



Technofascism: AI, Big Tech, and the new authoritarianism

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technologies, including AI, is having a significant impact on the social, economic, and political life. Yet, while presented as milestones in innovation and progress, these technological transformations have also introduced mechanisms of control, forms of organization, and ideological patterns that bear striking resemblances to historical fascist phenomena. Moreover, in parallel and increasingly intersecting with this development is a broader political context of fascist ideologies and strategies, populism, authoritarianism, and (other forms of) illiberalism in the West. Drawing from the classic philosophical and political theory literature on fascism, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism, this paper argues that and how features of contemporary digital technologies, their governance, and their political context mirror features of fascism. It concludes with a call to resist these new, anti-democratic forms of governance and domination, and make more systemic changes to both the development of technologies and the governance of tech and society.

Keywords Fascism · Authoritarianism · AI · Big Tech · Digital technologies: technofascism

1 Introduction

The rapid development of digital technologies, including applications of artificial intelligence (AI), is having a significant impact on the social, economic, and political life. From the way individuals communicate and form relationships to the methods by which political discourse and economic

transactions occur, digital technologies increasingly mediate our lives and societies. But while presented as milestones in innovation and progress, these technological transformations have also raised concerns about democracy (Nemitz 2018; Kreps and Kriner 2023; Jungherr 2023; Coeckelbergh 2024) and seem to introduce and support mechanisms of control, forms of organization, and ideological patterns that bear striking resemblances to historical fascist phenomena.

The term "technofascism" proposed in this article captures the fusion of technological pervasiveness with fascist tendencies and conditions. This is partly a matter of technology contributing to more capitalist control and to more authoritarian politics. Today in the Western world, we find ourselves in a situation where digital technologies and infrastructures, such as AI, social media, and cloud, serve not merely economic interests but also political ones, subtly guiding and constraining human behavior and contributing to the creation of a different political situation. Unlike classical fascism, which mobilized mass movements and openly celebrated violence and domination (and unlike authoritarian regimes elsewhere in the world that do not claim to be democratic), technofascism in the West tends to operate through quieter, more insidious mechanisms of control, such as data extraction, algorithmic governance, behavioral nudging, and platform monopolization. These mechanisms create

The Editors note that an earlier public preprint, published on In November 2024, ResearchGate, first presented the analytical framing "DigiFascism (or TechnoFascism)" and developed a conceptual analysis of digital infrastructures, information-flow manipulation, algorithmic governance, platform power, and the role of AI as a multiplier in emerging illiberal dynamics. This conceptual object is closely related to the framework discussed in the present article under the label "Technofascism". For completeness of the scholarly record, consistent with COPE and Springer Nature policy, the Editors provide a cross-reference to the first public disclosure of this framing: Yushchenko, A. G. (2024). "The New Weapons of Mass Destruction: Manipulative Information Technologies and the Threat of US DigiFascism in the Age of ECSIS and AI." Preprint, ResearchGate, November 2024. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.25779.23849>. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385847034>.

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conditions of depoliticization, atomization, and polarization, all under the guise of convenience and personalization.

However, today's technofascism is getting louder. It becomes more visible and takes on specifically fascist forms. In parallel and increasingly intersecting with the development just described, in the West, we find ourselves in a broader political context of tendencies toward fascism, right-wing populism, authoritarianism, and (other forms of) illiberalism¹—also in countries that call themselves democratic. Consider for example the U.S. under Donald Trump (especially his second term) and Viktor Orban in Hungary. In such contexts, technological forms of domination come to be exercised more openly and arguably more ruthlessly, directly supporting not only populist but also fascist ideologies and a political dynamics that clearly goes in authoritarian directions. Trump, for example, is widely seen as sliding toward authoritarianism, if not fascism. Consider for instance his incitement during the Capitol attack in 2021 (in his first term), his attacks on courts and democratic institutions, his personality cult, his frequent use of disinformation (repeated falsehoods), his use of ICE during his second term (under Trump the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency has broad discretionary powers regarding raids and aggressive detentions and deportations, creates fear and normalizes the suspension of rights, and is insufficiently accountable and works in ways that are opaque to the public), his encouragement of domestic political violence (e.g., through rhetoric that constructs some groups or even entire cities as “internal enemies”), and his war rhetoric, threatening shows of military force, and his support for what a UN commission has recently called ‘genocide’ (UN 2025). These developments interact with Big Tech openly playing a more political role. For example, tech billionaire Elon Musk plays a prominent role on the national and global political stage, promoting far-right thinking and parties (for example the German AfD party) and playing a key role in the second Trump administration without being elected (he acts as head of DOGE). After Trump's 2025 inauguration, he also performed what appeared to many as a Nazi salute (Pengelly 2025). More generally, the way Silicon Valley's has acquired political power (again, Musk as head of DOGE, but also OpenAI CEO Sam Altman's deals with Trump), its technocratic fantasies, and its ‘cold-blooded pursuit of efficiency’ have led a commentator in *The New Yorker* to conclude that ‘techno-fascism comes to America’ (Chayka 2025).

While the term ‘technofascism’ has been used previously (Kabakov 2022) and some of the phenomena in this

paper have already been described separately and framed in terms of related topics, such as surveillance and the power of Big Tech, so far a systematic analysis of the phenomenon is lacking. For example, Zuboff (2019) has helpfully analyzed what she calls ‘surveillance capitalism’ and has raised concerns about authoritarianism but has not offered a comprehensive analysis of the *fascist* tendencies raised by digital technologies. McElroy (2024) uses the term technofascism but focuses on Silicon Valley's imperialism. Others have rightly argued that Big Tech has accumulated too much power (Greene 2018; Schaake 2024); currently, this seems to be a growing consensus in the AI ethics literature. Earlier, Karatzogianni and Gak (2014) already pointed to the ‘quasi-totalitarian’ mechanisms in digital networks, where alignment between governments and corporate elites undermine democracy. And as mentioned recently, some authors have analyzed AI's impact on democracy. However, there is still a lot of room for the development and application of a framework to analyze and evaluate what is going on. Here, I focus on showing how fascism theory and related theory about authoritarianism and totalitarianism can be used for building such a normative framework. Moreover, I focus on AI, as opposed to digital technologies in general, to describe how AI specifically, in interaction with its business context and political context, contributes to technofascism.

Drawing mainly on the classic philosophical and political theory literature on fascism, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism, but also making bridges to contemporary literature, this paper argues that how features of contemporary digital technologies, their governance, and their context mirror elements of fascism. It thus shows that the fascist danger is not only a matter of the increasing power of Big Tech and a small number of billionaires, or of a gap in regulation, but lies also in the features of the technologies themselves and its toxic interactions with specific ideologies and wider political developments toward fascist forms of authoritarianism—for example in the U.S. context the developments that take place under the Trump administrations.

