

The Role of Right-Wing Alternative Media in the Nordic Media Systems

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Аннотация. The growing popularity of right-wing political forces in recent years is accompanied by an increased public interest in alt-right media. In the Nordic media systems, the alt-right has been shaped by right-wing political populism and aims to criticize migration policies. Due to the fact that alternative media have historically been studied by scholars using leftist theories, the alt-right has been labeled as deviant and marginalized community. Using critical discourse analysis, the paper analyzes the self-presentation of alt-right media in Norway, Sweden and Denmark and then juxtaposes these projects with mainstream media through a political economy framework. The result shows that the alt-right group is diverse, while modern Nordic media systems are increasingly composed of polarized and radicalized media. This trend indicates that alt-right projects may soon become a threat to the democratic regimes of welfare states.

Ключевые слова: right-wing alternative media, Nordic media systems, critical discourse analysis, political economy, anti-system media, polarization, radicalization.

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Роль правых альтернативных медиа в скандинавских медиасистемах

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Abstract. Растущая популярность правых политических сил в последние годы сопровождается повышенным интересом общественности к альт-правым медиа. В скандинавских медиасистемах альт-правые сформировались под влиянием правого политического популизма и направлены на критику миграционной политики. В связи с тем, что альтернативные медиа исторически изучались учеными с помощью левых теорий, альт-правые были причислены к девиантным и маргинальным сообществам. С использованием критического дискурс-анализа в статье анализируется самопрезентация альт-правых медиа в Норвегии, Швеции и Дании, а затем эти проекты сопоставляются с мейнстримными медиа с помощью политэкономического подхода. Результат исследования показывает, что группа альт-правых разнообразна, в то время как современные скандинавские медиасистемы все больше состоят из поляризованных и радикализованных медиа. Эта тенденция указывает на то, что альт-правые проекты могут вскоре стать угрозой для демократических режимов государств всеобщего благосостояния.

Keywords: правые альтернативные медиа, скандинавские медиасистемы, критический дискурс-анализ, политическая экономия, антисистемные медиа, поляризация.

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Introduction

On June 22, 2011, Norwegian neo-Nazi Anders Breivik carried out two major terrorist attacks — in Oslo and on the island of Utøya, killing 77 people. Breivik fought against the multiculturalism imposed by the state authorities and the destruction of the identity of the Norwegian nation. As it turned out, the terrorist had long been an active member of the Document forum, a far-right Norwegian alternative media.

The last decade has been marked by the growing popularity of right-wing political forces. In 2014, the anti-Islamist PEGIDA movement was born in Dresden, Germany; the right-wing populist *Sweden Democrats* came in 2nd place in the 2022 parliamentary elections; the nationalist *Brothers of Italy* won the most recent Italian elections and its leader Giorgia Meloni became the country's Prime Minister. These political changes have finally brought previously overlooked right-wing alternative media to the scholarly attention.

The first studies of alternative media emerged in the 20th century and were associated with leftist theories. Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1972) put forward the idea of counter-publicity against the bourgeois public sphere. Nancy Fraser (1990) introduces the notion of subaltern counterpublics. In addition, alternative media are often associated not only with Habermas's public sphere (Habermas, 1989) but also with the cultural hegemony of the Italian neo-Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1992). In the 1990s, another approach to alternative media and their differences from mainstream media was developed by American scholar Noam Chomsky (1997).

A significant contribution to the study was made by British scholar Chris Atton (2002), who attempted to conceptualize alternative media. A wide range of scholars have followed Atton in developing ideas about the democratic potential of alternative media (Atkinson, 2008; Bailey et al., 2008; Fuchs, 2010; Lievrouw, 2011). However, in the second decade of the 21st century, due to the growing popularity of right-wing political forces and movements, scholars began to consider right-wing alternative media and their threatening function for democratic communities (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019; Heft et al., 2020; Padovani, 2016). The misinforming properties of alternative media and their influence as news providers have also been increasingly studied (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Leung & Lee, 2014).

