

ARTICLE

129

Global Influence of the Contemporary American Far Right

A Case Study of Serbia

ANDREJ ŠEVO

Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade

Abstract: *The process of globalization in recent years has ignited an unprecedented level of far-right transatlantic cooperation. Individuals and members of organizations from the United States traveled to Europe intending to establish permanent relations with their ideological cousins, while new ways of online communication enabled extreme right-wing organizations to share ideas and methods of political activism and learn from each other. This phenomenon is observable in Serbia even though bilateral relations with the United States are troubled by the US-led NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999. For this reason, anti-American feelings developed among many Serbs, with the far right taking the most uncompromising attitude. Nevertheless, the American far right has inspired and influenced right-wing and even mainstream political organizations in Serbia. The first part of this article examines how extreme right-wing groups in Serbia became exposed to American far-right ideas over the Internet. It also shows how more recent connections have been established between the Serbian far right and alt-right figures from the United States. The second part will examine the effect of the populist right-wing movement created by Donald Trump on Serbian mainstream politics. Trump's non-interventionism in his first term awakened optimism that better relations between Serbia and the United States are possible while influencing Serbian narratives, ideology, and political practice.*

Keywords: Serbia, Stormfront, US far right, deep state, Donald Trump

The fall of communism in the late 1980s opened the countries of eastern and central Europe to the West. Societies that had spent the last four decades under the repressive rule of communist parties and nomenklatura soon found themselves exposed to political, economic, and cultural exchange with former ideological archnemeses. The far right was among those in the West interested in this newly opened and somewhat exotic region. In the Cold War era, some left-wing Western intellectuals felt alienated from their own communities and traveled to communist countries abroad in search of a political formula for a more equitable state and society.¹ What was once a rather

1 Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society* (London: Routledge, 2017), 129.

left-wing practice caused by dissatisfaction with internal political and social structures became a rather right-wing phenomenon in the twenty-first century.

Some American conservatives, deeply unhappy with the current political, social, and cultural condition of the United States, developed a profound interest in the illiberal, socially conservative, ethnically nationalist, and anti-immigration political regimes of eastern and central Europe. People like Pat Buchanan and Tucker Carlson had previously praised the likes of Vladimir Putin and Viktor Orbán while simultaneously criticizing their own governments. In 2013, Buchanan asked whether Putin is an American-style paleoconservative, whose defense of traditional values speaks for most of mankind.² More recently, in February 2024, Tucker Carlson interviewed Putin in the Kremlin, spent a day shopping in Moscow, and famously concluded that the Russian capital is “nicer than any city in the United States.”³ According to Buchanan and Carlson, America should redefine its liberal values, with strongman-run countries such as Russia and Hungary serving as bright examples of what societies unspoiled by globalization and liberalism look like.⁴

On the other side of the Atlantic, far-right figures in eastern and central Europe find appeal in the current conservative movement in the United States and its right-wing populism personified in Donald Trump. The outcome of the 2016 presidential election in the United States encouraged prominent far-right figures in Europe to adopt Trump’s slogans and style, the narrative of popular struggle against corrupted elites, and the belief that they can win elections against all odds.⁵ In the eyes of the European far right, Trump’s victory in 2016 proved that the political trajectory that led to the establishment of liberal democracies is not irreversible and that there is much that right-wing organizations can learn from each other. The capacity of the American far right to inspire and influence is observable in contemporary Serbia. Far-right parties, and even some mainstream parties, have developed fond sentiments toward Trump’s “America First” ideology and his conservative message. The NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 as well as the US recognition of Kosovo’s independence contributed to the development of resentment toward the United States among the Serbian people.⁶ The emergence of Donald Trump, however, helped ease those feelings and awakened optimism, at least in

2 Patrick Buchanan, “Is Putin One of Us?,” *Creators Syndicate*, December 17, 2013, <https://www.creators.com/read/pat-buchanan/12/13/is-putin-one-of-us>.

3 Dominick Mastrangelo, “Tucker Carlson: Moscow ‘So Much Nicer than Any City in My Country,’” *The Hill*, February 13, 2024, <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/4465352-tucker-carlson-moscow-putin/>.

4 Anne Applebaum, “The False Romance of Russia,” *Atlantic*, December 12, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/12/false-romance-russia/603433/>.

5 Thorsten Wojczewski, “The International Cooperation of the Populist Radical Right: Building Counter-Hegemony in International Relations,” *International Relations* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178231222888>.

6 Maja Bjelos, Vuk Vuksanovic, and Luka Steric, *Many Faces of Serbian Foreign Policy: Public Opinion and Geopolitical Balancing* (Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, 2020).

part of the Serbian public and among some political elites, that better relations with the United States are possible.

The influence of the American far right in Serbia, ranging from populists to political extremists, is the focus of this article. I make two key claims. First, I explain how the mainstreaming of the American far right represented in the person and in the electoral success of Donald Trump influenced public opinion, political behavior, and narratives in Serbia. Second, I argue that American extremist organizations have had a noticeable influence on similar groups in Serbia since the early 2000s through Internet communication on extremist websites, on forums such as Stormfront, and more recently, via personal connections. I establish these claims in four steps. In the first section, I define the far right in general and in the United States and Serbia in particular. The next section is dedicated to the right-wing extremist organizations in Serbia that were the first to be influenced online by the American far right. This group is composed of underground, often subcultural, and violent organizations that are not interested in or capable of participating in Serbia's democratic political process—and are often not legally allowed to. The third section will cover the influence of the American far right on Serbia's mainstream political parties and its public. This includes all those organizations whose activities are legal and transparent and that can participate in the democratic process or at least in public life. The final section will offer conclusions and a summary of the collected data. At the end, we will be able to identify the main channels of American far-right influence in Serbia.

I chose Serbia as a case study because the influence of the American far right there has been largely unexamined. To investigate American far-right influence on mainstream parties and the public in Serbia, I conducted in-person interviews with several political figures, including a state official, the leader of a parliamentary far-right party, and a former high-ranking member of one populist-right party. The statistical part of my argument examines the appearance of a single phrase, *duboka država* (deep state), among Serbian Twitter users,⁷ a phrase completely absent from the Serbian political dictionary before Trump's first presidency but now a popular buzzword; this is an example of how the language of American politics influenced Serbian political vocabulary. I have analyzed the frequency of this phrase's usage on Twitter from January 2014 to August 2022 by scraping data with Python and visualizing it in Excel.⁸

Regarding the influence of the American far right on right-wing extremist organizations in Serbia, I have done qualitative analyses of content on the neo-Nazi Internet forum Stormfront, on extremist social networks, and on Telegram channels. In addition, I have conducted a comprehensive survey of investigative journalism covering

7 Twitter was renamed X on July 23, 2023; thus, the name Twitter will be used for posts prior to that date.

8 In February 2023, Twitter announced that it will no longer offer free access to its Application Programming Interface (API). Together with adoption of the new X public search policy later that year, these changes made it essentially impossible to freely scrape the public data and use it for research purposes as I did in August 2022. For that reason, the data has not been updated since.

the topic and visited locations in the field connected to far-right activism. Academic research on Serbian right-wing extremism is modest, outdated, and often only scratches the surface of Internet communication and modern developments on the extremist scene. Accordingly, I offer my own classification of three separate waves of the extreme right in Serbia since the late 1990s and describe its current structure.

The scarcity of academic literature regarding the Serbian far right, especially after the migration crisis of 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic, offers a significant challenge to research and demands original explanations and categorizations on my part. The secretive nature of right-wing extremist organizations presents another problem and for that reason some of my more interesting allegations are hard to prove and remain speculative. Membership in far-right organizations, especially the ones described as extreme, is sometimes hard to trace. Official lists of members usually do not exist, and certain individuals might be affiliated with several far-right groups at the same time. Furthermore, ideological sources of Serbian far-right groups are occasionally difficult to unearth due to the shared intellectual origins of far-right ideas.

What Is “Far Right”?

Defining the far right might seem simpler than it is and should be approached with particular care in a polarized political climate. The term sometimes has a pejorative meaning closely resembling occasional usage of the word fascism as a political slur with no regard for the complexity of the term and historical context in which fascism appeared.⁹ Scholars have identified numerous features characterizing far-right ideology. Michael Minkenberg ironically calls this “feature chasing”—compiling shopping lists of criteria based on the vast number of characteristics found in the literature, a task that complicates the work of definition.¹⁰ Cas Mudde found fifty-eight different traits attributed to right-wing extremism at least once in the literature, with nationalism, racism, xenophobia, antidemocracy, and strong state being used by more than half of the authors.¹¹ More recently, Elisabeth Carter came to a similar conclusion by comparing the definitions of right-wing extremism/radicalism by fifteen authors, finding that the traits identified by Mudde still recur most frequently, with populism emerging as a new feature that should be added to the mix of far-right core values. Carter disagrees that racism and xenophobia are necessarily defining features and argues that right-wing extremism can function without them or even on antiracist grounds; she sees authoritarianism, antidemocracy, and nationalism, however, as essential far-right principles.¹²

9 Elisha Bures, “Don’t Call Donald Trump a Fascist,” *Foreign Policy*, November 2, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/02/donald-trump-fascist-nazi-right-wing/>.

10 Michael Minkenberg, “The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-Modernity,” *Government and Opposition* 35, no. 2 (2000): 170–88, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-7053.00022>.

11 Cas Mudde, “The War of Words Defining the Extreme Right Party Family,” *West European Politics* 19, no. 2 (1996): 225–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402389608425132>.

12 Elisabeth Carter, “Right-Wing Extremism/Radicalism: Reconstructing the Concept,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23, no. 2 (2018): 157–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2018.1451227>.

It can be difficult to distinguish between “far right,” “right-wing extremist,” and “radical right,” phrases often used interchangeably by scholars.¹³ Mudde notes that consensus does not exist about the proper term to refer to the broader movement, and that different terms have been historically dominant, with far right being most common these days.¹⁴ Mudde makes a useful distinction between the *radical right*, which “accepts the essence of democracy but opposes fundamental elements of liberal democracy,” and the *extreme right*, which is “opposed to democracy and majority rule entirely,” and places them both under the umbrella of *far right*.¹⁵ In that view, the radical right is personified by people like Viktor Orbán or Donald Trump and political parties such as National Rally in France, which has gained considerable mainstream recognition. Extreme right, on the other hand, still belongs to the underground and it covers individuals and organizations that can be described as at least undemocratic and even militant, neo-Nazi, or, in certain cases, terrorist.