The paper is structured along these three lines: after looking into key historical analyses of fascism and authoritarianism that emerged after the Second World War, it makes comparisons to today and first analyzes how the *technologies* themselves—in particular AI—can enable fascism. Then it focuses on the business context and shows how control and governance of AI and its infrastructures by *Big Tech* can lead to fascism. Finally it shows how fascist, populist, authoritarian, and (otherwise) illiberal tendencies in the broader *political* context risk to exacerbate these tendencies. The focus is on Western countries, in particular the U.S. The paper concludes with a call to heed the lessons of the past, resist these developments toward new, anti-democratic forms of governance and domination, support existing forms of resistance such as (some initiatives in) AI ethics and anti-fascist

¹ Some authors even speak of new forms of feudalism (Dean 2020; Varoufakis 2023). This has been criticized by Marxist thinkers: according to them, capitalism has not ended (Herzog 2025).

movements, and work toward creating conditions for more democratic technologies *and* more democratic forms of governance—ultimately putting us on a path to a different politics and a different society that is less vulnerable to the fascist threat.

2 Fascism: origins and features

Why, exactly, use the term *technofascism*, rather than authoritarianism or control within a capitalist order? In capitalism, control is exercised by corporations, in this case Big Tech, but in fascism this control is connected to anti-democratic ideologies and a political dynamic toward more authoritarian order, control, and repression in which both governments and corporations play a role. It is well known that dictatorial rule can emerge even in democratic societies, in response to problems with representational democracy (Willoughby 2019) and in response to crises, for example economic crisis. Authoritarianism is a form of political power in which authority is concentrated in a single leader or small elite. Authoritarianism can become totalitarian when it controls all aspects of life—including the personal, private life. Yet, fascism is a specific form of authoritarianism. It has an authoritarian form of power and tends toward totalitarianism, but has specific origins and features and arises under specific conditions. Moreover, even if it does not take the form of a full-fledged authoritarianism, it can already undermine liberal democracy (Stanley 2018) and gain more power via alliances with elites (Paxton 2004). To identify these origins, features, and conditions of fascism, let us examine classic analyses of fascism. I will also outline some relevant contemporary fascism theories, which partly emerged in response to these classic theories, and which offer additional perspectives to understand both historical and contemporary fascism.

In the aftermath of World War II, political theorists and philosophers sought to define and understand fascism beyond its historical manifestations in Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany, identifying its origins and core ideological and structural features. For example, Hannah Arendt argued that fascism, while distinct from totalitarianism in some respects, shared with it a drive toward absolute domination, the destruction of the public sphere, and the elimination of pluralism. She argued that both Nazism and Stalinism had these features. They were both based on a leader principle and relied on terror, deterministic worldviews, and mass movements and revolution. Fascism, in Arendt's analysis, was not simply a nationalist or militarist movement, but a phenomenon rooted in modernity, in particular mass society's alienation and the manipulation of collective fears. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), she emphasized the role of propaganda, the atomization of individuals, and the

use of bureaucratic structures to achieve domination. Critical theorists of the Frankfurt School in turn offered an analysis that tied fascism to features of modern mass society and capitalist rationality. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno (1944/1972) argued that fascism represented the logical culmination of Enlightenment's instrumental reason, where the pursuit of efficiency and domination eclipses ethical and emancipatory goals. Adorno and colleagues' work on *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950) further diagnosed the psychological conditions that made populations susceptible to fascist appeals. The authoritarian traits they identified and ranked on an 'F scale' (F for Fascism) include conventionalism, anti-intellectualism, superstition and occultism, power and toughness, destructiveness and cynicism, projectivity, and exaggerated concerns over sex. Herbert Marcuse (1964) extended these insights, showing how advanced industrial societies can also be authoritarian in so far as they repress dissent by promoting one-dimensional thinking, consumerism, and technological conformism. Fascism and authoritarianism are then not only about a specific form of government or about social relations based on specific relations of production (classical Marxism would emphasize the role of capitalism), but also about consumption and the power of corporations. Through the capitalist use of technology and capitalist social relations, even societies that are not explicitly considered authoritarian continue these forms of domination. Meanwhile, Walter Benjamin (1936/1968) warned of fascism's tendency to aestheticize politics, turning mass movements into spectacles that displace rational discourse. Later, Eco (1995) defined 14 properties of fascism, including fear of difference, appeal to a frustrated middle class, contempt for the weak, and newspeak.

Despite variations in emphasis, key postwar theorists converge around several defining features and origins of fascism, which are further developed (and critically responded to) in contemporary literature on fascism:

First, fascism is rooted in *mass society's alienation and atomization*, a condition where individuals, isolated from traditional social structures, become susceptible to movements promising belonging and meaning (Arendt 1951; Adorno et al. 1950). This vulnerability is exploited through the use of *propaganda and myth*, which fabricate narratives of national rebirth and lost greatness to galvanize collective action (Nolte 1966). Typically, these narratives are not only nationalist but also supremacist and racist. Emotional appeal, rather than coherent ideology, defines fascist mobilization, as myths are often contradictory but effective in channeling mass grievances (Eco 1995). Part of these ideologies, myths, and other narratives are the ideas that the nation, race, and leader are superior, that law and order is important, that there was a mythic past when the nation was still uniform (Stanley 2018), that one's group is a victim,

and that there are internal and external enemies that have to be destroyed by means of internal “cleansing” and war (Paxton 2004). There is also a glorification of violence and a celebration of strength and aggression; it is promoted as a legitimate means to achieve political goals.

Secondly, fascism relies heavily on the *suppression of pluralism and democratic deliberation*, replacing them with hierarchical structures of obedience and loyalty (Arendt 1951; Paxton 2004). Critical theorists further show that this authoritarian tendency is not simply political but also deeply rooted in psychology: Adorno et al. (1950) identified traits such as submission to authority, conventionalism, and aggression toward perceived outsiders as characteristic of the “authoritarian personality,” which fascist movements cultivate and exploit. They argued that this explained why some individuals were especially susceptible to fascist ideology (e.g., Nazi propaganda) and were eager to obey powerful leaders, especially in times of socio-economic crisis (e.g., inflation and unemployment in the 1930s).

A third key feature is the *fusion of state, corporate, and paramilitary powers* into a loosely organized yet effective apparatus of domination. Franz Neumann, a theorist associated with the Frankfurt School, described Nazi Germany not as a unified state but as a chaotic structure where party, military, and capitalist elites jockeyed for power while systematically suppressing civil liberties and political opposition. The fascist party, the bureaucracy, the military, and big business (monopoly capital) all functioned under a leadership principle: power is concentrated at the top. In this respect, fascism often blurs the lines between public and private power, mobilizing economic interests to serve political domination. (Neumann 1942) Fascism, like biblical Behemoth in the title of Neumann’s book, is a powerful monster but also a chaos beast. Or more precisely: it is a monster with many heads.