The academic community is still examining the role of right-wing alternative media in different media systems. Over time, it has become clear that studying alternative media as a phenomenon involves taking into account many aspects: media audiences, economic structures, relations with the authorities and mainstream media. Moreover, modern alternative media differ from each other depending on the media system in which they are located (Mancini, 2013). As Kristoffer Holt points out, "alternative media in totalitarian or authoritarian states are probably very different compared to alternative media in democratic liberal states" (Holt, 2019: 78). In this paper I will mainly study the Nordic welfare states and thus focus on the following research questions: 1) *How right-wing alternative media in Norway, Sweden*

and Denmark are self-represented? 2) Where do they stand in the Nordic media systems in relation to mainstream media?

The Nordic Media Systems

According to the annual World Press Freedom Index Report (Reporters without Borders, 2024) the freest journalism exists in Scandinavia: 1st place — Norway; 2nd place — Denmark; 3rd place — Sweden. Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004) categorize Scandinavian media as belonging to the Nordic group, or the Democratic Corporate Model. This group is characterized by social unity and commitment to the idea of the “common good”. In addition, freedom and openness of information is an essential feature, and the state should facilitate this. There is a high level of press development and mass circulation, a high level of professionalization of journalists, a high level of pluralism of opinion in the press, and a low pressure from the state. Despite the normative nature of Hallin and Mancini’s work, today their text is criticized by a number of scholars (Coudry, 2007; Hardy, 2012). It remains important that scholars limit their analysis to traditional media while neglecting new media. However, this gap has been filled by Trine Syvertsen, Gunn Enli, Ole Mjøs, and Hallvard Moe (2014), who argue that Scandinavian region can be clustered not only on the basis of economic and social aspects, but also in the field of media. They argue for a model of a media welfare state. This model rests on four pillars: 1) the organization of communication services as a public good, with extensive cross-subsidization and commitments to universality; 2) the institutionalization of media freedom from editorial and other interference; 3) media commitments to disseminate cultural policies that maintain diversity and quality; and 4) consensus decisions between the state, the media communications industry and the public in policy-making.

For a long time, the media in the Nordic countries were egalitarian and the region’s population was mostly culturally homogeneous. However, this has changed in recent decades, when the media became fragmented due to the new Internet economy. Moreover, the loyal migration policies of the Nordic countries led to ethnic and cultural diversity. The media were open to all points of view and the authorities did not interfere by subsidizing them. Critics of migration policy and multiculturalism, ranging from moderate to extremist positions, took advantage of this permissiveness, which in turn led to political and religious scandals, such as the scandal over the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005. According to Des Freedman (2008), states are usually criticized for overreacting to extremism and terrorism. In the case of the Nordic countries, the opposite effect has worked, namely the lack of attention to the problem. Thus, the high degree of freedom in the Scandinavian media system has led to media polarization. The alt-right has emerged and spread in media systems, changing accepted norms and challenging the idealistic notion of freedom of speech.

The close relationship between alt-right media and political populism in the Scandinavian context must also be considered. The Nordic countries

have a form of new populism characterized by a protest against bureaucracy and elite corruption (Herkman & Jungar, 2021). This form of populism is accompanied by anti-migration policies, criticism of the EU as a project aimed at destroying national sovereignty, and, in extreme cases, radical right-wing ideas bordering on xenophobia and racism. Since the second half of the 20th century, populist political parties have emerged in the Nordic region: the Danish Progress Party [FrP], the Danish People's Party [DF], the Norwegian Progress Party [FrP], the Swedish New Democracy Party [NyD], the Sweden Democrats [SD], the Finns Party [PS]. It is worth noting that Scandinavian populist parties try to stick together by forming institutional coalitions. This helps them win over the electorate and promote common ideas at the interstate level. For example, SD and DF as well as PS are members of the Nordic Freedom group of the Nordic Council.