Far right as an umbrella term covering radical right and extreme right, as offered by Mudde, will be used here as a heuristic framework. The advantage of such an approach lies in the thoroughness of the definitions, which enables the study of organizations and individuals operating legally and transparently, as well as those whose behavior and activities are criminogenic and shadowy in nature because of their political extremism. This is particularly important in light of the process of normalization of far-right ideology over the last two decades. Ruth Wodak identifies this mainstreaming of the far right in the success of individual parties and, more importantly, in the rightward shift of the entire political spectrum.¹⁶ This process tells us that there is more to the far right than just political extremism. Mudde points out the populist radical right’s ability, over the last two decades, to bring sociocultural topics once considered fringe into public debate and pressure mainstream parties to adopt more radical positions.¹⁷ With this political development in mind, we should be more attentive to the far right’s diversity around the world, which will help us to better understand far-right transnational cooperation.

The Far Right in Serbia

The far right has had an established presence in Serbian politics since the first postcommunist democratic elections were held in 1990. During the decade that followed, the Serbian Radical Party was the major far-right political organization, participating in every parliamentary and presidential election and achieving considerable results in each of them. As the name suggests, the Serbian Radical Party belonged to the radical

13 Jasper Muis and Tim Immerzeel, “Causes and Consequences of the Rise of Populist Radical Right Parties and Movements in Europe,” *Current Sociology* 65, no. 6 (2017): 909–30.

14 Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 6.

15 Mudde, 7.

16 Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: SAGE, 2015).

17 Mudde, *Far Right Today*, 164–66.

right and often publicly emphasized the importance of democratic procedures. During the 1990s and most of the first decade of the 2000s, it was the only significant far-right party on the political scene of Serbia and the most successful one in eastern Europe; it experienced only one temporary setback after the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević in October 2000.¹⁸ With the split of the Serbian Radical Party in 2008 and its electoral failures in 2012 and 2022, the party has become marginal and practically irrelevant. However, other parties emerged in the meantime, continuing the ideological line of the radicals to a certain degree, and adding their own new substance to Serbian far-right ideology. The common ideological substance of all these groups includes Serbian nationalism, social conservatism, anticommunism, opposition to migration, hard Euroskepticism, political Russophilia, and populism.

Unlike the radical right in Serbia, which is politically organized and participates in the work of the Serbian parliament, the extreme right has always been confined to the underground world of subcultures, street violence, football hooliganism, and obscure organizations in conflict with the law but not without connections to high places in mainstream Serbian politics.¹⁹ Since the early 1990s, extreme-right organizations in Serbia have been founded on ultranationalism, religious zealotry, antisemitism, white nationalism, and neo-Nazism. Their activities have come in waves of street violence and activism, which reveal their existence to the public.

What I call the first wave of the Serbian extreme right happened in the late 1990s with the outburst of disorganized neo-Nazi skinhead-related violence in Belgrade. I identify the second wave as starting in the mid-2000s, when Internet communication allowed extremists to effectively cooperate and share ideas online, which resulted in several much larger incidents, mostly against gay people and political opponents across the country. I argue that a third wave of the extreme right in Serbia started in the second half of the 2010s. New organizations emerged as a reaction to the migrant crisis and controversial foreign direct investments in the Serbian mining and energy sector. This chronological distinction will be important below.

The Far Right in the United States

In the United States the far right falls within the wider conservative movement, which incorporates many different worldviews and ideologies. Seymour Martin Lipset wrote in 1955 that conservative elements in American politics can be divided

18 Djordje Stefanovic, "The Path to Weimar Serbia? Explaining the Resurgence of the Serbian Far Right after the Fall of Milosevic," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 7 (2008): 1195–1221, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701682303>.

19 Ivana Jeremic, "Foul Play: Serbia's Football Hooligans Get Down to Business," *Balkan Insight*, July 22, 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/22/foul-play-serbias-football-hooligans-get-down-to-business/>.

into moderate conservatives and what he termed the “radical right,”²⁰ with attitudes toward Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal being the major differentiating factor. He further observed that moderate conservatives pragmatically embraced elements of Roosevelt’s domestic agenda and internationalist foreign policy, while the radical right rejected the recent political past and refused to accept certain social and political changes as irreversible.²¹

In the 1960s, however, the fusion of the traditionalist Christian right and fiscal conservatism started to take shape, resulting in the election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980. The idea of fusionism is often attributed to Frank S. Meyer, who wrote that libertarian individual freedom and traditionalist Christian stress on virtue and order are complementary and interdependent and represent a Western political tradition fundamentally opposed to collectivism.²² A free society will prosper when it comprises moral citizens, and hierarchical order will be maintained by the meritocratic rise of the most virtuous. Matthew N. Lyons explains that the fusionist movement attracted conservatives of different kinds and united them behind the idea of anticommunism. But with the end of the Cold War, the movement split into neoconservatives, paleoconservatives, the Christian right, and a minority of extreme-right neo-Nazis and white supremacists.²³ Alex McPhee-Browne writes that the Cold War era represented a unique historical conjuncture, when the focus on anticommunism restrained xenophobic and racist elements within the broader conservative movement.²⁴ The end of the Cold War, however, marked the end of the conservative consensus. In what follows, while discussing the American far right, the emphasis will be on paleoconservative, Christian nationalist, and neo-Nazi groups that gained influence in the early 2000s in conservative US politics.

It is debatable what constitutes the common core of these ideological positions. In her minimalist approach, which tries to identify the elements present among all manifestations of the American far right, Arie Perliger recognizes two major features in the entire scope of far-right activities and ideology: extreme nationalism and nativist sentiment.²⁵ To cover the remaining “gray areas” in the far-right ideological universe, Perliger develops a maximalist approach that adds the features of racism, xenophobia,

20 Lipset’s understanding of “radical right” should be understood in this specific US historical context and not confused with the previously mentioned definition by Cas Mudde.

21 Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Radical Right: A Problem for American Democracy,” *British Journal of Sociology* 6, no. 2 (1955): 176–209, <https://doi.org/10.2307/587483>.

22 Frank S. Meyer, *In Defense of Freedom and Related Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1996).

23 Matthew N. Lyons, “Fragmented Nationalism: Right-Wing Responses to September 11 in Historical Context,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 127, no. 4 (October 2003): 377–418.

24 Alex McPhee-Browne, “The Menace of Globalism: Merwin K. Hart and Nationalist Conservatism, 1930–1960,” *Journal of Right-Wing Studies* 3, no. 1 (2025): 2–27, <https://doi.org/10.5070/RW3.250>.

25 Arie Perliger, *American Zealots: Inside Right-Wing Domestic Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 30.

and exclusionism to the mix.²⁶ The minimalist features are observable not only among the far right of an extremist and neo-Nazi bent but also among more mainstream politicians and movements, with Donald Trump and his nativist rhetoric being the most obvious case.²⁷

Both the radical and extreme right in the United States are relevant to understanding certain political developments in Serbia. The first includes elements of the modern Republican Party and other organizations that accept the basic political consensus in the United States and the rules of the game of the American political system but employ right-wing populist narratives, often including nativist and nationalist undertones. The extreme right covers those organizations and individuals opposed to American political institutions entirely and often in conflict with the law or social conventions, such as neo-Nazis, white supremacists, or paramilitary groups promoting political violence and distrust in institutions. This is a somewhat simplified distinction. Donald Trump often serves as an example of a radical-right figure, but he denies the results of the 2020 presidential election and encouraged violence during the attack on the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021. Even though Trump's role in these events was never settled in court, he nevertheless again became the Republican candidate in 2024 and won the presidential election. His readiness to participate in the election as a candidate of a mainstream party puts him in the radical-right category, but there are early signs that Trump may be even less willing to adhere to the law and "play by the rules" in his second term,²⁸ which raises the question of fluidity between the radical and extreme right. Trump's case shows that the line between radical and extreme right can be crossed back and forth and that radical-right figures can pay lip service to rules they might feel ready to violate under the right conditions.

The Appeal of the American Far Right in Serbia

The appeal of the American far right in Serbia might seem surprising or even contradictory at first sight. The Serbian far right is passionately anti-American and anti-Western because of the role the United States and its NATO allies played in the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. In the eyes of the Serbian far right, American involvement was often opposed to Serbian national interests in the region. Negative sentiments toward the West and particularly the United States among the Serbian people are deeply rooted in the Kosovo conflict. The NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 and subsequent recognition of the independence of the southern Serbian province of Kosovo by the United States in 2008 are still stumbling blocks in mutual

26 Perliger, 31–32.

27 Julia G. Young, "Making America 1920 Again? Nativism and US Immigration, Past and Present," *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 5, no. 1 (2017): 217–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/233150241700500111>.

28 See, for instance, Peter Baker, "People Will Be Shocked': Trump Tests the Boundaries of the Presidency," *New York Times*, January 26, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/26/us/politics/trump-boundaries-presidency.html>.

relations.²⁹ The regional opinion poll conducted by the National Democratic Institute in 2021 showed that regard for the United States and NATO was distinctly low in Serbia.³⁰

Given this opposition to the West and the United States among the Serbian population, the appeal of the American far right needs to be understood in the context of the dominant political narratives in Serbia. The catastrophic outcome of Slobodan Milošević's policies in the 1990s can be considered an example of what Gilad Hirschberger defines as collective trauma, "a cataclysmic event that shatters the basic fabric of society" and forces later generations to be preoccupied with its history.³¹ What happened in the 1990s remains the foundation of many political issues in Serbia. Slobodan Milošević mobilized the Serbian people by evoking historical traumas such as the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 or the genocide of Serbs by the Croatian Ustaša regime in World War II, creating a narrative of Serbian "victimhood nationalism."³² With Milošević's departure from Serbian politics, this "victim ideology" remained alive and gained a new lifeline following Kosovo's declaration of independence and its recognition by Western countries in 2008.