Finally, critical theorists, such as Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) and Marcuse (1964), highlight fascism’s link to further *pathologies of modernity itself*: the instrumentalization of reason, the fetishization of technology and efficiency, isolation, and the repression of critical thought. Walter Benjamin (1968) adds that fascism’s “aestheticizes” politics turns political engagement into spectacle and emotional catharsis, thereby preventing rational critique and maintaining mass loyalty. Politics becomes a matter of rallies, parades, uniforms, symbols, and choreographed mass participation. Rather than empowering people and addressing matters of (in)justice, fascism manipulates emotion and identity through aesthetics to create a sense of unity and purpose.

Contemporary definitions and analyses of fascism further build on these theories but also critically respond to them. For example, Stanley (2018) builds on Arendt and Eco to argue that fascism is not just a historical phenomenon but a recurring political strategy that can also be found in Trump’s U.S., Orban’s Hungary, and Modi’s India. It operates by

creating a binary of “us” versus “them,” undermining truth, and fostering authoritarianism through fear, nationalism, and propaganda. Fascism, he argues, is narratively constructed. For example, a mythic, ‘glorious’ past is fabricated in which the nation is presented as strong and uniform, and in which there is a patriarchal family structure (4–5). Furthermore, truth and trust are undermined, intellectuals and experts are mocked, marginalized groups are targeted, and the dominant group is presented as a victim. Yet Paxton (2004) shows that fascism is not only an ideology but also a process: he puts more emphasis on the behavior and the political dynamics, rather than the ideology, and offers a model of how fascism rises and consolidates. For example, he argues that before fascists attain power and repress opposition, they form alliances with conservatives or elites to gain state power. These alliances are crucial for fascism’s success. Consider for instance how Nazi Germany was supported by German conservatives and industrialists. Paxton criticizes Arendt’s view that fascism is a revolutionary movement and instead treats it as counter-revolutionary force defending capitalism—in other words, defending the system rather than overthrowing it. Similarly, Eley (2016), critical of what he takes to be Arendt’s too abstract analysis that is too focused on similarities between Nazism and Stalinism, also stresses the process character of fascism: it develops through coalitions, alliances, and opportunistic political strategies. It also partly emerges from the crises of capitalism, the hollowing out of welfare states, and the polarization of wealth—conditions Arendt neglected. Fascism can also be linked to the history of European colonialism and imperialism. And like Paxton, Eley points to the convergence between far-right movements and conservative parties. Furthermore, Saull (2023) has pointed to capitalist and geopolitical shifts that facilitate(d) the success of the far right and the production of fascism. Again, political dynamics is key here, not so much ideas and ideology as in Arendt or Nolte.

Across these analyses and in spite of their differences, fascism emerges not merely as an aberration or extremist ideology that is tied to unique historical phenomena, but as a symptom of deeper structural crises and problems within modern capitalist, democratic, and technological societies. As these accounts emphasize, therefore, fascism is not tethered to one specific cultural form, geographical area, or political and historical moment but can reconfigure itself and gain power again by exploiting modern vulnerabilities, contemporary anxieties, and new technologies. Similar ideological structures and political-historical processes can emerge. In other words: it can happen again and perhaps is already happening, also in the U.S. and in Europe. The political, economic, and social conditions for its rise are reappearing. Understandably given their disciplinary perspective, historians such as Eley stress that historical fascism will not simply repeat itself—for example, it does not

come in the form of a mass movement against communism, but rather involves new technologies of surveillance and the slow dismantling of civil liberties (Eley 2016, p. 112)—and recommend a comparative and historical perspective (Riley 2018). Hence, more work is needed to make a more refined comparison. Yet, based on the features listed so far in this paper, we can already draw some clear parallels to the past and conclude that fascism, now re-defined in more contemporary terms (taking into account Paxton and Eley) as a set of ideas, relations, practices, repertoires, and trajectories, is forming again. And, like in the 1930s, nothing guarantees that current liberal-democratic institutions will stop it.

However, while both classic and contemporary analyses pay some attention to the role of the (mass) media in fascism (for example, Goebbels' use of radio and cinema is well known, Walter Benjamin emphasized the role of spectacle, and Eley acknowledges the role digital media play today), they tend to underestimate the important ways in which technologies and media *shape* and *constitute* these political realities. In contrast to contemporary philosophers of technology (e.g., Winner 1980; Feenberg 1999; Coeckelbergh 2022), who argue that technologies are inherently political, most fascism theorists assume that technology and media are politically neutral. (An exception is Marcuse, who claimed that technologies carry within them the interests of the social, economic, and political contexts they are developed in, and that in capitalist societies, technologies embody domination.) Furthermore, most classical theorists neglected corporate use of technologies and media. It is also important to update that work and analyze the political role of contemporary technologies such as AI. Today's applications of digital technologies and infrastructure such as AI and social media—characterized by surveillance, algorithmic control, and monopolistic power—offer new tools for forms of domination that echo fascist strategies of atomization, control of information, and emotional manipulation. At the same time, a political dynamics and ideological structure is emerging that is increasingly more fascist and that entangles in various ways with these technologies. Understanding how classical features of fascism may mutate into the digital age is therefore essential to identifying and resisting new authoritarian tendencies masked as technological progress or—typical for Silicon Valley—even as doing good for humanity.

Let me analyze how digital technologies (in particular AI), Big Tech, and their political context may display and support fascist tendencies.

3 The technology: how AI can become a fascist technology

Based on the features of fascism identified in the previous section, we can make some helpful comparisons to the political role of today's technologies, such as AI and digital social media and their social, economic, and political context, highlighting similarities while acknowledging differences. I will focus on (1) the role of AI, (2) the role of Big Tech and the culture of Silicon Valley, and (3) the political context in which these technologies and businesses operate.

First, rather than mass rallies and visible paramilitary violence (e.g., against minorities and political opponents), control is now usually exerted through opaque systems that predict, influence, and constrain behavior, often in ways invisible to the public. For example, fascism's features are increasingly reflected in the algorithmic governance of contemporary digital platforms, where decision-making processes are opaque, centralized, and resistant to democratic oversight. Similarly, social welfare institutions and insurances use AI in ways that are not transparent to users.

AI has specific features that facilitate these forms of control. In contrast to earlier digital technologies, AI in the form of machine learning produces outcomes in ways that are not transparent; yet by producing convincing and seemingly “authoritative” text, for instance, it tempts the user to following its recommendations without much thinking or judgment. With AI, it is now also possible to manipulate masses of people in a fast and effective way, based on personalized profiles. Moreover, due to the huge resources needed to train AI (data centers, enormous volumes of data), a few large corporations tend to oligopolize AI and hence exert a lot of power of its development, use, and future.