The agenda of right-wing populist parties in most cases contradicts the values of mainstream media. Moreover, right-wing populists often base their political program on accusing mainstream media of excluding critical opinion and silencing migration issues. In this regard, populist political forces benefit from cooperation with alt-right media: the former receive channels for communication with the electorate, while the latter receive financial and ideological support. Future research should more clearly trace the connection between populist politicians and the alt-right media in the Nordic region, but already now several scholars argue that such a connection exists: "If massively negative media coverage in the mainstream channels has not hampered the increasing support for SD, it may be because there are other voices available which play an important and perhaps underestimated role in public discourse" (Holt, 2019: 30–31).

In addition, mainstream media stigmatise alternative colleagues as extremists seeking to undermine the foundations of democracy, although in fact the alt-right may not promote radical ideas but publish critical and politically correct materials. To avoid falling into the trap of generalization, it is necessary to divide right-wing alternative media into subgroups. Holt (2018) identifies four types of alternative media: 1) anti-system alternative media that position themselves as direct opponents of mainstream media and yet influence the transformation of the media system; 2) irrelevant alternative media that are ignored by mainstream media and cannot influence changes in the media system; 3) polarizing alternative media that do not seek to change the entire system but call for point changes in it; 4) not anti-system media that have little significance in the general context. This typology of right-wing alternative media shows their complexity and heterogeneity. The empirical part of this paper focuses primarily on anti-system and polarizing alternative media, as they have the greatest impact on the transformation of media systems and compete with mainstream media for audience attention. In addition, the typology breaks down the perception of alt-right media as exclusively radical and marginal projects on the periphery.

Methods and Empirical Base

According to the Digital News Report's weekly reach index (Newman et al., 2019, 2022, 2024), I select the following alternative media from each country: the Norwegian Document.no, and Human Rights Service, the Swedish *Nyheter Idag* and *Samhällsnytt* and the Danish *Den Korte Avis* and 24NYT. The study was conducted between 2022 and 2023 and supplemented with the latest data for 2024.

This paper uses mixed research methods: a combination of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and political economy. CDA is the auxiliary qualitative method and the political economy framework is the main method. Since "alternativeness" is a discursive category, I examine how Scandinavian right-wing alternative media present themselves (Holt et al., 2019). I subject the official websites (the "About Us" section) of the selected media to CDA (Fairclough, 1995). In textually-oriented discourse analysis (TODA), Norman Fairclough proposes a three-stage model: 1) Text Analysis; 2) Discursive Practice Analysis; 3) Social Practice Analysis. This model makes it possible to assess and characterize the features of alt-right media self-presentation by identifying the main discourses.

In addition, I apply a self-developed political economy framework to compare alternative and mainstream media. I believe that the development of such a framework should be in the domain of political economy, as the key aspects of alternative media are fundamentally different models of management and financing, which allows them to be alternative.

Christian Fuchs stresses that "neglecting the profit imperative makes alternative media politically independent and potentially more critical, but at the same time more prone to censorship exerted by market forces and the lack of resources that result in precarity" (2014: 220). The sacrifice of economic well-being in favor of political independence becomes an essential aspect. For alternative media, which are controlled by owners and cannot be considered impartial and unbiased, political independence does not exist. However, it is important to clarify who owns such projects and the extent of their influence on the production process.

The alternative media presented in my paper are mostly not purposefully commercial (*Den Korte Avis* is an exception). As a rule, created by volunteers or journalists who have not found themselves in mainstream media, such projects pursue ideological goals and have political content. For example, the Swedish media *Nyheter Idag*, disguised as populist and presenting itself as "a media built on a libertarian basis" allows itself to use racist and other radical rhetoric. Another example is the Norwegian far-right media *Document*, which uses its content to incite hatred of migrants and Islam. However, alternative media still need to be integrated into the capitalist system. This problem is solved with the help of: 1) state subsidies or grants; 2) advertising; 3) donations and/or paid subscriptions. Therefore, I include in the theoretical framework a criterion about the sources of funding, extending the Herman — Chomsky's filter on advertising (1988).