However, even if anti-Western sentiment was strong, individuals and organizations in the West that opposed their own governments' policies regarding Kosovo and NATO involvement in the Balkan wars were often promoted in Serbian media as friends of the Serbian people, or at least as truthful and courageous figures. The image of an "honest Westerner" was constructed about anyone who publicly opposed US or Western involvement in the Balkans, the NATO bombing of Serbia, or the recognition of Kosovo, regardless of their political positions. This is how Noam Chomsky acquired significant praise in Serbia and was even awarded the "Order of Sretenje" by the decree of Serbian president Tomislav Nikolic in 2015 for his comparison of the NATO bombing of Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) headquarters in 1999 with the Charlie Hebdo attacks.³³ Similarly, US congressman from Texas Ron Paul, famous for his libertarian opposition to American overseas intervention, was praised in Serbian media for his opposition to the Clinton administration during the 1999 bombing. When his son Rand Paul launched a campaign for the presidency in 2015, a popular daily newspaper

29 Vincent L. Morelli, *Serbia: Background and U.S. Relations* (Washington, DC: The Congressional Research Service, 2018), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44955/12>.

30 "Between East and West: Democracy, Disinformation, and Geopolitics in Central and Southeastern Europe," National Democratic Institute, July 2021, <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/REAPPS2021researchpublicversion.pdf>.

31 Gilad Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9, art. 1441 (2018): 1–14, at 1, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01441>.

32 Adam B. Lerner, "The Uses and Abuses of Victimhood Nationalism in International Politics," *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 1 (2020): 62–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066119850249>.

33 Marija Ristic, "Serbia Honours Chomsky for Criticising NATO Bombing," *Balkan Insight*, February 16, 2015, <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/02/16/serbia-honours-chomsky-for-nato-comments/>.

in Serbia reported that “the son of the friend of Serbs is running for president.”³⁴ Paul and Chomsky are politically different, but they share some common ground, including staunch opposition to American interventionism. This brought them a reputation as honest Westerners and friends among the Serbian public.

Such figures existed on the US far right in both its extreme and radical variants, and their opposition to the US government and its Balkan policies was often met with similar enthusiasm among some Serbs. American members of the extremist right after the end of the Cold War became increasingly hostile to their own country, to the point of abandoning loyalty to the United States as a hopeless case of a state “controlled by a secret Jewish elite,” with some of them openly welcoming the September 11 attacks as a strike at the heart of “Jewish power.”³⁵ One such figure was William Pierce, a man who was described by the Southern Poverty Law Center as “America’s most important neo-Nazi” until his death in 2002.³⁶ In a text written in 1999 during the NATO bombing of Serbia, Pierce passionately criticized Bill Clinton and the “Jewish gang” around him and praised Serbian resistance to the New World Order.³⁷ This text and other works by Pierce resonated in post-Milošević Serbia and were translated and published.

Just like Chomsky and Ron Paul, William Pierce was, in the eyes of Serbian media and parts of the public, an honest American who recognized justice behind the Serbian cause simply by disagreeing with Clinton’s Balkan policies. Support for Serbs, direct or at least implicit via opposition to overseas intervention, made the individuals expressing such views popular and likable in Serbia and therefore trustworthy. It was unimportant if those people held left- or right-wing positions or how far on that scale they went. In such an environment it should not come as a surprise that Donald Trump was greeted with unprecedented enthusiasm in Serbia. To many, it was appealing to have an “honest” American as the president of the United States.

American Influences on the Serbian Extreme Right

The Stormfront Connection

The first wave of the internationally linked extreme right in Serbia consisted of neo-Nazi skinheads and football hooligans. Many of them belonged to the organization Blood & Honour, originally founded in the United Kingdom in the late 1980s. The

34 “Sin prijatelja Srba u trci za lidera SAD” [Son of the friend of Serbs in race for the US leader], *Kurir*, April 15, 2015, <https://www.kurir.rs/planeta/1741187/sin-prijateljja-srba-u-trci-za-lidera-sad>.

35 Lyons, “Fragmented Nationalism,” 412, 415.

36 “William Pierce,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed August 19, 2024, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/william-pierce>. Pierce was the author of the 1978 novel *The Turner Diaries*, which was highly influential among members of the extreme right in the United States. The novel depicts a fictional race war in the United States that ends with the extermination of non-whites and nuking of the Pentagon, headquarters of the US Defense Department.

37 William Pierce, “Hands Off Yugoslavia!,” republished in *National Vanguard*, August 14, 2016, <https://nationalvanguard.org/2016/08/hands-off-yugoslavia/>.

Serbian branch of this organization was established in 1995 with permission of Blood & Honour in the United Kingdom.³⁸ Besides organizing music concerts and publishing their own fanzines and a magazine, Blood & Honour was responsible for several violent attacks in Serbia.³⁹ The Serbian branch was internationally connected with other European branches of this organization as far back as the late 1990s.⁴⁰ However, significant contacts with American far-right groups did not exist during this period. It was in the second wave, in the 2000s, that important transatlantic connections developed. In 2000, the autocratic regime of Slobodan Milošević was overthrown, UN sanctions were lifted, and Serbia opened to the world. Even though Internet access existed in the country before, its availability in Serbian society started growing rapidly at the beginning of the new millennium, allowing a broader circle of people to participate in chat rooms, forums, and other forms of online communication.⁴¹ The Serbian branch of the infamous neo-Nazi website and online forum Stormfront was formed in 2001. Founded by Donald Black, an American white nationalist who was also a former member of the American Nazi Party and grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, Stormfront is often cited as the first white supremacist site on the Internet. According to the 2014 Southern Poverty Law Center report, Stormfront was the most influential white supremacist community online; its members committed around one hundred documented murders between 2009 and 2014.⁴²

During the 2000s the new wave of the Serbian extreme right was organized around the Stormfront Serbia community subforum. In a 2012 analysis of Stormfront activity, researchers discovered that around 25 percent of posts on Stormfront were written on regional subforums; with 107,762 posts, Serbia's subforum was the fourth most active after those in Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Australia / New Zealand.⁴³ After 2012 the number of posts on the Serbian subforum of Stormfront grew to almost 192,000, though it seems that activity has fallen off drastically in recent years, probably

38 Suzana Grubješić, "Right-Wing Extremism in Serbia," in *Right-Wing Extremism: South-East Europe in Focus*, ed., Yordan Bozhilov (Sofia, Bulgaria: Sofia Security Forum, 2022), 71–92.

39 Đorđe Tomić, "On the 'Right' Side? The Radical Right in the Post-Yugoslav Area and the Serbian Case," *Fascism* 2, no. 1 (2013): 94–114, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00201012>.

40 Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Edmund Standing, *Blood & Honour: Britain's Far-Right Militants* (London: Centre for Social Cohesion and Nothing British, 2010), <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/BLOOD-AND-HNOUR.pdf>.

41 "Serbia—Individuals Using the Internet (% of Population)," Trading Economics, accessed August 27, 2024, <https://tradingeconomics.com/serbia/individuals-using-the-internet-percent-of-population-wb-data.html>.

42 "White Homicide Worldwide," Southern Poverty Law Center, April 1, 2014, <https://www.splcenter.org/20140331/white-homicide-worldwide>.

43 Neal Caren, Kay Jowers, and Sarah Gaby, "A Social Movement Online Community: Stormfront and the White Nationalist Movement," in *Media, Movements, and Political Change (Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change, vol. 33)*, ed. J. Earl and D. A. Rohlinger (Leeds: Emerald Group Publishing, 2012), 163–93, [https://doi.org/10.1108/S0163-786X\(2012\)0000033010](https://doi.org/10.1108/S0163-786X(2012)0000033010).

due to migration to social networks and messaging applications such as Telegram. According to the same study, non-US Stormfront users posted in the “general” (i.e., American) section of the forum much more frequently than Americans posted in national subforums.⁴⁴ Non-US users would explain their local problems and situation using Stormfront’s political vocabulary, which was American in origin, suggesting that US cultural influence on non-US users was more significant than the reverse.

On Stormfront, specific slang and various symbols such as the Celtic cross or Confederate flags were used in order to create a common meaning and sense of community.⁴⁵ It was a place where Serbian extreme rightists of different styles ranging from skinheads to more conventional nationalists and Christian fundamentalists could post content relevant to them, in American and European general sections of the forum, and explain the significance of such content for the wider cause of “preserving the white race” and in terms understandable to their American comrades. It became a way of Americanizing what the Serbian extreme right viewed as nationally important topics, such as the issue of Kosovo, with the aim of gaining the understanding and acceptance of like-minded foreigners.

The forum’s internal structure allowed different extremist organizations to present their programs and ideologies and communicate about their activities. It also served as an online library where various books and texts were available for free. Besides Serbian authors, the library offered Serbian translations of mostly American and German literature concerning national socialism, historical revisionism, white nationalism, antisemitism, and eugenics.⁴⁶ Among the authors who were translated and whose works were free to read or download on the Stormfront Serbia library are the names of some of the most important American far-right figures of the current and last century. Members of Stormfront translated the work of David Lane, a convicted felon and white nationalist, author of the famous “fourteen words” slogan (“We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children”), which is one of the most recognizable credos used by the white power movement globally and whose influence in the world of the extreme right brought him many devoted admirers.⁴⁷ Besides texts by Lane, Stormfront’s Serbia library offered translated works of other American far-right authors, including William Pierce, Tom Metzger, and George

44 Caren, Jowers, and Gaby.

45 Kevin C. Thompson, “WATCHING THE STORMFRONT: White Nationalists and the Building of Community in Cyberspace,” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology* 45, no. 1 (2001): 32–52.

46 “СРПСКА Н.С. БИБЛИОТЕКА” [Serbian N.S. library], Stormfront, accessed September 12, 2024, <https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t132727/>.

47 George Michael, “David Lane and the Fourteen Words,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10, no. 1 (2009): 43–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760903067986>.

Lincoln Rockwell.⁴⁸ This library was a pioneering project introducing American white nationalist and neo-Nazi ideology and methods of activism to Serbian far-right extremists.

