
Capitalism: Malignant by Design

Dr. **Victoria A. Stuart**, Ph.D.
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

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Project: [Wealth, Power, and Influence: Issues and Solutions](#)

Executive Summary

We live in a world of compounding, interrelated crises: extreme and growing inequality, mass surveillance, the erosion of civil rights and democratic norms, rampant disinformation, ecological destruction, and accelerating climate breakdown. These are not separate failures. They share a common cause.

Capitalism - predicated on the logic of unconstrained accumulation - concentrates wealth, and concentrated wealth captures power. It converts legislatures into policy vending machines, regulatory agencies into industry shields, and media into instruments of manufactured consent. The result is a political economy that is structurally incapable of addressing the harms it produces, because those harms are its profit centres.

The central argument of this paper is precise: massive private wealth enables unchecked power and influence, which in turn protects and expands that wealth. This **triangle** - wealth, power, influence - is self-reinforcing, corrosive to democratic governance, and ecologically catastrophic.

The treatment for malignant capitalism is *democratic socialism*: a system in which the political economy is governed by democratic accountability rather than private accumulation. This does not preclude markets; it subordinates them to the public interest - through taxation, public ownership, labour protections, and the genuine democratic governance of institutions that currently function as instruments of class power.

Contents

1	Background	2
2	Capitalism: Malignant by Design	2
2.1	The architecture of managed democracy	3
2.2	The silence of opposition parties	3
2.3	A case study: Mark Carney and the Canadian variant	3
2.4	The industrial complexes as features, not bugs	4
2.5	Manufactured hopelessness as political technology	4
2.6	The triangle that explains everything	5
2.7	What democratic socialism actually means in this context	5
2.8	The disease has a name. So does the cure	5
3	Author	6
4	Recommended reading	7
	References	8
	Endnotes	11

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1 Background

Unchecked, rust never sleeps - it erodes structural integrity.

Likewise, [social conservatism](#) slowly, relentlessly undermines the foundations of a just and democratic society.

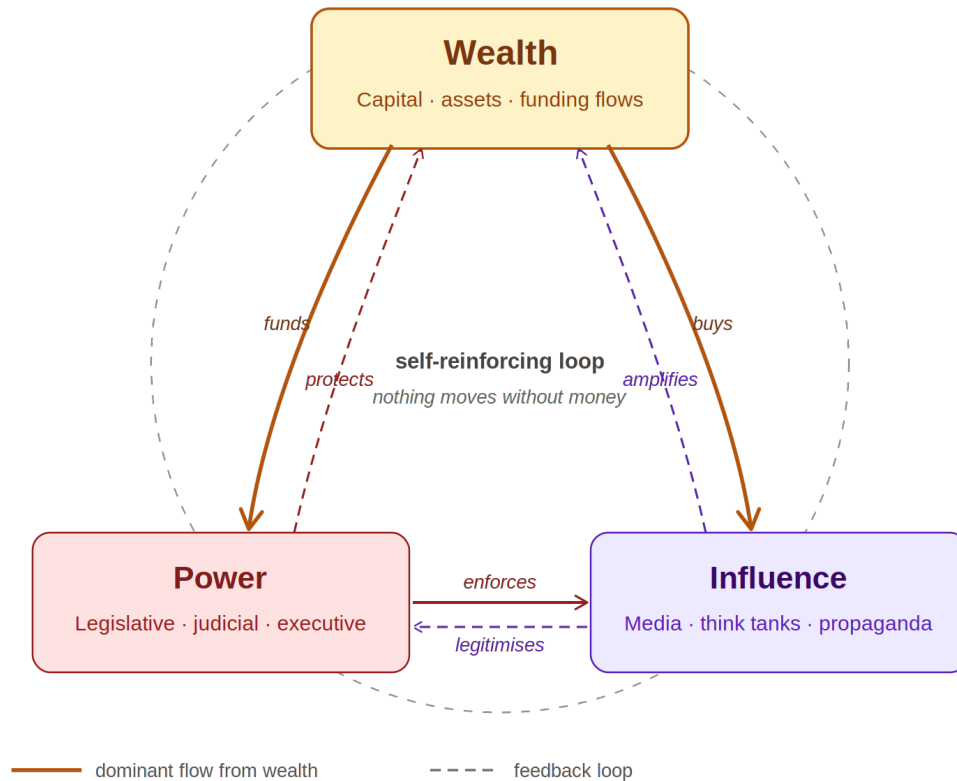


Figure 1. The WPI triangle: wealth funds power; power protects wealth; influence legitimises both.