Besides, Fuchs states that alternative media are characterized by critical form and content, are a type of citizen journalism, have no hierarchical organization, and are distinguished by alternative ways of distributing content (2014: 230). Indeed, the point about the distribution of content is an important one, which is also related to the limited production resources of Scandinavian alternative media. It is even more interesting to find out how alternative and mainstream projects distribute their material.

The growing popularity of the alt-right media cannot be ignored. This is why it is important to talk about the level of audience trust in alternative projects compared to mainstream media. To find out how much people trust Scandinavian alt-right projects, I turn again to the Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2022; 2024).

Finally, based on the “media depoliticisation” concept (McChesney, 2015), I would like to add a last criterion to the analysis: the level of audience activity. With disproportionate audience reach and commercial goals, it is meaningless to compare mainstream media with alternative media in terms of audience size. However, it is possible to see where audiences are not only consumers of content but also its voluntary producers, where audiences are willing to suggest and act.

All in all, I include the following criteria into political economy analysis: 1) ownership; 2) financial sources; 3) audience trust level; 4) audience activity level; 5) forms of content distribution. This framework allows me to determine the role of right-wing alternative media in each country and conclude what threats they may pose to democratic systems of welfare states.

Features of Self-Presentation of the Right-Wing Alternative Media

This subsection presents the results of the critical discourse analysis required to identify the specific features of right-wing alternative media self-presentation in each of the three countries. As Tab. 1 shows, self-presentation differs from country to country and from media to media. Some use counter-hegemonic discourse and present themselves as ideological enemies of the authorities and the mainstream media. Others utilize populist rhetoric.

Table 1. The self-presentation of the Nordic right-wing alternative media after Norman Fairclough’s CDA

	The peculiarity of self-representation
Document	Counter-hegemonic, alternative political discourse (nationalism, anti-migration, Islamophobia), environmental discourse, philosophical and historical discourses as parts of conservative discourse.
HRS	Democratic and scientific discourses as parts of right-wing populism.
Nyheter Idag	Political, legal and business discourses working on relativity and creating an image of “independence”.
Samsnytt	Opposition to the mainstream as part of right-wing populism.

	The peculiarity of self-representation
Den Korte Avis	Marketing discourse as a way to sell content.
24NYT	Hatred based on ideology (conservative, anti-migration, Islamophobic, nationalistic discourses) as a way to stand out.

Norway

Norway is one of the most welfare country in the world. Nevertheless, Norwegian society today faces a number of both internal and external challenges. These challenges create the context in which the discourses used in alternative media are constructed. For example, *Document* mentions environmental discourse. According to the Environmental Performance Index (Wolf et al., 2022), Norway is ranked 20th, the worst among the Nordic countries. Norway’s environmental performance is still very high compared to other European and non-European regions, but oil and natural gas extraction leaves its footprints. Norway is following renewable energy, green technology and sustainable use of resources. The topic of ecology is topical among the population and often appears in the media. *Document* does not miss an opportunity to parasitize on this issue and often blames the Norwegian authorities for their insufficient and indecisive actions in this regard. The next important discourse is related to the question of migration. The high level of migration to Norway is linked to low unemployment and labor demand (Pettersen & Østby, 2013). However, liberal migration policy raises questions among the population and was also the cause of the 2011 attacks. Debates about stricter requirements for migrants are ongoing at the institutional level, but so far have come to nothing. In addition, the issue of anti-migration policy was one of the main ideas of the political campaign of the Norwegian Progress Party [FrP], which was in the Norwegian parliament for a long time, but in recent years was forced to leave it and became an opposition force. There is no evidence that any of the FrP members cooperated with *Document* or *HRS*, but, in any case, the existing anti-migration discourse is supported simultaneously by politicians and the media. While *HRS* was long been subsidized by the coalition government and Oslo municipality, and was originally set up as a foundation, *Document* was free from economic dependence on the authorities and could afford more radical rhetoric. The consequence has been a nationalist and Islamophobic discourse, which, however, in recent years must also be articulated within Norwegian law, as the editor, Hans Rustad, has become a member of the Association of Norwegian Editors. “This means that Document.no must abide by the ethical guidelines that the professional news media institutions are held accountable to by self-regulation” (Nygaard, 2019: 1154). The historical and philosophical discourses of *Document* bear an ideological character. *Document* can be categorised as an anti-system right-wing alternative media. In contrast, the scientific discourse of *HRS* affects the reputation of the project, but also shades its ideological component. Media has relational potential, but not ideological, and belongs to the polarizing alternative media (Holt, 2018).