By this time the Serbian extreme right had become much more diverse than it had been in the 1990s. Barbara Wiesinger divided the organizations into the Christian right and racist extreme right, with Christian right groups characterized by religious zealotry, social conservatism, and xenophobia, while the racist right held similar beliefs but with less emphasis on religion and a pivotal focus on race as the central motive of political struggle.⁴⁹ This division is largely correct but it misses some rather conventional Serbian nationalist organizations such as Naši or 1389, neither of which placed Christianity or racism front and center.

The Christian right incorporated organizations such as Obraz (Honor),⁵⁰ Dveri (Gates), and several smaller organizations.⁵¹ They were present on the Stormfront Serbia forum but on a lesser scale than the racist extreme right. The racist extreme right was united behind an organization called Nacionalni stroj (National Alignment, NS), which rallied skinheads, former members of the group Blood & Honour Serbia, and other extreme nationalists in the form of a loose federation whose members embraced the name, program, and symbols of the organization. Members of the NS became a significant presence in Serbian public life, and its groups acted as splinter cells based on the “leaderless resistance” concept, similarly to Blood & Honour.⁵² They have adopted an explicit Nazi ideology, although somewhat adapted to the cultural climate of Serbia, with emphasis on the protection of the “Aryan Dinaric race,” to which Serbs allegedly belong.⁵³ Between the two far-right currents was the organization Srbska akcija (Serbian Action, SA), which formed in 2010 and shared all typical characteristics of the Christian right but also embraced racism.

National Alignment (NS) and Serbian Action (SA) had the most explicit and active presence in the Stormfront Serbia community, which served as an online base of operations. The NS was the first to establish a presence on the forum when the program

48 Pierce founded the National Alliance; Metzger was a member of the Ku Klux Klan and founded the White Aryan Resistance; and Rockwell founded the American Nazi Party.

49 Barbara N. Wiesinger, “The Continuing Presence of the Extreme Right in Post-Milošević Serbia,” *Balkanologie. Revue d'études pluridisciplinaires* 11, no. 1–2 (2008): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.4000/balkanologie.1363>.

50 The literal translation of the word *obraz* is “cheek.” In Serbian, cheek is a metaphor for honor or dignity.

51 Marko Babić, “Defining Political Extremism in the Balkans. The Case of Serbia,” *International Studies. Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal* 17, no. 1 (2015): 73–90, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ipcj-2015-0006>.

52 Wiesinger, “Continuing Presence.”

53 Babić, “Defining Political Extremism.”

and statute of the organization were posted as a “sticky thread” in early 2005.⁵⁴ The NS also had its “advertising thread,” where members boasted about their actions, travels, visits to their comrades in Poland and Greece, and even about helping to establish their Russian subgroup.⁵⁵ The NS was banned by Serbian authorities in 2011, and the loose connections between its groups soon dissolved after its most prominent figure, Goran Davidović, temporarily left Serbia. The organization quickly disintegrated, but not before the NS did significant work normalizing neo-Nazism and white nationalism with a “Stormfront flavor” among the circles of more conventional Serbian nationalists.⁵⁶

Serbian Action (SA) was formed in 2010 and almost immediately presented itself on Stormfront Serbia. It is a Christian right organization whose main ideological influence is Dimitrije Ljotić, a pre-World War II Yugoslav politician and leader of the Zbor movement. The ideology of Zbor is described by scholars as fascist, pro-fascist, ultra-nationalist, and clerical-fascist due to the influence of Orthodox Christian theology on Dimitrije Ljotić, but there is no agreement about the appropriate term.⁵⁷ It would be wrong to claim that SA is a typical Christian right organization, as its ideology has a racial element.⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that on the Stormfront Serbia SA thread there was initially no emphasis on race. It was only after several forum members asked about the organization’s stance on race and eugenics that a member of the SA clarified that the organization “was dedicated to the preservation of racial consciousness,” indicating that there was perhaps some peer pressure regarding this topic.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the SA embraced racist views wholeheartedly, and its members would often pose with the Celtic cross, one of the most recognizable white supremacist symbols in the United States and Europe and the logo of Stormfront itself.

54 “Pravi Program i Statut Nacionalnog Stroja!” [Real program and statute of National Alignment!], Stormfront, accessed August 22, 2024, <https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t215772/>.

55 “НАЦИОНАЛНИ СТРОЈ” [National Alignment], Stormfront, accessed August 22, 2024, <https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t245784/>.

56 Davidović appeared in public with the leaders of other nationalist organizations on several occasions. For example, in an episode of the TV show Ekskluzivno (Exclusive) aired on the channel Happy TV in February 2020, Miša Vacić, leader of the nationalist organization 1389, stated that he and Davidović met at the celebration organized by Obraz in 2005 and have remained close since, even though 1389 denied any connections to neo-Nazism. See “KSKLUZIVNO—Goran Davidovic Firer u Srbiji nakon 11 godina provedenih u Italiji!,” posted February 10, 2020, by Jutarnji Program TV Happy, YouTube, 28:27, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ih41QFdvzY>.

57 Maria Falina, “Between ‘Clerical Fascism’ and Political Orthodoxy: Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Interwar Serbia,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 2 (2007): 247–58.

58 “ИДЕОЛОШКЕ ОСНОВЕ” [Ideological foundations], СРБСКА АКЦИЈА [Serbian Action], accessed September 12, 2024, <https://akcija.org/ideologija/>. As the organization states, “Serbian Action emphasizes the importance of Orthodox Christianity for the national well-being of the Serbian nation and state but also the importance of the preservation of the current ‘racial self’ of Serbs.”

59 “СРБСКА АКЦИЈА” [Serbian Action], Stormfront, p. 2, accessed September 12, 2024, <https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t707535-2/>.

Stormfront Serbia lost its importance during the 2010s as messaging applications replaced the need for online forums as a medium of communication. The forum itself remains, but the traffic has decreased substantially. However, the significance of the Stormfront Serbia community in the 2000s, during what I describe as the second wave of the extreme right in Serbia, cannot be neglected. The forum served as an online rallying point for different right-wing extremists who shared everything from music and sports to ideological texts and descriptions of their street activism, thus allowing intercultural exchange between members.⁶⁰ Much of that material was extremist content originating in the United States, which was translated into the Serbian language for the first time by enthusiastic users.

The role of Stormfront Serbia at that time was to help the extreme right cooperate, share, and coordinate their activities, and they did so on an unprecedented level. The presence of the Serbian far right on a predominantly American forum also exposed it to the ideas, symbols, and vocabulary of their American comrades for the first time. Expressions such as “white genocide,” “ZOG” (Zionist Occupied Government), and David Lane’s “fourteen words” found their way into the Serbian extreme right’s way of communicating, and contacts with their American counterparts made it necessary to adopt elements of their behavior in the pursuit of recognition.

The Identitarian Right

The second wave of the Serbian extreme right died down around 2012 after the state took resolute measures against the extremists. However, a major change happened in 2015 with two formative events for the further development of the Serbian extreme right: the migrant crisis in Europe and the alt-right’s emergence as an important sociocultural phenomenon ahead of the 2016 US presidential election profoundly influenced Serbia’s extreme-right online culture and led to the establishment of several new extreme-right organizations.

The third wave of the extreme right in Serbia is fundamentally linked to the migrant crisis of 2015 and its subsequent implications. Most of the new extreme-right groups in Serbia were created in this period, and their ideologies were grounded in xenophobia toward new arrivals. Marina Lažetić explains that because anti-immigration attitudes were a common obsession among the far right throughout Europe during the crisis, differences could be put aside and more flexible and decentralized transnational far-right networks connecting the Serbian with the European far right could be established based on such common feeling.⁶¹ As Lawrence Rosenthal noticed, the existence of immigrants and refugees as “the shared Other” is common to both US

60 Thompson, “WATCHING THE STORMFRONT.”

61 Marina Lažetić, “Migration Crisis’ and the Far Right Networks in Europe: A Case Study of Serbia,” *Journal of Regional Security* 13, no. 2 (2018): 131–78.

and European nationalisms and forms the basis of common nativist identity shaping what he calls “the Nationalist International.”⁶²

The migrant crisis and its social consequences fueled the so-called Identitarians, a pan-European ideological movement with French philosophical origins that rallied organizations all over the continent. The ideology behind the Identitarian movement and its youth wing, Generation Identity, is very diverse, but it can be summarized as nativist and traditionalist. Identitarians react to the supposed “Great Replacement” of Europeans by migrants, a conspiracy that is attributed to actors raging from national governments to the United Nations, “globalist elites,” and Jews.⁶³ They hold an “ethnopluralist” view, meaning that the cultural uniqueness of European nations must be preserved and protected from dangerous impacts of immigration and globalization. Identitarian forms of activism and language were borrowed from many historical and current right- and even left-wing extremist organizations.⁶⁴

Identitarian influence in new extreme-right Serbian organizations that were formed around 2015 or later is observable in the narratives and symbols they use, if not in their open embrace of Identitarianism. Unlike the second wave eager to borrow from American sources, the third wave was exposed to influences whose roots and origins are less likely to be direct and obvious. Christopher Vials showed that the Identitarian ideology of French philosophers such as Alain de Benoist echoed positively in the United States, fitted with its own white nationalist tradition, and inspired the alt-right movement in America.⁶⁵ José Pedro Zúquete concludes something similar, though he is careful to note that Identitarian pride in the ethnic and cultural uniqueness of distinct European peoples was at odds with the alt-right’s white nationalism, formed in the context of the American melting pot.⁶⁶ In fact, alt-right figures, such as Richard Spencer, spent considerable time and effort persuading European Identitarians to adopt a transnational white identity, with mixed success.⁶⁷

While other scholars such as Cas Mudde and Maxime Dafaure offer a more conservative assessment of Identitarian influence on the American far right, claiming that ideological differences are substantive, it is nevertheless accepted that parts of the alt-right in the US are to some extent and via certain individuals connected to the

62 Lawrence Rosenthal, *Empire of Resentment: Populism’s Toxic Embrace of Nationalism* (New York: The New Press, 2020), 115–21, at 117.

63 José Pedro Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 150–51.

64 Imogen Richards, “A Philosophical and Historical Analysis of ‘Generation Identity’: Fascism, Online Media, and the European New Right,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 1 (2022): 28–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1662403>.

