feeds the «Zero-Sum Red Queen» race on a continental scale. The aggressive push for social re-engineering in the West triggers a radical «Right-reaction» in the East, exemplified by the «counter-revolutionary» turns in Hungary and Poland. These actors utilize the mimetic authoritarianism, adopting the «democratic shell» of the European Union to implement retroadaptive agendas [7]. Western elites, blinded by economic interests and ideological naivety, have historically turned a

«blind eye to these developments, assuming that the procedural inclusion of these states into liberal institutions would automatically confer the «substance» of liberal values [9].

The result is a fragmentation of the political center that is no longer merely ideological but geographical. The «Narrow Corridor» of liberty is hollowing out because the «center» has lost its ability to serve as a shock absorber for these irreconcilable historical experiences. In the West, the center is eroded by the hypertrophy of individual autonomy; in the East, it is dismantled by the retroadaptive urge to restore «strong gods» and national sovereignty as a defense against perceived Western «decadence». This creates a «panorama of hypocrisy» where both sides claim to defend democracy while utilizing illiberal methods to suppress their opponents.

Furthermore, the «spin dictator» model has become the global standard for this new era of political pathology. By hollowing out the «inner stuffing» of constitutionalism—-independent judiciaries, a free press, and professional academic standards—modern illiberal actors ensure that the state becomes a «Despotic Leviathan» masked as a «Shackled» one. The digital infrastructure, as analyzed through the lens of infodemics and «Truth Decay», provides the perfect environment for this mimicry to flourish. When the public is kept in a state of permanent polarization by the Zero-Sum Red Queen race, they lose the capacity to «see through» the manipulative strategies of elites who claim to be protecting them from the «other side».

The fragility of the center is the ultimate security risk of the «Age of Will». As the «reflective infrastructure» of democracy collapses, the system loses its ability to handle complex, long-term challenges—from climate change to the regulation of artificial intelligence—because every policy becomes a front in the zero-sum cultural war. The center is no longer a place of deliberation but a «killing zone» where moderate voices are purged for lack of tribal loyalty. This confirms that the exhaustion of the liberal vaccine is not a temporary fever but a structural transition. The West is moving from a rules-based order of «prophylactic pluralism» toward a raw, unmediated clash of wills, where progress is no longer measured by the expansion of rights but by the efficiency of power.

**Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research.** The investigation into the contemporary crisis of liberal democracy reveals a system not merely under external threat, but one undergoing a profound internal metamorphosis. The «liberal vaccine»—the institutionalized prophylaxis established to prevent the recurrence of totalizing ideologies—has reached a state of terminal exhaustion. This decay is not a failure of the core liberal tenets of equality and autonomy, but rather a consequence of their distortion through hypertrophy. As these principles were pushed to doctrinaire extremes, they triggered a systemic imbalance, hollowing out the «inner stuffing» of constitutionalism and leaving behind a fragile, democratic shell.

The primary driver of this destabilization is the Zero-Sum Red Queen race. In a digital environment characterized by epistemic erosion and algorithmic antagonism, political actors find that moderation is an evolutionary dead end. To maintain relevance, they must run toward the radical poles. This study has shown, through the chronological analysis of Ben Shapiro, that even those who set out to defend the «Side of History» are eventually consumed by the «Age of Will». The transition from universalist reason to binary, existential conflict is a survival requirement in a landscape where the «Narrow Corridor» of civil discourse has been replaced by tribal warfare.

Furthermore, the rise of mimetic authoritarianism suggests that the future of illiberalism will not look like the crude dictatorships of the past. Instead, it will manifest as a sophisticated mimicry of democratic forms. By hollowing out institutional gatekeepers—academia, science, and the judiciary—and relabeling them as «Credentialed Elites», retroadaptive movements seek to install a techno-authoritarian hierarchy that prioritizes will and efficiency over the slow process of deliberation. This threat is compounded by the «blind-spot politics» that prevents the West from recognizing that its own «hypertrophy» is viewed by others—particularly in post-totalitarian Eastern Europe—as a recurrence of the very virus the liberal order was meant to stop.

The prospects for further research should focus on the development of a «reflective infrastructure». If the crisis is communicative and epistemic, the solution cannot be purely legislative. Future studies must investigate how to rebuild «deliberative constraints» on elite behavior and how to empower a citizenry to «see through» mimetic strategies. There is a pressing need for interdisciplinary work that combines political philosophy with digital sociology to find ways to «shackle the Leviathan» once more, ensuring that the Red Queen effect is channeled back into productive institutional competition rather than zero-sum destruction.

Ultimately, the survival of the liberal project depends on its capacity for self-correction. Liberalism must learn to moderate its own excesses and recognize that a system without boundaries is a system without a center. Only by de-escalating the radical race and reclaiming a shared factual reality can established democracies hope to prevent the «Age of Will» from becoming a permanent eclipse of the Enlightenment.

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**Виснаження «ліберальної вакцини»: міметичний авторитаризм та фрагментація постліберальних політичних реальностей**

**Анотація.** Стаття досліджує сучасну кризу ліберальної демократії через метафору «ліберальної вакцини» — сукупності інституційних запобіжників, встановлених після 1945 року для запобігання рецидивам тоталітаризму. Стверджується, що цей системний імунітет наразі перебуває на стадії виснаження, зумовленого притаманною сучасним ідеологіям плинністю та зростаючим тиском цифрових комунікацій. Центральне місце в аналізі посідає застосування гіпотези «Червоної Королеви з нульовою сумою» (Zero-Sum Red Queen), запозиченої з праць Д. Аджемоглу та Дж. Робінсона. У цифровому політичному екосередовищі ідеологічні актори опиняються в ситуації відчайдушних перегонів, де вони змушені радикалізуватися лише задля збереження свого відносного впливу, що призводить до вимивання змісту «вузького коридору» стабільного деліберативного врядування.

Дослідження висвітлює, як радикальна інтенсифікація «лівого повороту», що характеризується суттєвою моральною реінженерією в межах ключових інституцій та просуванням флюїдних соціальних ідентичностей, створила сприятливий ґрунт для аналогічної радикальної правої реакції. Цей процес «системного балансування», підживлюваний страхом перед міграцією та сприйняттям ідеологічної індоктринації наступного покоління, змістив політичний дискурс зі стабільного центру до крихких крайнощів. Через аналіз хронологічної радикалізації дискурсу Бена Шапіро та виникнення «міметичного авторитаризму» у статті розкривається, як зовнішні форми демократії використовуються для руйнування її сутнісного змісту. Автори порівнюють західний досвід інституційної втоми з «контрреволюційним» досвідом Східної Європи, ідентифікуючи небезпечну фрагментацію політичної реальності. Зроблено висновок, що результуюча поляризація у відчайдушній спробі збалансувати систему несе ризик її розколу в самому центрі. Лише шляхом розбудови «рефлексивної інфраструктури» демократії можуть сподіватися на перехід від антагонізму з нульовою сумою назад до сталого деліберативного ядра.

**Ключові слова:** міметичний авторитаризм; «Червона Королева з нульовою сумою» (Zero-Sum Red Queen); ліберальна вакцина; ідеологічна плинність; цифрова радикалізація.

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