Sweden

The example of Sweden shows that the media struggle to gain the trust of the audience. Sweden ranks last among the Nordic countries in terms of audience trust (Newman et al., 2024). This has been influenced by liberal migration policies as well as a decrease in the public's trust in the government during COVID-19 (Nielsen & Lindvall, 2021). Overall, the level of trust in government in Scandinavia is high compared to other countries, but the small change in sentiment contributed to a major public debate. The decline in trust in government has in turn led to a slight decline in trust in the mainstream media (Ricknell, 2024). For this reason, alternative media stress in the description that they are not affiliated with any ruling parties. *Nyheter Idag* uses political and business discourse to emphasize that they are distanced from parties and any institutional affiliations. The legal discourse, on the other hand, of the same, shows that the media are not marginalized and work within the framework of journalistic ethics and Swedish law. In turn, *Samsnytt* also stresses the relational aspect with phrases such as “we specialise in the areas where the established media shows omissions”. Both media have long concealed their ties to the SD party despite investigations by their opponents. However, in 2020, Kent Ekeröth claimed that SD and *Samsnytt* were cooperating, but this could be interpreted as a populist move as SD started to gain huge public support around that time. In both cases, there is no description of the media's ideology on their websites. Thus, *Nyheter Idag* and *Samsnytt* can be categorized as polarizing alternative media and those that use right-wing populist rhetoric.

Denmark

The case of Denmark is unique. The Danish public sphere is tolerant of right-wing radical views and values an open debate culture. The high degree of freedom of speech has been criticized by right-wing political actors. Right-wing populist parties, such as the Danish People's Party [DF], have achieved institutional success: the government has adopted a stricter policy on migration and integration. In addition, the immigration discourse entered the media space in the form of a news agenda. Consequently, the alt-right had to come up with new strategies to construct a discourse different from mainstream media. My example shows that *Den Korte Avis* chooses the path of marketing, while *24NYT* uses the strategy of eccentricity. Looking at how political discourse is reproduced in other alternative media, it appears that they:

Clearly seek to position themselves as journalistic “outsiders” — despite or maybe even because of the fact that their editors have considerable experience in legacy journalism. By shunning membership of key journalistic organizations and public subsidies, relying primarily on donations from a small but dedicated group of followers instead, they clearly refrain from a strategy of normalization (Mayerhöffer, 2021: 131).

Den Korte Avis leaves ideology aside and focuses on marketing strategies, realizing that this is the only chance to become a successful project in the Danish media system. In contrast, *24NYT* focuses exclusively on political

discourse, promoting an Islamophobic, nationalist, and conservative agenda and using hate speech. It is difficult to say which strategy is more effective. As Ihlebæk and Nygaard (2021) point out, right-wing alternative media in Denmark are less popular than their Swedish and Norwegian counterparts. One last thing to note in this regard is that *Den Korte Avis* belongs to the polarizing alt-right, and *24NYT* to the anti-system media. However, the radical language of *24NYT* could be the reason for moving this media into the “deviant” sector of the irrelevant alt-right.