65 Christopher Vials, “Empire after Liberalism: The Transatlantic Right and Identitarian War,” *Journal of American Studies* 56, no. 1 (2022): 87–112, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875821000517>.

66 Zúquete, *Identitarians*, 296–97.

67 Zúquete, 299–301.

Identitarian movement.⁶⁸ This complicates the task of detecting American far-right influence on the third wave of the Serbian extreme right as it is hard to recognize whether some ideas, support, or inspiration came from European Identitarians or the American alt-right. With this in mind, the next section will focus less on ideological links and more on concrete evidence of American influence on the Serbian extreme right.

A Far-Right Sanctuary

The new Serbian extreme-right organizations of the third wave can be separated into four groups. The first is represented by old second-wave organizations such as Serbian Action. The second group, including such organizations as Narodne patrola (People's Patrols), is anti-immigrant and came into existence as a reaction to the migrant crisis of 2015; emerging as single-issue movements, they are responsible for acts of vigilantism against immigrants.⁶⁹ The third group includes organizations that could be described as properly Identitarian. There are several such groups, including Zentropa Serbia, Serbon, Kormilo (The Rudder), and Junak fondacija (Hero Foundation). They are relatively new and maintain connections with European and American far-right groups and have a rather internationalist and pan-European ideology. This is particularly true for Zentropa Serbia, which is a Serbian branch of a pan-European Identitarian movement of the same name.⁷⁰ The fourth group rallies far-right environmentalists and animal rights activists, with Levijatan (Leviathan) being the most prominent representative.⁷¹

This diverse and flourishing far-right scene attracted the attention of extremists in Europe and the United States, with some of them deciding to settle in Serbia and expand their activities there. The Balkans, in general, are perceived as a front line against the Islamic world by some far-right figures in the West who have been inspired by its ethnic conflicts and violence, such as the 2019 Christchurch mosque shooter.⁷² Marina Lažetić traced the path of Jim Dowson and Nick Griffin, two British extremists who

68 Mudde, *Far Right Today*, 94; Maxime Dafaure, "The 'Great Meme War': The Alt-Right and Its Multifarious Enemies," *Angles. New Perspectives on the Anglophone World*, no. 10 (2020): 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.369>.

69 "People's Patrols (Narodne patrola)," Who Are the Extreme Right in the Balkans? (investigative project), *Balkan Insight*, accessed October 21, 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/extreme-right-organisations/orgPeoples-Patrols.php>.

70 "Zentropa Serbia," Who Are the Extreme Right in the Balkans? (investigative project), *Balkan Insight*, accessed October 7, 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/extreme-right-organisations/orgZentropa.php>.

71 "Leviathan Movement Serbia," Who Are the Extreme Right in the Balkans? (investigative project), *Balkan Insight*, accessed October 19, 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/extreme-right-organisations/orgLevijatan.php>.

72 Hikmet Karčić and Monica Hanson-Green, "Remove Kebab': The Appeal of Serbian Nationalist Ideology among the Global Far Right," *Journal of Right-Wing Studies* 2, no. 1 (2024): 16–43, <https://doi.org/10.5070/RW3.1677>.

established close connections with the Serbian far right in 2017, and explained their decision to visit Serbia and connect with the local far right as motivated by the weakness of local law enforcement.⁷³ This institutional weakness is the most plausible explanation in the case of another far-right figure who is of greater interest here: the American alt-right white nationalist Robert Rundo, who lived and operated in Serbia between 2020 and 2022. The case of Rundo and his associates is probably the strongest personal link connecting the third wave of the Serbian extreme right with its American counterparts.

Robert Rundo is a cofounder of the Southern California alt-right Rise Above Movement (RAM), a violent gang of white supremacists that trains extremists in mixed martial arts with the purpose of participating in street fights and protests, such as the “Unite the Right” march in Charlottesville in 2017, where RAM was present.⁷⁴ After the federal case against him for violence at public rallies was dropped, Rundo decided to settle in Serbia in early 2020.⁷⁵ He remained active in the RAM community while establishing contacts and affiliations with Identitarian extreme-right organizations in Belgrade. In February 2021, Rundo was deported from Serbia to Bosnia and Herzegovina after it was revealed that he participated, together with Serbian far-right extremists, in the destruction of monuments to Yugoslav Partisans in Belgrade. Even though Robert Rundo was officially expelled from Serbia, Michael Colborne discovered in November 2021 that Rundo was back in the country, indicating that his deportation was either temporary or that the legal response to his presence was weak.⁷⁶

Robert Rundo has established close activist and business connections with members of the Identitarian organizations Zentropa, Serbon, and Junak.⁷⁷ These organizations were cosigners on street art they made together with several RAM graffitiists in Belgrade. Rundo also painted graffiti in Belgrade with an organization called Beogradski nacionalisti (Belgrade Nationalists). One such work is dedicated to Kenosha shooter Kyle Rittenhouse, bearing the English inscription “KYLE WAS RIGHT” next to the figure of Rittenhouse holding a rifle in front of a black sun, a common neo-Nazi symbol.⁷⁸

73 Lažetić, “Migration Crisis”; Jelena Cosic, Lawrence Marzouk, and Ivan Angelovski, “British Nationalist Trains Serb Far-Right for ‘Online War,’” *Balkan Insight*, May 1, 2018, <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/05/01/british-nationalist-trains-serb-far-right-for-online-war-04-30-2018/>.

74 “Rise Above Movement,” Counter Extremism Project, accessed August 22, 2024, <https://www.counterextremism.com/supremacy/rise-above-movement>.

75 The case was later reopened and Rundo was sentenced in December 2024 after being extradited from Romania in 2023. Ali Winston, “US Founder of Neo-Nazi Network Sentenced to Two Years of Time Served,” *Guardian*, December 13, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/dec/13/neo-nazi-founder-robert-rundo-sentencing>.

76 Michael Colborne, “‘On the Run Again’: Has US White Supremacist Rob Rundo Returned to Serbia?,” *Bellingcat*, December 2, 2021, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2021/12/02/on-the-run-again-has-us-white-supremacist-rob-rundo-returned-to-serbia/>.

77 Grubješić, “Right-Wing Extremism.”

78 Karim Zidan, “Kyle Rittenhouse, Kenosha, and the New Far-Right Battleground,” *Right Wing Watch*, People for the American Way, December 9, 2020, <https://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/kyle>

The Belgrade Nationalists are composed of members of different Belgrade-based extreme-right organizations and are allegedly organized and coordinated by Rundo himself.⁷⁹ If correct, this would mean that Robert Rundo is the first foreigner to create an extreme-right organization in Serbia with local nationalists as members. The Belgrade Nationalists are well connected with Identitarian organizations in Serbia and have adopted the language and iconography of RAM, seen on the streets of Belgrade in the form of graffiti and stickers.

Rundo also had business ambitions in Serbia. He opened a company in Belgrade called Will2Rise, which was officially registered with the Serbian Business Registers Agency but was liquidated in 2024. He created a fashion brand under this name and marketed his products via some Serbian far-right extremist organizations. For example, Serbon Butik, an online store run by the Identitarian organization Serbon, is still promoting and selling Will2Rise clothes on its official Facebook page.⁸⁰ Will2Rise also participated in philanthropic activities organized by Serbian extreme-right groups. Rundo himself contributed and raised money for the Junak Foundation's 2021 Christmas charity action dedicated to the children of Serbian enclaves in Kosovo.⁸¹

Robert Rundo eventually left Serbia and was recently arrested in Romania. But his presence in Belgrade reveals a grim picture of Serbian legal and institutional weakness, especially a lack of mechanisms to recognize extreme-right ideology swiftly and implement the existing laws preventing its promotion. In recent years extreme-right groups in Serbia have grown in variety and are noticeably more capable of affording legal protection against prosecution compared to the beginning of the previous decade.⁸² Serbia's declining democracy and weak institutions, combined with relatively high levels of violence, have proven fertile ground for local far-right extremists and a safe haven for those from abroad.

The Great Meme War of 2016

The 2016 United States presidential election was an important event in the history of far-right Internet activism. For the first time, the far right was able to reach millions of people with its messages and present itself as a hip new counterculture. Satirical memes that ridiculed issues of race, immigration, social justice, and feminism skillfully

-rittenhouse-kenosha-and-the-new-far-right-battleground/.

79 Ana Lalić, "Desničari jurišnike regrutuju već u osnovnoj školi" [Right-wingers recruit soldiers as early as high school], *Nova.rs*, February 8, 2021, <https://nova.rs/vesti/hronika/desnicari-jurisnike-regrutuju-vec-u-osnovnoj-skoli/>.

80 See Serbon Butik's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/serbonshop> (last post July 18, 2024).

81 "WILL2RISE—Christmas Charity," altCensored, December 23, 2020, https://altCensored.com/watch?v=Sqtgo143_IE.

82 Brankica Janković (commissioner for protection of equality of the Republic of Serbia), author's interview, July 11, 2022.

used humor and irony to send right-wing political messages.⁸³ This was the origin of the alt-right—an almost exclusively online phenomenon initially positioned against political correctness and social justice in the United States, which were seen as hostile to white identity.⁸⁴ According to Perliger, the alt-right was a loose network of white nationalists who embraced antiliberal positions on domestic issues and foreign policy, taking advantage of the mainstreaming of the far right, which encouraged people to say or do what once seemed socially unacceptable.⁸⁵ The online environment provided an opportunity to popularize far-right ideas as people were able to post content anonymously and behave in a way that is much harder to imagine without the protection of physical distance and confidentiality.

The alt-right mocked the so-called social justice movement in the United States, which was already widely criticized for its allegedly ambivalent attitude toward freedom of expression. By ridiculing concepts such as safe spaces or the sensitivity of the political left, and by labeling their opponents as “social justice warriors” and “snowflakes,” the alt-right was able to hide its true intentions behind the veil of irony or trolling and often blend into a much larger crowd of people who were not necessarily on the far-right end of the political spectrum. Ideologically, the alt-right was inspired by various sources. These include the American paleoconservative movement and its non-interventionism, protectionism, and traditionalism; Antonio Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony; and the European New Right’s concept of metapolitics, or the spread of messages among the general public with a focus on cultural and ideological struggle instead of actual politics.⁸⁶ Intellectually, the alt-right shares some of its theoretical sources with the Identitarian movement in Europe and the third wave of the extreme right in Serbia.