More generally, while there is no such thing as “fascist technologies” in the sense that there would be an explicit link between the technology and fascism as an ideology or movement, and while these effects are often not intended, some features of current digital technologies and infrastructures enable and support fascist tendencies on the basis of their technical features and possibilities. They are hence not fascism-neutral in this sense. The term *technofascism* as proposed in this paper refers to the synthesis of digital technologies (in particular AI) and fascist political tendencies that resemble classical fascism without necessarily replicating its outward symbols. Partly, this synthesis is intended: AI and other digital technologies may be used by specific groups and people for fascist and authoritarian goals. But often, these technologies have also unintended consequences; some people who develop the technologies, for instance, might often be unaware of what they are doing. Technofascism's features include the following:

3.1 Mass surveillance and control via emotional manipulation and new myths

AI and related digital technologies enable governments and corporations to track, analyze, and predict behavior enables the creation of profiles of individuals, who can be managed and manipulated without their knowledge (Zuboff 2019). Today, this includes the analysis and manipulation of emotions. With AI, this kind of manipulation is easier than with traditional propaganda technologies, since it enables personalization at scale: it can make fine-grained profiles and analysis based on language patterns, interaction history, and subtle behavior signals. AI systems in the form of large language models (LLMs) can also converse in a way that mimics empathy and care, and tone and style can be adapted in real time. Embedded in all kinds of apps and in chatbots, emotional strategies can be tested quickly and at individual level. AI can even generate convincing fake personas, and it can create new narratives and new “trends” in a short amount of time. Since it is more personal, more adaptive, more human-like, more scalable, and more persistent, AI is thus much more potent for emotional manipulation—and manipulation in general—than earlier technologies.

This has political consequences. The manipulation technologies are used for the political mobilization of people and the steering of (buying and voting) behavior. Citizens are here not treated as rational and autonomous individuals, but are manipulated based on their emotions; their autonomy is undermined. Through social media and with the help of AI algorithms, critical thought is also repressed, polarization is encouraged (Rodilosso 2024), and particular ideologies are boosted, promoting a “us” versus “them” mentality: as said, fascism operates according to this binary (Stanley 2018), and today, this binary is further promoted via the new technologies. For instance, it seems that Elon Musk has changed the social media platform Twitter (now X) to a machine that serves his political purposes, creating more polarization and spreading far-right propaganda, including suggesting that some groups are to be seen as enemies. Polarization and mass mobilization against enemies are key elements in enabling fascist power (Paxton 2004).

In addition, next to use of supremacist myths that are similar to the historical ones used in Italian fascism and Nazism, new myths and ideologies have been created that present current technologies as pathways to artificial general intelligence (AGI) and superintelligence and toward more capitalist growth and drastic technological change (accelerationism). This then in turn casts top AI CEOs and tech billionaires such as Musk and Altman as leading the way on behalf of the rest of humanity. (I will say more about related ideologies and narratives in the next section.) Tech myths, currently the myths around AI, are the new (techno) fascist ideologies that are meant to mobilize people around

the goals of the new (tech) leaders. The actual limitations of AI do not matter much in this light; what matters to the tech industry and their political allies is that people go along with their technocratic and accelerationist vision of the technological future, ready to make sacrifices if needed.

At first sight, it may seem that this is a contrast to historical fascism: today, the emphasis seems less on a mythic past and more on a future to come. However, historical fascism was not only based on origin myths (the birth of a superior race and nation) but also rooted in Futurism, which praise of invention, speed, and disruption resonates in today’s technofascism (Eveleth 2019). Today, we are invited to embrace AI’s disruption and follow where it (and the tech leaders) leads us. At the same time, and mixed with this technological modernism, romantic ideas, and quasi-religious narratives surround AI. For example, we hear apocalyptic narratives about AI and the end of humanity. This does not surprise. Fascism has been called a form of ‘reactionary modernism’ (Herf 1981) for attempting to reconcile the rational logic of engineering with romantic nationalism, irrationalism, and anti-modernist sentiment. AI thus becomes not only a technology but also a myth and an organizing principle: a principle of fascist political organization.

3.2 Information domination

The previous effects are exacerbated by means of control over the media—in this case digital social media. Control over platforms of discourse such as Facebook and X allows for the amplification of preferred narratives and the suppression of dissenting voices, resembling fascist control over media. Here, the technological capacities of AI play again a key role: it assists manipulation and information domination through automatic content filtering and narrative amplification (e.g., downranking or removing certain opinions and pushing posts with preferred narratives), the rapid production of aligned voices and content, and the use of targeted influence campaigns based on effective emotional framing. Musk’s takeover and re-shaping of Twitter/X can be interpreted as a fascist form of control of the media that boosts specific narratives in line with his political views and suppresses critical voices. In contemporary technofascism, however, this is generally not done by direct human intervention (although this allegedly also happens) but by means of covert tweaking the algorithms, which then exert their automated political influence. It is a less visible (if visible at all), but not less powerful form of control and governance. This leads us to the next feature.

3.3 Algorithmic governance

Decision-making processes are increasingly automated, removing human judgment and democratic accountability,

thus leading to what Arendt (1963) has called the “banality of evil”: evil can be committed by ordinary individuals who follow orders without critical reflection, empathy, or judgment. She portrayed Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann as someone who obeyed the rules without questioning their morality. Today, AI’s taking over of decision-making may lead to a similar banality of evil: since it is so easy and convenient to have AI take over the burden of decision-making (for instance in welfare bureaucracies, jurisdiction, or insurance, but also through the private use of tools such as ChatGPT), decision-makers in these sectors may simply follow AI’s recommendations without critical thinking and without empathically considering its consequences for others. Those others may not even know that AI was used in the first place; AI-assisted decisions often happen behind the scenes. And to those who employ AI for their decisions, AI feels authoritative, because it produces confident and convincing answers. Decision-makers relying on AI may also assume that the machine produces “objective” results or that it is always correct, even if this is not the case. Due to its opaque nature and lack of technical knowledge on the part of users, it is also usually impossible to inspect the training data, the model architecture, the optimization goals, etc. And by delegating decision-making to AI, users reduce cognitive load and responsibility. AI, through its capacity to automate, may thus promote thoughtlessness and the evasion of moral responsibility. As McQuillan puts it, in this sense, AI can be understood as ‘an upgrade to the existing bureaucratic order’ (McQuillan 2022, p. 60). This may well be applauded by technofascists, since they reject empathy (see below) and since their power relies partly on thoughtless following.

Another interesting and related notion to shed light on current forms of AI algorithmic governance and their political implications is “algorithmic governmentality.” Influenced by Foucault’s notion of governmentality, Rouvroy and Berns (2013) have argued that today power is not exerted through laws but through data analytics and predictive algorithms. Individuals are governed and disciplined via correlations drawn from big data rather than causal reasoning or moral judgment. Again moral judgment and autonomy are undermined; the living human being and their agency disappear. For technofascists, this is not a problem; what matters is that the technology and the tech leaders are followed, preferably worshiped.