2 Capitalism: Malignant by Design

The [first](#) and [second](#) presidencies of Donald Trump relentlessly implemented policies and actions that discriminated against and harmed transgender persons.

There is a question that has nagged at serious observers of contemporary politics for at least a generation, and which the mainstream press continues to evade with remarkable discipline: if democratic governments are sovereign - if the people actually elect representatives who shape policy in the public interest - then why does nothing fundamentally change, regardless of which party wins?

The answer is uncomfortable. Elected governments in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom are not, in any meaningful sense, in charge of the political economy. They manage its optics. They narrate its outcomes. Occasionally, at the margins, they modulate it. But they do not control it. Wealth controls it -

and wealth has constructed the entire visible apparatus of democratic politics as a buffer between itself and accountability.

This is not conspiracy thinking. It is institutional analysis.

2.1 The architecture of managed democracy

Begin with the think tanks. The Cato Institute, The Heritage Foundation, the Fraser Institute, the Institute of Economic Affairs - these are not neutral research organizations. They are policy factories funded by concentrated wealth whose outputs are laundered through the language of expertise and deployed into legislatures, regulatory agencies, and judicial appointments. Their work is not to discover truth; it is to manufacture the intellectual infrastructure of policies that serve capital.

Around them cluster the lobbyists - an industry in Washington alone worth billions annually - whose function is to ensure that the text of legislation, the fine print of regulation, and the composition of regulatory bodies reliably protect the interests of those who fund them. This is not corruption in the colloquial sense. It is the system operating as designed.

And beneath all of it: the funding flows. Political campaigns require money at a scale that can only come from wealth. The result is a structural dependency - politicians who need donors to win, and donors who extract policy in return. Citizens United in the United States formalized what was already functionally true: that political speech, in a capitalist democracy, is proportional to capital.

2.2 The silence of opposition parties

If this analysis holds, it explains something that otherwise defies explanation: the spectacular inadequacy of opposition parties in the face of genuine political emergencies.

The Trump/GOP/MAGA project has, in the space of a few years, mounted an assault on democratic norms, on the rights of queer and trans people, on environmental regulation, on international alliances, on workers' protections, and on the basic epistemic infrastructure of shared reality. The response from the Democratic Party establishment - and from comparable centrist parties in Canada and the UK - has been, at best, procedural objection. At worst, collaborative silence.

This is not stupidity. It is not timidity. It is the logical behaviour of political actors who share, with their nominal opponents, the same financial substrate. When your campaign contributors overlap substantially with theirs; when your senior staff will revolve through the same lobbying firms; when the institutional donors who sustain your party infrastructure are the same corporations and billionaires whose regulatory preferences drive their donations to the other side - you are not, in any functional sense, the opposition. You are the B-team of the same project.

The Democratic establishment's refusal to mount a serious, structural critique of oligarchy is not a strategic calculation. It is a financial constraint dressed as pragmatism.

2.3 A case study: Mark Carney and the Canadian variant

Canada presents itself as a counterpoint to American democratic decay - a more civil, more institutionally stable version of liberal governance. The tenure of Prime Minister Mark Carney instructs us otherwise.

Carney arrives in office trailing impeccable establishment credentials: economist, former Governor of the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England, senior Goldman Sachs operative. He is exactly the profile that the financial substrate produces and promotes - a technocrat whose worldview was formed inside the institutions of concentrated capital and whose policy instincts reliably serve them.

The pattern is consistent. Carney has justified Trump's geopolitical aggression rather than confronting it structurally. He has proposed a "sovereign wealth fund" - marketed in the language of national interest, functioning as a privatization mechanism that routes public assets toward private returns. He promotes fossil fuel development in the face of climate emergency, subordinating the survival calculus of the planet to the quarterly earnings expectations of the energy sector.

This is not a series of miscalculations. It is a coherent programme - the programme of a man whose formation, networks, and obligations are to capital, not to citizens. I call him Sam Slick: the charming, smooth-tongued operator whose folksy surface conceals the interests he actually serves. The rich get richer. The rest get managed.

Carney is not an anomaly in Canadian politics. He is its logical product - and a demonstration that the financial substrate does not stop at the 49th parallel.