Although it is hard to quantitatively assess how influential memes were for the outcome of the 2016 presidential election in the United States, there is a consensus that they helped attract the attention of otherwise unaffiliated people.⁸⁷ The Great Meme War of 2016, as some like to call it, inspired the Serbian far right on the Internet. Meme templates widely used by the American alt-right, such as Pepe the Frog, Dolan Duck, NPC Wojak, or red pilling, started circulating among Serbian Internet users after 2015. However, unlike the American alt-right, which had to conceal its true ideological nature, the Serbian far right acted online in a social and political environment that was dominantly nationalist anyway and only suffered under the censorship algorithms of the social networks where they

83 On the use of satire and irony in the “Great Meme War,” see Johanna Maj Schmidt, “Limbless Warriors and Foaming Liberals: The Allure of Post-Heroism in Far-Right Memes,” *Journal of Right-Wing Studies* 2, no. 2 (2024): 79–107, <https://doi.org/10.5070/RW3.1620>.

84 Mudde, *Far Right Today*, 60–61.

85 Perliger, *American Zealots*, 206–7.

86 George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Dafaure, “Great Meme War.”

87 Benita Heiskanen, “Meme-ing Electoral Participation,” *European Journal of American studies* 12, no. 2 (2017): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.12158>.

posted. There was no need to hide their meaning or present themselves in a better light for the Serbian public, and their memes were explicitly nationalist and rightist.

This directness reflected the fact that the Serbian right-wing meme scene operated on a very different frequency than the alt-right in the United States with respect to social acceptability and the political mainstream. However, their meme templates, the way they were used, their overall aesthetic, and their political language were borrowed mostly from the American alt-right. In fact, the Great Meme War of 2016 was felt in Montenegro too. Bordering Serbia, Montenegro had a political opposition that included ethnic Serbian parties, who were helped in their 2020 parliamentary victory by popular pro-Serbian meme pages on Facebook posting content critical of the Montenegrin government.⁸⁸ These pro-Serbian meme pages had a monthly reach of several hundred thousand and the number of views online surpassed the total population of Montenegro.⁸⁹

The fact that Serbian right-wing opposition in Montenegro ran an online campaign like the one seen in the United States in 2016 shows that popular meme templates and methods of political promotion and propaganda developed by the US alt-right can be used in local contexts outside of the United States.⁹⁰ There were no similar attempts in Serbia though, as most right-wing meme pages remained unaffiliated with any political party. Nevertheless, content among meme pages in Serbia itself is much more ideological and abstract in nature, with Serbian nationalism being a major inspiration. Although politically less ambitious, right-wing meme pages in Serbia remain an influential part of online culture and a replicator of popular alt-right memes.

American Influence on the Serbian Radical Right

Given the widespread perception that the United States was always hostile to the Serbian position and the national interests of Serbia, there was understandably scant influence from American mainstream politics in Serbia, which left the flow of ideas from the United States mostly restricted to the extreme right. But Donald Trump's electoral campaign and first presidential term changed that. For the first time the mainstream US right, now a radical-right movement in the form of the MAGA Republican Party, gained prominent attention from the Serbian public. Several Serbian political parties and individuals in both government and the opposition praised the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and cheered for his reelection in 2020 and 2024. Moreover, narratives

88 Andrej Ševo, "Politička moć i doseg internet mimova u Srbiji" [Political power and reach of Internet memes in Serbia], *Talas.rs*, July 29, 2021, <https://talas.rs/2021/07/29/internet-mimovi/>.

89 Jelena Vujanovic, "Meme Pages as Public Opinion Leaders in the Election Campaign for the Parliamentary Elections in Montenegro in 2020," *Baština*, no. 53 (2021): 341–53, <https://doi.org/10.5937/bastina31-31115>.

90 Montenegro and Serbia were part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia until it dissolved after a successful independence referendum in Montenegro in 2006.

and political vocabulary from the United States gained relevance in Serbian public debate.

The Trump Effect

Even though Donald Trump did not have any concrete pro-Serbian agenda in his 2016 campaign, the mere fact of his opposition to the political establishment in general, and the Clintons in particular, was enough for some Serbs to greet his victory with optimism.⁹¹ There was a common impression in right-wing circles that to some extent, if not completely, Donald Trump would shift America's foreign policy approach to Serbia and the Balkans. In October 2016 the weekly magazine *Nedeljnik* published a fake interview with Donald Trump in which the presidential candidate apologized to Serbia for the NATO bombing during Clinton's presidency in 1999.⁹² Reactions to the interview were overwhelmingly positive and its echo was heard long after it was revealed to be a hoax. The Serbian newspaper with the largest print circulation was the pro-government *Informer*. The newspaper paid for billboards around Belgrade congratulating Trump on his victory, with the message "TRUMP, YOU SERB!"⁹³ This soon became a catchphrase among Trump enthusiasts across Serbia.

These positive public and media reactions were followed by similar responses among political parties. The Serbian Radical Party was temporarily revitalized by the return of its leader, Vojislav Šešelj, from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague. The party organized pro-Trump rallies and urged Serbs in America to vote for the Republican Party, even during Vice President Biden's visit to Serbia in 2016.⁹⁴ The radical-right party Dveri adopted a more cautious approach. Opposed to the American political mainstream and so-called neoliberal and globalist elites, Dveri embraced Donald Trump's ideological positions as acceptable and much better than those of conventional American politicians.⁹⁵ Dveri would later develop strong international links with several like-minded conservative groups; its representatives participated along with prominent right-wing speakers from the United States in the Conservative Political

91 Henry E. Hale and Ridvan Peshkopia, "Trump Sympathy in the Balkans: Cross-Border Populist Appeal," *Mediterranean Politics* 28, no. 3 (2023): 375–398, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2021.1956775>; Boško Obradović (president of the Serbian movement Dveri), author's interview, July 6, 2022.

92 Kyle Cheney and Barbara Surk, "Trump Camp Says Serbia Apology Interview Was a Hoax," *Politico*, October 13, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/10/trump-serbia-bombing-apology-229742>.

93 Marko Angelov, "Nationalists and Populists in Serbia and Macedonia Celebrate Trump's Victory," *Global Voices*, November 10, 2016, <https://globalvoices.org/2016/11/10/nationalists-and-populists-in-serbia-and-macedonia-celebrate-trumps-victory/>.

94 Ivana Sekularac and Fedja Grulovic, "Vote for Trump' Serbian Ultra-Nationalists Chant as Biden Visits," *Reuters*, August 16, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-balkans-biden-trump-idUSKCN10R1U0>.

95 Obradović, author's interview.

Action Conference (CPAC) 2023 congress in Budapest organized by CPAC Hungary, a local spin-off of the more famous annual meeting in the US.

Enough is Enough (EIE) was a Serbian political party that gained parliamentary status in 2016 and slowly shifted its political positions from centrist and liberal to the populist right. It eventually embraced Donald Trump as a role model and some other conservative elements of the US Republican Party as inspiration. The leadership of the party started this ideological shift in 2017 with the opportunistic intention of filling the space on the right wing of the political spectrum with a Serbian Trumpist option. The idea was to shape EIE as a populist-rightist party that would benefit from the existing enthusiasm for Donald Trump among the Serbian public.⁹⁶ EIE became a major popularizer of Trumpist ideology and American right-wing conspiracy theories, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. While this transition alienated its existing membership, the party failed to make inroads among the established far-right parties, which maintained their grip on the voter base and prevented an EIE takeover.

Enough is Enough has largely ceased to be a relevant political party, but it was the first one whose members actively promoted conspiracy theories originating in the United States, such as those about the origins of COVID-19, the role of Bill Gates and George Soros in its creation, and the secret agendas of satanic elites behind vaccination efforts.⁹⁷ The torch has since been passed to the party We—Voice of the People, founded in 2023. The main figure in the party for the 2023 parliamentary elections was a physician, Branimir Nestorović. Initially a member of an expert team formed in early 2020 by the Serbian government to monitor the spread of COVID-19, Nestorović often undermined and trivialized its work with his nonchalant approach; for that reason, he was sacked from the team, but he also gained a base of cult followers, especially among the vaccine sceptics.⁹⁸ In their analysis of narratives in Nestorović's book *Između dva sveta* (Between two worlds), Jelena Jovović and Stefan Janjić identified numerous American sources for his claims. Nestorović quoted the American satirical website *The Onion*, claimed that the "Philadelphia Experiment" (an urban legend about invisibility experiments in the US Navy during World War II) took place, quoted discredited "alternative medicine" figures such as Dr. Joseph Mercola, and generally preferred to use American and European sources in his work.⁹⁹ Nestorović is also a proponent of the Trumpist narrative about election fraud in 2020 and has shown keen interest in

96 Tatjana Macura (former member of Enough is Enough and member of the Serbian National Assembly from 2016 to 2018), author's interview, August 31, 2022.

97 "Conspiracy Theories from the Parliament of Serbia," Digital Forensic Center, accessed February 22, 2025, <https://dfc.me/en/conspiracy-theories-from-the-parliament-of-serbia/>.

98 Nebojša Blanuša, ed., *COVID-19 Disinformation and Conspiracy Theories in Croatia*, Republic of Croatia, Ministry of Science, Education, and Youth (Zagreb: GONG, 2023), <https://www.croris.hr/crosbi/publikacija/rad-ostalo/811933>.

99 Jelena Jovović and Stefan Janjić, *Nestorology 101: Analysis of Narratives in the Book "Between Two Worlds"* (Novi Sad, Serbia: Novi Sad School of Journalism / Fake News tragač, 2024), <https://fakenews.rs/wp-content/uploads/Nestorology-101.pdf>.

American politics.¹⁰⁰ The political party he dominates managed to gain six seats in the Serbian National Assembly in 2023.