Comparing Mainstream and Alternative Media: Similarities and Differences

The empirical material for comparative analysis is the right-wing alternative media from the previous chapter: *Document*, *Human Rights Service* (Norway); *Nyheter Idag*, *Samsnytt* (Sweden); *Den Korte Avis*, *24NYT* (Denmark), as well as the most popular mainstream media, according to the Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2024): *VG Nett*, *NRK Nyheter* (Norway); *Aftonbladet*, *SVT Nyheter* (Sweden); *DR Nyheder*, *TV 2 Nyheder* (Denmark).

Norway

Norwegian alternative media are privately owned. In the case of *Document*, it is the private stock company Document.no AS and in the case of *HRS* it is the non-profit foundation Human Rights Service. In contrast, *NRK Nyheter* is owned by the Norwegian government and *VG Nett* is owned by the Schibsted media group. The difference in ownership affects the economic models of the projects as well as the distribution of content. At the same time, private ownership allows alternative media to be ideologically independent from the state. *NRK Nyheter* is the largest media outlet in the Norwegian market, financed by the state through mandatory state taxation. *NRK* is essentially a public broadcaster operating in TV, radio and online formats. As the largest media outlet in the Norwegian market and distributed in various media formats, *NRK* is trusted by 80% of the audience. *VG Nett* is part of the international media holding Schibsted Media Group, which owns the Norwegian tabloids *Aftenposten*, *Stavanger Aftenblad* as well as the Swedish media *Aftonbladet* and *Svenska Dagbladet*. This imposes some corporate obligations on *VG Nett*, but helps to distribute content in print, online and on TV. Belonging to the media holding helps *VG Nett* to find advertising sponsors. *VG Nett* also uses a system of paid subscriptions. *VG Nett*'s audience trust rate is 67%. In contrast, *Document* and *HRS* have limited distribution and economic opportunities. Both alternative media operate only on the website and social media and economically exist on an unstable basis: user donations, merchandise sales, advertisement, paid subscriptions (*Document*), user donations (*HRS*). Until recently, *HRS* received government subsidies, but due to a controversial agenda, this financial source has been terminated. Audience trust in *Document* is 35% and in *HRS* less than 27%, which is significantly lower than their mainstream competitors. However, the advantage of alternative media is that their audiences are more active and engaged. *Document* and *HRS* exist largely because of their subscribers,

and their editors are not only professionals. In the case of *Document*, the audience has an opportunity to discuss news on forums and in social media. Sometimes online discussions can lead to street actions, as was the case with Breivik. It can be assumed that anti-system alternative media pose a threat to the democratic foundations of society. This is why the level of activity of the *Document* audience is high. At the same time, the level of audience activity in the mainstream media is lower due to the high professionalization of journalists and the distance of traditional media, such as TV or radio, from the consumer. Some mainstream media have comment sections, while others do not (e.g., *NRK Nyheter*). More often, to participate in the discussion and leave a comment, you must be an authorised user who has gone through several stages of verification and the post-moderation process. There is no direct correlation between audience size and activity in mainstream media.

Table 2. Comparison of Norwegian mainstream and alternative media

	VG Nett	NRK Nyheter	Document	HRS
Ownership	Schibsted Media Group	Government of Norway	Document.no AS (Private)	Non-profit foundation HRS
Financial sources	Advertisement, paid subscriptions	State funding through individual tax everybody in Norway have to pay	Advertisement and user donations, paid subscriptions, merchandise sales	User donations
Audience trust level	67	80	35	< 27
Audience activity level, %	Low	Low	High	Medium
Content distribution	Daily newspaper (tabloid), online media, TV	Radio, TV, online media	Website, social media	Website, social media