3.4 Cult of efficiency, technological fetishism, and the rejection of empathy

As in historical fascism, there is a celebration of technological power and efficiency over humanistic values (Eco 1995). Consider also again Futurism’s obsession with speed and technological power: nothing or nobody should stand in the way of technological modernity. For example, Musk

believes in technology and sees empathy as a ‘fundamental weakness of Western civilization’ (Waoif 2025). He wants to save humanity, but particular humans, such as workers (for example in his companies), receivers of benefits, critical thinkers, “woke” people, and so on, might stand in the way of technological progress. Musk also took control of DOGE (the “Department of Government Efficiency”) to shrink government, since money for social services and public projects is seen as a waste of money. What matters is investment in AI and in the Big Tech companies (and hence the tech billionaires getting even richer). However, the ideology is all about humanity paired with a blind belief in technology: tech billionaires and many of the engineers and developers that work for them do not only promote this ideology but might even genuinely believe that technology—in particular AI—will save humanity.

3.5 Corporatist alliances

As Paxton argued, alliances with existing powers are crucial for the growth of fascism. This is also the case for technofascism. The close entanglement of Big Tech firms with state institutions mirrors the corporate-state alliances that were hallmarks of fascist regimes (Paxton 2004). In contrast to what free market ideology preaches, Big Tech is not really the result of free market at all and can only exist through support of the government(s) of this world. Big Tech is also increasingly intertwined with the military industrial complex. Google, for instance, abandoned its old motto “Don’t Be Evil” and, against employee unrest and activism, has contracts with militaries and intelligence agencies. (Fitri 2022) Big Tech thus risks to exemplify fascist corporatism and to support war and oppression. People are given the illusion that there is not class conflict, that the interests of ordinary citizens and the tech bosses (and right populist leaders) align. Instead, and to use Neumann’s term again: there is a fascist Behemoth in the making. And in spite of the close collaboration with the government, Big Tech propagates an anti-government, libertarian ideology. Musk wants to downsize government. However, he would not approve of less public money for AI and his companies (on the contrary, he seems to work hard to secure this), and the gigantic public spending on the military is not seen as problematic.

3.6 Using the weaknesses of modern individuals

Modern individuals tend to feel lonely and isolated; this is a classic problem in modernity and it is not different today. Community is not strong. Friendship relations are weak. People have difficulties to find a romantic partner. Using AI and other automation technologies, the tech industry claims to provide solutions. It does not only provide new myths that gather people around new goals and visions (the future of

AI is portrayed as our common future); it also offers concrete “remedies” for modern societies’ ills. You cannot find a good romantic partner? Here is your dream partner in the form of a chatbot or robot. You need friends? We can create them with AI. AI has specific features that assist this: it gives undivided attention, mirrors your emotional tone (or the tone you like), adapts to you, does not embarrass you, and is always supportive and always available. It easily creates the illusion of intimacy. It seems to meet your emotional needs. By tapping into fundamental human social and psychological mechanisms, it can give the user the illusion of offering friendship and love. And this is what modern lonely individuals crave. Recently, Meta boss Mark Zuckerberg said that he wants more people to connect with chatbots, since they do not have enough real-life friends. AI chatbots are thus supposed to ‘help fight the loneliness epidemic.’ (Tangermann 2025).

This is not only a striking example of technosolutionism—technology is presented as the solution to every problem—and of the ways in which technology simulates intimate relations via robots and chatbots but fails to deliver real friendship and love (Turkle 2012). It also fits a fascist pattern of pretending to offer new forms of sociality and community in modern times, remedies for feelings of loneliness, and meaninglessness. Erich Fromm, another member of the Frankfurt School, argued in *Escape from Freedom* (Fromm 1941) that fascism appeals to people looking for meaning and belonging. Individual freedom can cause fear, anxiety, and alienation. Authoritarianism is then a mechanism of escape from freedom. Fascism enables people to submit to the control of a superior force (a leader, a nationalist idea). But unlike historical fascism, current technofascism, using AI, penetrates deep(er) into the intimate sphere. Via the phone and its AI apps, Big Brother is now always

with you. Constantly taking your data, AI is a friend and partner that never leaves you. AI intimacy is pervasive. And so is the emotional spectacle of violence and war that pervades digital social media, potentially preparing the ground for the next technofascist project.

As this analysis already suggests, the current form of technofascism with AI is not *identical* to historical forms of fascism (Nazism in Germany, Fascism in Italy, Franco in Spain, and so on). However, it shows that in spite of these differences, the similarities are striking and are highly relevant for understanding technofascism today (for an overview see Table 1).

4 The business context: the fascist tendencies of Big Tech’s power and myths

Second, as already mentioned in my analysis so far, the use of these technologies goes hand in hand with the rising power of tech corporations. So-called Big Tech—Meta, Google, Amazon, Apple, X, and others—has amassed unprecedented levels of influence over communication, economic transactions, and information flows. Zuboff (2019) describes this phenomenon as “surveillance capitalism,” wherein human behavior is commodified for profit. However, there are wider political effects. Beyond economic exploitation and the maintenance of capitalism, this surveillance infrastructure can become an instrument of political control, enabling manipulation of public opinion, the suppression of dissent, and the construction of echo chambers that foster ideological conformity. Big Tech also gains more political power vis-à-vis the democratic institutions. More recently, Marietje Schaake speaks of a ‘tech coup’: tech companies have resisted regulation and have taken power

Table 1 Comparison between historical fascism and technofascism with AI

Historical fascism	Technofascism with AI
Openly violent (military and paramilitary) and openly authoritarian forms of control, using Nazi or Fascist symbols	Covert, invisible forms of algorithmic governance without necessarily replicating the historical symbols
Mass surveillance and control by the state via emotional manipulation and “us versus them” thinking, polarization	New technologies (AI, digital social media) that enable personalized propaganda and making of narratives, “trends”, etc.; polarization and division; surveillance and control by private companies
Supremacist myths (mainly) about the past; racism and eugenics	Supremacist myths + new tech myths about the future; no empathy for those that block technological advancement
Control of mass media, manipulation of end result	Control of mass media but now digital media and AI, covert manipulation of algorithms and people
Uncritical, thoughtless following of bureaucratic rules and evasion of moral responsibility	Uncritical, thoughtless following of AI’s recommendations and evasion of moral responsibility
Celebration of technological and military power (industrial technologies) and rejection of empathy and humanistic values	Celebration of technological and military power (digital technologies, AI) and rejection of empathy and humanistic values
Corporatism (government works with big industry)	Corporatism (government works with Big Tech)
Using loneliness, alienation, and nihilism in modern society; escape from freedom	Using loneliness, alienation, and nihilism in modern society; escape from freedom

from governments. This is not only about the direct influence of tech on law makers. Tech has bought politicians: democratic leaders are very much influenced by tech lobbying. However, it is also about tech leaders and their companies taking on roles normally reserved for governments: literally, as in Musk's case (DOGE), but also through the very capacities enabled by digital technologies. Private companies can hack into people's devices and can engage in cyber warfare. Facial recognition software enable mass surveillance. Technologies, presented as leading us to utopia, undermine democracy. There are no checks and balances. There is no democratic control. Democracy, Schaake argues, has to be saved from Silicon Valley (Schaake 2024).