Trump's movement also enjoyed a positive reception among the ruling parties. Then Serbian prime minister Aleksandar Vučić, head of the Serbian Progressive Party, made an initial blunder by forecasting a Hillary Clinton victory and showing up at an event organized by the Clinton Foundation two months before the November 2016 election.¹⁰¹ This decision was heavily criticized, and by the time Donald Trump became president-elect, Vučić and his coalition had changed course, as reflected in neutral to positive Trump reporting and Trump's occasional idolization in some government-affiliated media, such as the tabloid newspapers *Informer* or *Kurir*.¹⁰²

Trump's positive image was so remarkable that the country's minister of foreign affairs, Ivica Dačić from the Socialist Party of Serbia, approached Trump at a United Nations summit to present him with headlines from Serbian newspapers full of praise for his persona—something that Trump apparently liked very much.¹⁰³ Optimism about Serbo-American relations with the arrival of the new president was crowned with the Oval Office signing of the 2020 Washington Agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, a de facto independent state since 2008 that Serbia considers a de jure part of its territory. After Trump's departure from the White House, both sides refused to implement it, but the Washington Agreement showed that Donald Trump was reliable enough for the Serbian government to move the painful and exhausting negotiations with Kosovo further than before, in this case toward economic normalization.

The “Deep State”

Enthusiasm about Donald Trump in Serbia meant that many now listened carefully to what the American president had to say. Words and phrases Trump used to speak about his political opponents or his own positions soon found their way into Serbian political vocabulary. This phenomenon moved beyond the boundaries of the far right, and people of very different political positions found themselves discussing “globalist elites,” “fake news,” or “draining the swamp” in Serbian politics. The language of the 2016 United States presidential election was finding its way into everyday political debate in Serbia.

In particular, the “deep state” idiom embedded itself deep inside the collective mind of the nation (figure 1). Almost completely absent before 2016, the deep state soon became a common phrase in political discussions and among conspiracy theorists in Serbia.

100 Sanja Lazarević Radak, “Authoritarianism, Conspiracy Theories and Covid 19 Pandemic in Serbia,” *Thesis* 10, no. 2 (2021): 51–75.

101 “Vucic to Be at Clinton Foundation Event Hillary Will Miss,” *B92*, September 19, 2016, https://www.b92.net/eng/news/world.php?yyyy=2016&mm=09&dd=19&nav_id=99248.

102 “Analysis of the Print Media in Serbia: October–December,” Public Policy Institute Belgrade, *Quarterly Mediameter* 2, no. 4 (2016), https://www.medijametar.rs/pdf/MM_8_ENG.pdf.

103 “Trump ‘Reacts Positively’ to Serbian Front Pages about Him,” *B92*, September 19, 2017, https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2017&mm=09&dd=19&nav_id=102347.

Trump and his allies used the expression to discredit all the critics of his administration and the system of checks and balances in the United States with the intention of centralizing power in the White House.¹⁰⁴ This left space for free interpretation of the meaning of the term. With its history of political violence organized by all-powerful security services, Serbia was a perfect environment for the proliferation of deep-state narratives.

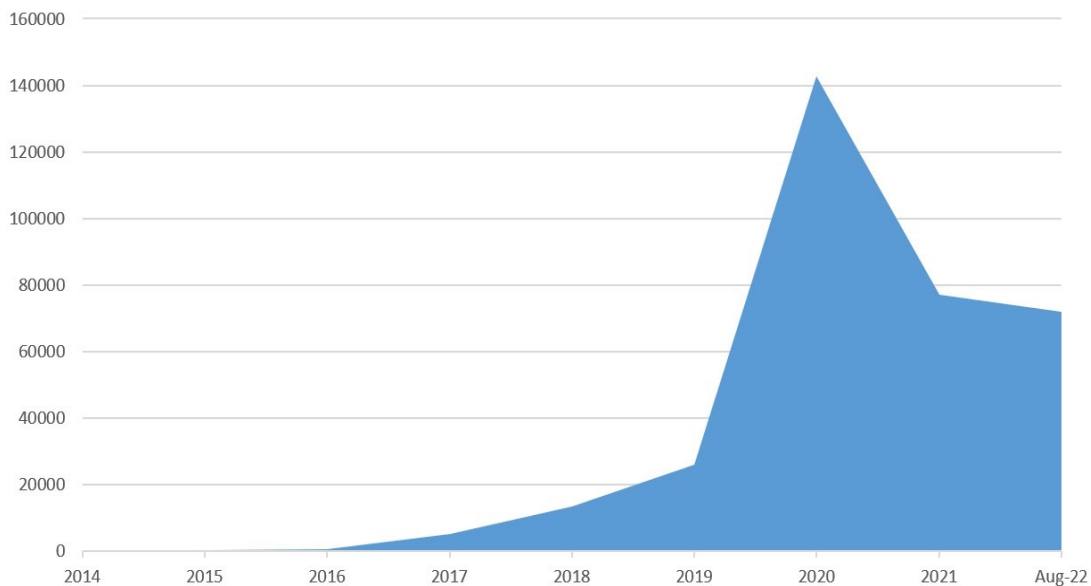


Figure 1. The number of tweets mentioning *duboka država* (deep state) between 2014 and August 2022. Source: author's construction.

Figure 1 shows that tweeting about *duboka država* (including different grammatical cases of both words) started to increase slowly in the election year 2016, then grew steadily, peaked in the election year 2020, and remained high thereafter. Data for 2022 was incomplete, only covering tweets until August 19, when I did the scraping of tweets. But it is highly likely that the number of tweets surpassed the 2021 figure, indicating that *duboka država* had become rooted in the political language of the entire region (the expression *duboka država* has the same meaning in all varieties of the Serbo-Croatian language).

There are two contexts for understanding Serbia's popular adoption of *duboka država* during and after Donald Trump's first term in office. The first is the prevailing Trumpist interpretation of political events in the United States, which was echoed by government-affiliated tabloids in Serbia. *Informer* published more than one hundred articles about US politics containing the expression *duboka država* in their headlines between September 2017 and February 2025, all of them with obvious pro-Trump

104 Robert B. Horwitz, "Trump and the 'Deep State,'" *Policy Studies* 42, nos. 5–6 (2021): 473–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2021.1953460>.

bias.¹⁰⁵ Several politicians in Serbia used the term in different situations; President Vučić himself claimed in February 2024 that he had a scheduled meeting with influential members of the American deep state at the Munich Security Conference.¹⁰⁶ The alleged deep state members were in fact a bipartisan Senate delegation led by Senator Jeanne Shaheen.¹⁰⁷ By claiming that the elected US senators represented the American deep state, Vučić sent a message to voters already familiar with the deep state mythos that he spoke to the important gray eminences of American politics. It also indicated that he had adopted the Trumpist interpretation of the deep state as any separate governmental authority able to check or balance the president's own power.

The second context is domestic political affairs. The term deep state is sometimes utilized by members of the ruling coalition parties and their sympathizers to refer to the administrative remains of previous governments from the period 2000–2012, which are alleged to be obstructing the current government for political reasons. In 2019, for example, the judges appointed during the previous government, led by the Democratic Party (informally known as the “yellows” after their party colors), were labeled by President Vučić as the “yellow judges” and accused of deliberately refusing to prosecute criminals and preventing him from putting them in jail.¹⁰⁸ While not directly saying that these judges belonged to the deep state, the president criticized them as corrupt and motivated by personal malice in a manner similar to Trump's frequent complaints about “witch hunts.” Other politicians were more explicit. A member of parliament from the Serbian Progressive Party, Nebojša Bakarec, in his *Informer* column from November 2024, accused judges and prosecutors, among others, of being a rogue Serbian deep state working against the interests of the people.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Bakarec's parliamentary and party colleague and one of the president's closest associates, Vladimir Đukanović, repeated some of Bakarec's words on a TV show, *Novo Jutro*, aired on Pink TV on February 12, 2025, where he also blamed USAID for allegedly establishing control over the depths of the Serbian state, primarily by corrupting judges and prosecutors.¹¹⁰ Both in the interpretation of US political events and in commentary on Serbian politics the expression deep state has been

105 Based on author's search of *informer.rs*, accessed February 12, 2025.

106 Đorđe Pavićević, “The President of Serbia in the American Deep State,” *Vreme*, February 21, 2024, <https://vreme.com/en/vreme/predsednik-srbije-u-americkoj-dubokoj-drzavi/>.

107 “Vucic with a Delegation of US Senators in Munich: It Is Important to Protect the Serbs in Kosovo,” *Kosovo Online*, February 17, 2024, <https://www.kosovo-online.com/en/news/politics/vucic-delegation-us-senators-munich-it-important-protect-serbs-kosovo-17-2-2024>.

108 “Judge Says Top Judiciary Body Has to React to Serbian President's Statement,” *N1*, January 10, 2019, <https://n1info.rs/english/news/a450834-judge-says-top-judiciary-body-has-to-react-to-serbian-presidents-statement/>.

109 Nebojša Bakarec, “Odmehnuta duboka država protiv Srbije!” [Rogue deep state against Serbia!], *Informer*, November 24, 2024, <https://informer.rs/politika/kolumne/964910/nebojsa-bakarec-odmehnuta-drzava-srbija-kolumna>.

110 Interview with Vladimir Đukanović, posted by *Novo Jutro*, February 12, 2025, YouTube, 26:47, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbwduQWIEsY&t=115s>.

applied to tarnish the reputation of the legislative and judiciary branches of government, as well as civil society and the media. At bottom, both contexts show incredible similarity with how the expression “deep state” is utilized in the United States by Donald Trump.

The Shy Pro-Lifers

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the Supreme Court of the United States in 2022 and the adoption of strict antiabortion laws in Poland in 2020 have ignited the abortion debate in Serbia. It would be an exaggeration to claim that this issue is exceptionally important in Serbian politics, but some far-right organizations and political parties have dedicated their time and resources to move the abortion debate closer to the center of public attention. Right-wing criticism attacks what Mirjana Rašević and Katarina Sedlecki call the “culture of abortion,” or the use of abortion as a method of contraception, following a series of increasingly liberal abortion laws between 1952 and 1995, which were not followed by an adequate increase in the availability and knowledge of modern contraceptive methods.¹¹¹ However, unlike Rašević and Sedlecki’s advocacy for better contraceptive education for young people and preparedness of the health system to provide counseling in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies and tackle the abortion culture, some far-right organizations see the solution in full or partial restriction of the practice.