Sweden

The Swedish mainstream media *Aftonbladet* and *SVT Nyheter*, just as in the Norwegian case, are owned by the media conglomerate and the government respectively. *SVT* is owned by Foundation Management for SR, SVT and UR, consisting of politicians from the various parties represented in parliament. This means that *SVT* is a public broadcaster, maintained with taxpayers' money and provides news and entertainment content through

both traditional media (TV) and new media (website, social media). At the same time, the level of audience trust is consistently high: 77%. In turn, *Aftonbladet* is 91% owned by Schibsted Media Group and another 9% by The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO). Interestingly, LO has the right to appoint the media’s political editor-in-chief. Currently, *Aftonbladet* adheres to the ideology of social democracy and supports the Swedish Social Democratic Party [S/SAP], the most popular party in the country. Unlike *SVT Nyheter*, *Aftonbladet* is published as a daily newspaper (tabloid) and online (website, social media). The trust level of the audience is 52%, which is quite low for a Scandinavian mainstream media. In comparison, such alternative media as *Nyheter Idag* and *Samsnytt* have an audience trust level of 40% and 36% respectively. As mentioned earlier, these high results are because the alternative media adhere to right-wing populist rhetoric and are not directly related to the ruling parties (as in the case of *Aftonbladet*). Both alternative media remain privately owned and exist through advertisements, paid subscriptions and user donations. Although *Aftonbladet’s* economic sources are similar, it is tied to Schibsted’s corporate rules. *Nyheter Idag* and *Samsnytt* are only distributed online as they do not have the economic and operational capacity for broadcast or print formats. Finally, alternative media have a more active audience and incur less reputational damage by encouraging open discussions on social media about the most sensitive topics.

Table 3. Comparison of Swedish mainstream and alternative media

	Aftonbladet	SVT Nyheter	Nyheter Idag	Samsnytt
Ownership	Schibsted Media Group (91%), LO (9%)	Government of Sweden	Publicism NITEK AB (Private)	Föreningen för sverigevänliga intressen (Private)
Financial sources	Advertisement, paid subscriptions	State funding through individual tax on personal income	Advertisement and paid subscriptions	Advertisement, user donations, paid subscriptions
Audience trust level, %	52	77	40	36
Audience activity level	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Content distribution	Daily newspaper (tabloid), website, social media	TV, online news, social media	Website, social media	Website, social media

Denmark

The difference between Danish alternative media and their Swedish and Norwegian counterparts is that their role in the media system is insignificant. In Denmark, the mainstream media *DR Nyheder* and *TV 2 Nyheder*, which are owned and financed mostly by the state, are able to distribute content in all formats: TV, radio, and online. The level of audience trust in such projects is much higher than in alternative media. This is due to the tolerance of the Danish public sphere to different ideological positions, even the most radical ones, as well as the public's trust in the government and national institutions (Nielsen & Lindvall, 2021). However, audience activity is still low for mainstream media. In turn, *Den Korte Avis* and *24NYT* are privately owned. Their economic sources are advertising, paid subscriptions, sponsored content and user donations. When *Den Korte Avis* underwent an advertising boycott in 2016, it was a tragedy for the media, which was on the verge of closure. The media distribute content only on the website and in social media. The level of audience activity can be considered average, as the media exist at the expense of subscribers. In addition, the level of censorship and comment moderation in social media is low, which allows the audience of alternative media to openly express their opinions, argue and discuss.

Comparing the Nordic countries, it can be seen that on a political-economic level the media systems have similar tendencies. Nevertheless, each media system has its own specifics. In Sweden, there is competition for audience trust between mainstream and alternative media. In Norway, *Document* is an ideological threat to the system because of its highly engaged audience. In Denmark, alternative projects cannot compete with mainstream media due to the significant hegemony of the latter.