By itself, the rise of corporate power is nothing new, and neither are analyses of the related danger of fascist forms of totalitarianism. Consider again the analysis of Marcuse (1964), for instance: modern capitalist societies have developed new forms of control that are less overtly violent than in classic fascism but just as totalitarian in their suppression of critical thought and opposition. Through consumerism, media, and technological rationality, dissent is neutralized and false needs are created, making people dependent on the system. We have the illusion of choice (consumer choice, informed consent) and feel free in this sense, but this does not abolish the totalitarian system and its forms of domination. People are pacified not by fear but by gratification and distraction. Corporations play a key role in upholding this system of domination and control. Today's Big Tech can be seen as playing a key role in creating new, false needs: we are given the feeling that we "need" the new gadgets and new software, and that the new distractions offered by AI and other digital technologies are indeed all we need. Why resist the system if you can game, watch Netflix, and distract yourself on social media platforms? Moreover, the system, via AI, knows better than you what you need next. The Amazon algorithms will give you recommendations. No need to think—not even to make your consumer choices or give consent. Technofascism does not need to force people or create fear. Dominated through pleasure and convenience provided by AI and its corporations, we are docile and following.

More recently, Sheldon Wolin (2008) introduced the concept of "inverted totalitarianism" to describe a system where corporate power is paramount, and democratic institutions exist primarily in form rather than substance. Under this model, citizens are transformed into passive consumers, and political engagement is systematically discouraged. The current digital landscape reflects this tendency, as AI-driven platforms subtly nudge users toward behaviors and beliefs that reinforce existing structures of power. The new development is that, in contrast to the mass propaganda of historical forms of fascism, all this happens rather covertly. AI is a power tool that is largely invisible. Via social media, more

power is accumulated by Big Tech, and ordinary people are gently pushed into a more totalitarian direction.

This power of Big Tech is supported by specific kinds of narratives. Silicon Valley has its own propaganda and myths. This includes technosolutionism and the myth of convenience (new technology will always make things easier for you)—a myth that can be easily debunked when we consider for example how email has made the work life much harder rather than easier. But there is more, and that "more" answers to our need to be guided by big narratives and find meaning in the modern world. The leaders of Big Tech and their advisors spread ideologies that say that the development of AI will accelerate dramatically: artificial general intelligence (AGI) and superintelligence are around the corner and will radically transform society and humanity. Influenced by thinkers such as Bostrom and MacAskill, Big Tech further promotes narratives about the long-term, cosmic future of intelligence. MacAskill (2022) has argued for longtermism: the long-term future takes priority, ethically speaking. This future is imagined as one in which humanity spreads to other planets: trillions of people living with advanced AI. But transhumanists such as Bostrom (2014), Kurzweil (2005), Yudkowsky, and Sanders go further and imagine a vast number of superintelligence beings as mergers of humans and AI. These narratives invite and support the self-regulated development of AI in the hands of Big Tech and puts tech kings such as Musk and Altman (and the thinkers who advise them) in the role of heroes and leaders in a longer term narrative of cosmic proportions: they will lead humanity on the way to the new Brave New Future, in which AI transforms everything. And this has consequences for ordinary mortals such as you and I. We might not matter so much anymore in the light of the New Brave World in the making. Today, we better follow the tech leaders. And in the future, we might well become obsolete. As Torres (2021) has warned, Silicon Valley is influenced by, and spreads, ideologies that are apocalyptic and predict doom: ends times are near and current humans might no longer be needed on the way to a transhumanist and longtermist future, where we will make way to superintelligent entities. Like the ideologies of historical forms of fascism, these tech ideologies spread a death cult and a leadership cult. While these quasi-religious world views may appear exotic and were first developed in the margins of academia, today they increasingly influence political leaders and certainly tech leaders such as Musk and Altman, and they are used to increase their (leadership) power.

5 The political context: fascism, right-wing populism, authoritarianism, and illiberalism in the West and the role of digital social media

Third, today these tech developments and the related corporate powers intersect with the fascist, right-wing populist, authoritarian, and other illiberal tendencies that pervade the political contexts within which they take place. The problems of modernity and the vulnerabilities of liberal-democratic politics (especially representational democracy) identified by the mentioned postwar thinkers have not magically disappeared, and multiple crises (economic crises, war, and environmental crises) have further worsened the situation. Both in the U.S. and in Europe, there is a growing anti-intellectualism, a call for authoritarian leadership, alienation and isolation, alliances between government and corporate powers, a frustrated (lower) middle class, widening social divisions and polarization, “us” versus “them” thinking, a focus on politics as being primarily about group struggles and group identity, and fear of differences and contempt for the weak. For example, in the U.S., Big Tech is financially and politically heavily supported by the government and has a significant political influence both nationally and internationally. As mentioned, Elon Musk has openly expressed contempt of empathy and has supported Trump’s far-right populism and authoritarian tendencies. Musk and other Big Tech leaders create alliances with political powers. Digital social media, owned by Big Tech, supports polarization. Musk has also expressed support for right-wing groups and movements on his platform X, which may be interpreted as supporting fascism. And all this takes place in a context in which politics—this time through AI and digital social media—has become an aesthetic spectacle and in which democratic institutions and processes are increasingly suppressed in the service of the rise of strongmen, who do not shun violence to reach their political and ideological aims.

Let me further unpack how this broader political context supports technofascist developments. The rise of increasingly illiberal democracies, characterized by the erosion of checks and balances and the concentration of executive power, parallels the digital consolidation of power. Leaders in the U.S., Hungary, India, and elsewhere have leveraged digital platforms to bypass traditional media and cultivate direct, emotional relationships with the masses, a technique historically associated with fascist propaganda (Arendt 1951). In his analysis of right-wing authoritarian capitalism in the age of Trump and his European counterparts, Christian Fuchs (2018) speaks of ‘digital demagogue’: crises and developments of neoliberalism have led to the emergence of authoritarianism that is communicated on social media platforms. Drawing on critical theory from the Frankfurt

School, Fuchs sees Trump’s politics in his first term as a form of authoritarianism that shows parallels with historical forms of authoritarianism such as Hitler’s Nazi fascism, since it includes features, such as authoritarian leadership, friend/enemy dichotomies, ethnocentrism and nationalism, and patriarchal militarism. Today, digital social media are used to propagate and amplify these elements of right-wing authoritarian ideology, for example, via tweets.