Antiabortion activism and attitudes are a relatively new phenomenon in Serbian politics. Even during the 1990s, when conservative and right-wing political attitudes were revived after almost fifty years of communist repression, pro-life policies were not adopted by any political party. Opposition to abortion was expressed mostly by religious organizations, with the Serbian Orthodox Church being occasionally vocal about the issue.¹¹² Besides the traditional churches, nongovernmental organizations would sometimes gain public attention for their expression of pro-life attitudes. One such organization, Savez za život (Alliance for Life), has recently gained prominence with its 2022 initiative for an abortion ban. Alliance for Life is a member of an international network of pro-life movements and proudly displays its connections on the organization’s website. In May 2023, the Alliance organized a worldwide pro-life summit in Belgrade and hosted prominent pro-life figures from around the world.¹¹³

However, perhaps the most interesting case is the political party Dveri, which held parliamentary status in two election cycles between 2016 and 2023. Although Dveri does not have an antiabortion stance in its program, it is somewhat unclear where it really stands on the issue. The party is not uncompromisingly antiabortion; it never

111 Mirjana Rašević and Katarina Sedlecki, “Pitanje postojanja abortusne kulture u Srbiji” [Question of existence of abortion culture in Serbia], *Stanovništvo* 49, no. 1 (2011): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.2298/STNV1101001R>.

112 “Serbian Church Demands Crackdown on Abortion,” *Balkan Insight*, June 5, 2013, <https://balkaninsight.com/2013/06/05/serbian-orthodox-church-urges-abortion-ban/>.

113 “Beginning of Summit and Basic Info,” Pro-Life Worldwide, May 10, 2023, <https://prolifeworldwide.net/conference-pro-life/beginning-of-summit-and-basic-info/>.

advocated for an abortion ban. However, its members have spoken against abortion on some occasions, and they have been the most prominent political figures in Serbia to publicly condemn abortion as an immoral practice and a health concern. We could say that Dveri has a soft antiabortion stance, meaning that its opposition should be interpreted in the context of Serbian social reality, in which abortion has been legal for several generations and is not a question many in Serbia are ready to reevaluate. Therefore, Dveri's approach is careful and pragmatic. It criticizes the morality and health implications of abortion, and it expresses concerns while avoiding the trap of questioning its legality.

However, on an international level, Dveri is active in a pro-life movement known as the World Congress of Families (WCF). As described by the Southern Poverty Law Center, the WCF is an organization founded by US and Russian Conservatives in 1997 but originating in the ideology of the US Christian right.¹¹⁴ Kristina Stoeckl traces the formative years of the WCF as far back as 1995 and agrees that even though the Russian element inside the WCF is significant, the strategies and key ideas of the organization are American in origin.¹¹⁵

The willingness of Russian (and European) pro-life activists to adopt ideas from the United States is explained by Stoeckl and Susanna Mancini, who point to the absence of a tradition of pro-life activism in Russia; after the fall of the Soviet Union, there were no authentic, local pro-life strategies and language available to be used.¹¹⁶ The WCF holds natalist and pro-life views and sees itself as an organization whose mission is to defend the concept of the traditional family. Members of Dveri have been present at several of the congresses held by the WCF, and Dveri members even organized regional WCF conferences in Belgrade in 2015 and 2016.¹¹⁷

The ties between Dveri and the WCF can be traced to the founding days of the Dveri movement. In an interview, Dveri's president at the time, Boško Obradović, stated that it would be presumptuous to assume that there was too much American influence on Dveri, but he did stress that the American pro-life movement was an inspiration in the early days of the organization. In the same interview, Obradović revealed that Dveri maintains regular contact with Brian Brown, president of the WCF and founder of the

114 "World Congress of Families," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed October 8, 2024, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/world-congress-families>.

115 Kristina Stoeckl, "The Rise of the Russian Christian Right: The Case of the World Congress of Families," *Religion, State and Society* 48, no. 4 (2020): 223–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2020.1796172>.

116 Susanna Mancini and Kristina Stoeckl, "Transatlantic Conversations: The Emergence of Society-Protective Antiabortion Arguments in the United States, Europe, and Russia," in *The Conscience Wars: Rethinking the Balance between Religion, Identity, and Equality*, ed. Susanna Mancini and Michel Rosenfeld (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 220–57.

117 Naureen Shameem, *Rights at Risk: Observatory on the Universality of Rights Trends Report 2017* (Toronto: AWiD / OURs, 2017), <https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rights-at-risk-ours-2017.pdf>.

National Organization for Marriage, which opposes same-sex marriage. Obradović also claimed that Dveri was the first political party to become a partner organization of the WCF.¹¹⁸ It should be noted here that Brown was the first speaker at the worldwide pro-life summit in Belgrade, organized by Alliance for Life in 2023, where he discussed the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.¹¹⁹ The case of Dveri is similar to those of US-influenced pro-life organizations in Russia. After the fall of communism and decades of relatively liberal abortion laws in an authoritarian political climate, there was no authentic, local rhetorical tradition or strategic infrastructure that could be used for pro-life advocacy in Serbia. This does not mean that pro-lifers in Serbia did not have their own views on abortion, but decades without any kind of public debate on this issue took a toll. Pro-life activists in Serbia had to look for a teacher abroad and they found one in the United States.

Conclusion

The far right is globalizing. It is exchanging ideas, sharing methods of political activism, and establishing personal and financial connections. American and European far rights are cooperating, coordinating their activities, and learning from each other. American far right groups provided over \$50 million in financial backing to European rightists in the last decade.¹²⁰ There are reports indicating that the spending has increased since then, with recipients including even the major European far-right parties such as Alternative for Germany.¹²¹ As a relatively small country outside of the European Union, Serbia is somewhat peripheral in this process. But connections have been established with the American far right, which has influenced Serbian political parties, organizations, and even public narratives, both directly and indirectly.

American far-right thought first gained recognition among Serbian extreme right-wing organizations. During the first decade of the 2000s, with the proliferation of the Internet and online communication in Serbia, the far right was gathered around Stormfront, an American white nationalist site and Internet forum. Far-right individuals on the website posted content relevant to the ideology and activities of their organizations and translated domestic and foreign far-right literature, including most of the major figures of the American far right. Until the early 2010s, Stormfront was a

118 Obradović, author's interview.

119 "Summit Program ENG," Pro-Life Worldwide, May 12, 2023, <https://prolifeworldwide.net/conference-pro-life/summit-program-eng/>.

120 Mary Fitzgerald and Claire Provost, "The American Dark Money behind Europe's Far Right," *openDemocracy*, July 11, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/the-american-dark-money-behind-europes-far-right/>; Claire Provost and Adam Ramsay, "Revealed: Trump-Linked US Christian 'Fundamentalists' Pour Millions of 'Dark Money' into Europe, Boosting the Far Right," *openDemocracy*, March 27, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/revealed-trump-linked-us-christian-fundamentalists-pour-millions-of-dark-money-into-europe-boosting-the-far-right/>.

121 Keneth Haar, "The Alliance Attacking Freedom," *Corporate Europe Observatory*, May 13, 2024, <https://corporateeurope.org/en/2024/05/alliance-attacking-freedom>.

pivotal online sanctuary for the Serbian extreme right, with its local branch, Stormfront Serbia, among the most active on the forum.

The presence of members of Serbian far-right organizations on Stormfront, whose users were mostly American, meant that Serbian participants in the forum's discussions adopted elements of behavior, language, and ideology from their American counterparts. In the wake of the migrant crisis that began in 2015, the far right in Serbia increasingly adopted the pan-European Identitarian ideology. Serbian right-wing extremists developed friendly relations with other European organizations as well as with alt-right groups in the United States, some of whose members and founders established a commercial and activist presence in Serbia itself.

While the Serbian extreme right was inspired by similar activists in the United States—namely those at the edge of legal and social norms—the Serbian radical right and even mainstream parties and parts of the public were influenced by American figures with a much higher profile. Donald Trump's criticism of the American political establishment and the Clintons convinced some people in Serbia that rapprochement between the United States and Serbia was possible. Political parties both in power and in opposition expressed their praise and admiration for the forty-fifth president of the United States. The political situation across the Atlantic was followed more closely than before and Serbian media covered important issues with a rather Trumpist approach to interpreting major events. New terms such as deep state, globalist elites, and fake news entered Serbia's political vocabulary and gained prominence among politicians, commentators, and journalists, as well as in everyday life, while popular Internet memes used by the US alt-right were replicated in Serbian politics. Right-wing America was largely unknown outside Serbia's far right before Donald Trump's emergence in US politics. The rise of Trump's movement and its "America First" ideology not only exhilarated Serbia's far right but found resonance in the resentful nationalism that crosscuts Serbian politics.

Trumpist ideas and narratives became part of everyday political discussion in Serbia and revealed to the Serbian far right that conservative America exists and embodies values that they consider important. This America, which was mostly unknown prior to Donald Trump's political ascension, represents a friendly force in the eyes of the Serbian right wing—one they believe could spark the renaissance of Serbo-American relations or, at least, a more sympathetic approach toward the Serbian nationalist cause. As they see it, Trump represents, if nothing else, a chance for a positive change in the heart of a global superpower. Trump's first term was an educational journey for much of the Serbian right, who were introduced to a right-wing American worldview, while his second term marks the return of a recognized ideological ally. As the Serbian ruling coalition cheered his comeback, Trump and his family have revitalized their old idea of constructing a Trump hotel in Belgrade on the site of the former Yugoslav

Ministry of Defense, destroyed during the 1999 NATO bombing.¹²² Shared ideology and commercial interests, backed by Trump's unorthodox presidential style, might be the foundation of partnership between his administration and the Serbian government in the years to come.

159

Acknowledgments

This article was realized with the support of the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia, according to the agreement on the realization and financing of scientific research 451-03-136/2025-03/ 200025.

122 Eric Lipton, "New Luxury Hotel in Serbia Will Be a Trump-Kushner Joint Project," *New York Times*, January 24, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/24/us/politics/trump-kushner-serbia-hotel.html>.