Table 4. Comparison of Danish mainstream and alternative media

	DR Nyheder	TV 2 Nyheder	Den Korte Avis	24NYT
Ownership	Public-service broadcaster	Danish Ministry of Culture	Private	Private
Financial sources	State funding	State funding, paid subscriptions	Advertisement, paid subscriptions, sponsored content	Advertisement, user donations, sponsored content
Audience trust level, %	84	81	< 35	< 35
Audience activity level	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Content distribution	TV, radio, online media	TV, online media	Website, social media	Website, social media

Conclusion

The role of right-wing alternative media in contemporary Scandinavian media systems is larger than one might assume. The traditional understanding of alternative media in academia is directly linked to left-wing theories such as Jürgen Habermas's public sphere and Antonio Gramsci's cultural hegemony. The first studies focused on the democratic function and emancipatory potential of alternative media. However, a series of social, cultural and political events in the 21st century led to a turn in the scholarly field when right-wing alternative media came under scrutiny. At first, they were hastily labeled as "deviant" and "marginal" projects, but later it became clear that right-wing alternative media is a heterogeneous group with positions ranging from radical and extremist to moderate, conservative and populist.

The growth of right-wing alternative media in the Nordic countries can be explained by several factors: the popularity of right-wing political parties, the relevance of the anti-migration agenda and the high level of media freedom from state control and interference. However, despite the similarity of the alt-right projects, each of them has its own specificity due to the configuration of the public sphere and media system.

The Danish public sphere is inherently tolerant of radical positions. Consequently, the potential for creating a counter-public, alternative sphere is not so high. The Danish alt-right must offer exceptional solutions in order to become visible in the media system. *Den Korte Avis* follows a commercial path, while *24NYT* uses eccentric and aggressive political rhetoric. In Sweden, the right-wing alternative media perform more impressively. The Swedish alt-right choose the path of right-wing populist rhetoric, which helps them to integrate into the media system and gain more public support. The fact that public support for left-wing parties and mainstream media has decreased against the background of the migration crisis and COVID-19 also played an important role. In recent years, the right-wing populist SD party has been drawing attention to the migration issue and unofficially in the case of *Nyheter Idag* and officially in the case of *Samsnytt* has been helping alternative media. The alt-right media do not cooperate with other parties, whose public trust is declining. Norway is contextually in the middle, in the sense that the issue of migration is relevant, but not as much as in Sweden, and the public sphere is stricter than in Denmark. The Norwegian right-wing alternative media show different tendencies against this background. In the case of *HRS*, it is a populist and moderate position, balancing on the edge of legitimacy (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019). In the case of *Document*, it is a radicalization of the agenda, providing ideological resistance to the established media.

In Denmark alt-right projects are journalistic "outsiders" because they do not enjoy much trust and demand from the audience. Private ownership and funding from either advertisers or the audience further complicate the position of Danish alt-right media in the media system, forcing them to survive and be minor actors. Although the form of ownership and economic sources are almost identical to the Danish media, the Swedish alt-right

media are in a better position. They can compete with mainstream media due to their high level of audience trust. The Swedish projects belong to the polarizing alternative media, which means that they are able to bring point changes to the media system by adjusting some established journalistic practices. Although Norwegian alt-right media do not differ from the projects of neighbouring countries in terms of ownership, sources of funding or distribution, the key factor is the high audience activity level. A prime example is *Document*, which can not only compete with mainstream media, but also pose a destructive ideological threat to the media system.

In conclusion, not all alternative media can pose a threat to the democratic foundations of society, but only anti-system media. However, in order to become really threatening, the media must have a high level of trust and activity of the audience. A common trend in the Nordic media systems is the polarization and radicalization of the media. I see this radicalization as a negative consequence that may lead to the growth of anti-system alternative media, which will gain support both from the audience and from right-wing political forces. Future research should examine this polarization and radicalization of alternative media in more detail. In addition, this paper has shown that the boundaries between mainstream and alternative are increasingly blurred. This means that the categories of alternative and mainstream media should not be opposed, but rather considered in a dialectical way. One of the most important tasks for future research is to determine whether alternative media are already part of the mainstream. Finally, my research sheds light on Scandinavian media systems, but it is significant to study the role of right-wing alternative media in other regions. The new political economy framework I have applied, comparing mainstream and alternative media, can contribute to this. The challenge of right-wing alternative media is universal, but it manifests itself differently in each particular media system.

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