Moreover, the digital environment’s tendency toward spectacle and outrage, mediated and amplified by social media, aligns with the aestheticization of politics that Walter Benjamin (1936/1968) identified as a feature of fascism. Political engagement becomes a matter of emotional performance rather than deliberative reasoning. While today it is increasingly recognized in political theory that emotions can also have a productive role in (democratic) politics (e.g., Nussbaum 2013; Mouffe 2005), which revises the one-sided emphasis on rationality of the Frankfurt School, today emotional performance—mediated by digital technologies—is used for anti-democratic purposes and shape conditions for the rise of fascism. The masses are now not just found on the street; their organization and control take place in a more subtle way via AI-driven digital social media. We can distinguish between at least the following mechanisms of control:

First, people have the impression that they can express their interests and opinions on social media platforms, but at the same time their emotions, expressions of identity, and (other) performative gestures on these media usually change very little and ultimately maintain and build an authoritarian system. People can express their rage and victimhood, but there is no real structural social change. These digital media maintain what Dean (2005) calls ‘the fantasy of participation’: we believe that our contributions to the infostream matter, that they mean something, but they do not change anything. The focus is on the aesthetic and outward identity: on style, performance, charismatic leaders, and so on. Flooded with emotion-driven content that increases social media engagement and manipulated by AI, there is hardly room for real political engagement and change. Control of the masses through distraction is a classic fascist formula. Second, divisive content is amplified by AI algorithms and critical thought is suppressed through filter bubbles and affective feedback loops. In other words, we are stuck in the spectacle and we find ourselves pushed “us” versus “them” thinking. The others think differently (they are not “us”) and they are not just people with a different opinion; they become “them,” the others, perhaps even the enemies. This way of thinking is ideal for fascist mobilization. Third, the platforms promote a cult of personality, for example through follower counts. There are leaders (*Führer*) and followers. The idea is no longer that you need to form your opinion and argue with others in a respectful manner. Instead, you have

the option to “like” or not “like”, to follow or not follow. You react with your emotions, and it is all about leaders and those who are being led. The result of these aesthetic tendencies is the death of democracy and arguably the death of politics, at least the death of non-fascist, democratic politics.

6 What can be done and what can happen? Democratization, resistance, and system dysfunctions

So far, this paper has presented an analysis of “technofascism” that benefits from the insights of both classical and contemporary theories of fascism but emphasizes the key role of digital technologies, in particular AI, in enabling and constituting a new form of fascism that is emerging in the West—thus going beyond a merely instrumental role. The aim was not to propose an entirely new fascism theory that is supposed to replace all others. Rather, the paper shows that and how AI and related technologies interact with the features and processes identified by the existing theories; it thus provides an extra and much needed toolbox that needs to be further integrated with the other, already available conceptual tools (see Fig. 1).

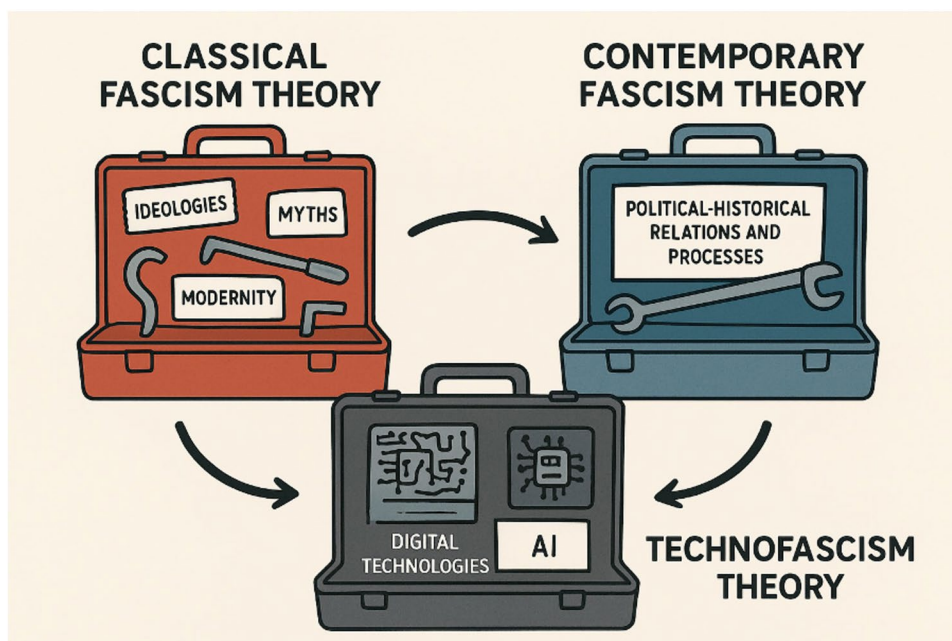
While I did some work in this direction, the analysis presented here is far from complete and should rather be understood as a tentative conceptual framework that can guide a “technofascism” research program, which is to further elaborate the precise relations between fascism and technology, both from a historical and a systematic perspective (which then can be applied to contemporary forms of fascism).

Nevertheless, we can already explore some practical political implications. Based on this analysis, what can be done to prevent further developments in the direction of the AI-driven technofascism described here and to strengthen democracy? If the analysis is right, then any democratization policy and resistance strategy should give an important role to dealing with *AI and digital technologies* and their interaction with other elements, such as ideologies, political processes, and capitalism, rather than focusing on one or more of these elements as such.

One obvious and perhaps the least controversial direction is strengthening democracy and making sure AI does not undermine it. In so far as AI enables technofascist developments in concrete ways that are already clear to us today, its development and use needs to be regulated and guided in ways that protect fundamental rights and liberties, uphold constitutional protections and balances, prevent too close alliances between big business and the state, promote social justice and reduce polarization and “us” versus “them” thinking, require democratic oversight and the assessment of potential political impacts, promote digital literacy, and limit the direct political use of AI for emotional manipulation, manipulation of voting, and political mobilization.

There is increasing attention to such issues in current AI ethics. For example, in response to the increased and unchecked power of Big Tech, Schaake (2024) rightly says that law and regulations should catch up to the new developments in tech and she helpfully proposes to make tech expertise more available to lawmakers to reduce the power of lobbyists. Indeed, with its pushes toward more regulation, AI ethics itself has become a site of resistance against fascist and other authoritarian tendencies. Confronted with

Fig. 1 Three toolboxes for understanding contemporary forms of fascism in the West



the growing power of Big Tech and the mentioned technofascist tendencies, some AI ethicists take on the role of defenders of democracy. Democratic design of AI proposals (and democratic movements more generally of course) can also be counted among the forces of resistance. For example, Coeckelbergh has argued for democratizing AI, next to further democratizing our political institutions (Coeckelbergh 2024). Currently, these institutions do not prevent the accumulation of power in the hands of a few, as we can observe for instance in the U.S. In response, it is necessary to strengthen constitutions in ways that make it less easy for the executive powers (e.g., the president or prime minister) to claim emergency powers, ensure the independence of judicial and civil administrations by requiring supermajorities or special procedures to intervene in these domains and have transparent, merit-based appointment processes, and provide more legal barriers against corruption. Intelligence agencies and oversight of such agencies should also be reformed to avoid all too easy capture by a specific political actor (e.g., a political party and leader). One should also consider public financing for parties, anti-concentration rules for media ownership, clear and effective digital platform rules that support instead of undermine democracy, social safety nets and support for communities, monitoring of regimes by international organizations, and regulations that limit the accumulation of capital and the related political power.

However, when developing these forms of resistance and democratization, it is important to be aware that most existing proposals for regulation and small changes to the way our democracies work are not sufficient to prevent and work against technofascism. From the analysis presented in the previous sections, it is clear that the technofascist tendencies described only work when and because AI is connected to (1) other technologies and infrastructures such as digital social media and their conditions that together create these effects, (2) a specific form of capitalism that has authoritarian tendencies if left unregulated and that may have fundamental flaws (and related ideologies such as neoliberalism), (3) a specific economic and (geo)political constellation in which Big Tech has been able to accumulate a lot of power and in which the existing democratic institutions are weakened, (4) a specific political context in which there are dangerous, anti-democratic alliances and political processes with clear tendencies toward fascism, right-wing populism, authoritarianism, anti-intellectualism, and illiberalism, and (5) a broader societal and cultural context of modernity in which people face specific vulnerabilities, such as loneliness, alienation, lack of meaning, and belonging, and are (still) highly susceptible to the “banal” evil of following what technologies, corporations, and bureaucracies tell them. These broader (and arguably deeper) political, economic, societal, and cultural problems go beyond narrow

definitions of fascism as a specific ideology, form of government, or political dynamic, and have received far less attention than, say, simple slogans about the power of Big Tech, but addressing them is nevertheless vital for ensuring that the new technologies of our age do not gently but surely push us in the hands of technofascism and technofascists. Changing these more structural *conditions* of AI and technofascism is much harder than the usual measures proposed in AI policies: a quick regulatory “fix” will not suffice. Fending off technofascism might require a combination of resisting specific powers (the authoritarian tendencies of Big Tech and the far-right political leaders with whom they ally), mobilizing and promoting new forms of solidarity and community, and building new democratic institutions and new, better forms of governance overall.

What does that mean in practice, and what role can technology play in this? Next to initiatives by governments and international organizations (consider for instance the OECD’s guidelines on citizen participation and deliberation, OECD 2022), non-governmental actions and community initiatives are important sites of resistance against technofascism. This may include working on alternative digital technologies. For example, some such initiatives propose different, more decentralized technological architectures and networks that reduce the risk of manipulation and mass surveillance. Academic work may inspire such initiatives. For example, proposing an ‘anti-fascist’ approach to AI, McQuillan (2022) argues against the ways AI may create distancing and thoughtlessness and relates AI to structural violence. He calls for a restructuring of AI that prioritizes the common good over an algorithmic optimization that reinforces the marginalization of vulnerable groups. More work is needed to elaborate what this means in terms of digital technologies and their infrastructures. One can also develop more democratic alternatives to platforms, such as X and Facebook, for instance through platform cooperatives. Companies, such as Bluesky and Signal, also claim that they offer services free from centralized control. In addition, education and creating awareness of the technofascist risks are very important. This includes not only teaching democracy and civil virtue to engineers (see, for example, Jung 2024), but also to the citizens at large. Education can be a major tool for anti-technofascist resistance and democracy building.

Note also that next to being hindered by these forms of resistance, technofascism may also be damaged by its own dysfunctions, vulnerabilities, internal contradictions, and crisis tendencies. For example, AI-driven technofascist systems depend on extracting and processing immense quantities of data, but if anything goes wrong with these dataflows or its infrastructures, or if the system becomes unmanageable because too complex, there can be blackouts, infrastructure collapse, or even system collapse. When dissent is

crushed, there could be a brain drain, hindering innovation and creativity (consider for instance how today some academics leave the U.S.). Leaders may no longer understand the technological systems on which they depend. Internal bureaucracies and agencies may sabotage or fight each other. The system may be vulnerable to cyberattacks. Environmental crises (local or global) may escalate and overwhelm centralized command. Relying on always friendly, sycophant AI, the leadership may lose touch with real conditions, misjudge risks, and make misinformed decisions. Forces of resistance may try to make use of these vulnerabilities and contribute to these systematic crises.

Resistance and democracy building takes time and is difficult given all the forces and interests in play—and especially given all the more structural conditions described here, some of which are hard to change in the short term. But doing so is all the more important: for the sake of AI's future, but especially for people's future, that is, for our common future.

7 Conclusion

Technofascism is not a replication of twentieth-century fascism but an adaptation: a new form of fascism shaped by new technologies (AI and other digital technologies), particular political dynamics (authoritarianism, corporatism, etc.) and ideologies, persistent economic structures (capitalism), and specific social and cultural conditions (modernity). The convergence of digital surveillance, algorithmic control, corporatist entanglements, and rising forms of political illiberalism in the West suggests that AI in the context of Big Tech and social media is not merely a commercial phenomenon but a profound political force, with deep roots in our political-economic conditions and narrative structures and ultimately in modernity. Recognizing these parallels and origins is crucial for developing strategies to resist new forms of domination that threaten democratic forms of life in the digital age.

The focus of this paper was on technofascist tendencies in Western countries, but since many developments described here also take place elsewhere, its conclusions are relevant globally. That being said, more work could be done comparing Western forms of technofascism with other types of technofascism or other techno-political entanglements in non-Western countries. Heeding the lessons from history—here: lessons offered by *both* classic and contemporary fascism theory—is also an important basis for thinking about how to develop and regulate technologies that support, rather than undermine democracy and for creating better, more resilient democratic institutions and processes—indeed for thinking about how to create the structural conditions for a different politics and a different society. We need to acknowledge and support existing pro-democratic and anti-fascist movements

and initiatives in AI ethics and beyond, but also contribute to thinking about how to bring about more radical structural changes to technology and society that can effectively block the road to (more) technofascism. If the analysis presented in this paper gets it right, we need to pay attention not only to the current political leaders and their regimes (Trump, for example) but also and especially to the *conditions* that support technofascism's rise, including AI and other digital technologies. And doing something about these conditions is not just about making some minor improvements to the system, let alone about AI governance as such; it is about a broader transformation of both technology and society.

Moreover, if not only regulation but also systemic transformation is required, we need to think harder about what kind of political system we *do* want. For this democratic and anti-fascist project, we may well need to rely on some political emotions and exercise some form of politico-aesthetic imagination, next to rational thinking and consensus-oriented debate. (After all, the Frankfurt School, for example, did not reject emotions; instead, they suggested that a genuine emancipation requires transforming both rationality and the emotional life.) Perhaps, even AI can help. Unless we want to give free reign to the technofascism that is on the horizon (if not already here), our imagination and emotions urgently need to be redirected to more democratic directions. Next to collective action and forms of resistance that target the technofascist structures and processes, we need new myths and other political narratives that open up the horizon of a more democratic future. We also need to pay attention to, and resist, the ways fascists are already gaining power, with AI and in other ways. And ultimately, we need to change the basic structures of our societies, removing the conditions for the current forms of domination and creating a different, better form of life. Critical thinking about the political roles of AI and other digital technologies is vital for this purpose.

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No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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