2.4 The industrial complexes as features, not bugs

The military-industrial complex. The prison-industrial complex. The poverty industry - the vast infrastructure of nonprofits, consultancies, and government contracts that manage poverty without ending it. The pharmaceutical complex. The fossil fuel complex.

These are routinely described, even by progressives, as "failures" - as systems that were designed for one purpose but have been "captured" or "corrupted" by private interests. This framing is precisely backwards. They are not failures. They are profit centres. They perform their actual function with extraordinary efficiency: the extraction of public wealth into private hands, sustained by legislative protection, regulatory capture, and the conversion of social crises into revenue streams.

The prison-industrial complex does not fail to rehabilitate. It was never designed to rehabilitate. It was designed to incarcerate - and incarceration, at scale, is enormously profitable for those who build the facilities, supply the food, provide the labour brokerage, and invest in the bonds. Similarly, the poverty industry does not fail to eliminate poverty. It thrives on its perpetuation. A world without poverty is a world without a poverty industry.

This is capitalism operating exactly as its internal logic demands: the conversion of every human condition - including suffering - into an opportunity for accumulation.

2.5 Manufactured hopelessness as political technology

Into this structural reality, social media injects the appearance of political agency. Movements trend. Hashtags propagate. Petitions circulate. The outrage machine produces its daily outputs. And almost none of it - absent an extraordinary convergence of factors - translates into structural change.

This is not accidental. The attention economy that underlies social media platforms is itself a capitalist enterprise. Its incentive is engagement, not liberation. Rage engages. Solidarity, at scale, is harder to monetize. The platforms that host political speech are owned by the same class of billionaires whose interests are served by ensuring that political energy remains on the surface - loud, visible, and ultimately contained.

But social media noise is only one mechanism of control. The other, more insidious one is the manufacture of political despair. When nothing changes regardless of who wins; when opposition parties are indistinguishable from governing ones in their fundamental commitments; when the scale of the problem appears to dwarf the capacity of any available response - the rational conclusion, for many people, is withdrawal. Why vote? Why organize? Why bother?

This resignation is not a natural response to objective conditions. It is a cultivated one. Manufactured hopelessness is a political technology - a wedge tactic whose objective is the atomization of potential opposition. An apathetic population does not strike, does not organize, does not build the solidarity networks that threaten concentrated power. Despair is not a side effect of the system's failures. It is one of its primary outputs, deliberately amplified.

Recognizing this is itself an act of resistance.

2.6 The triangle that explains everything

The core dynamic is simple enough to state in **three nodes**: wealth protects power; power protects wealth; both suppress the conditions under which either could be challenged.

Far-right and libertarian policy - deregulation, privatization, tax reduction for the wealthy, the dismantling of public infrastructure - is not an ideological project in the sense of being motivated by genuine philosophical conviction. It is a class project: the systematic elimination of every institutional mechanism by which collective action could constrain the accumulation of private wealth. The ideological dressing is the product of those think tanks, those foundations, those media properties - all funded by the same wealth whose interests they serve.

In this light, the libertarian turn in contemporary conservatism is perfectly coherent: it is wealth telling the state to remove itself from the business of constraining wealth. And the liberal centre's failure to name this is not puzzlement; it is complicity, structural and financial.

2.7 What democratic socialism actually means in this context

Democratic socialism is not, as its opponents characterize it, an atavistic attachment to Soviet-era state control. It is a structural argument: that the political economy must be governed by democratic accountability rather than by private accumulation, and that this requires the subordination of capital to collective decision-making - through taxation, public ownership, labour rights, antitrust enforcement, and the democratic governance of the institutions (including media and financial systems) that currently function as instruments of class power.

It means that the military budget should be determined by democratic deliberation about security needs, not by the lobbying of Lockheed Martin. It means that housing policy should be set by the housing needs of the population, not by the return requirements of real estate investment trusts. It means that climate policy - which is to say, the survival policy of the species - should be governed by the science of biophysical limits, not by the quarterly earnings expectations of ExxonMobil.

It means, in short, that the people should actually govern - which is to say that democracy should be real, rather than the managed performance it currently is.

Albert Einstein understood this clearly. Writing in 1949, he identified the "economic anarchy of capitalist society" as the source of the evils of his time, and argued that a planned economy oriented toward social need rather than private profit was the necessary corrective. The analysis has not aged. The conditions it describes have only intensified.

2.8 The disease has a name. So does the cure

The first step toward any of this is accurate diagnosis. The cancer is not bad policy. The cancer is the structural capture of policy-making by private wealth. Until that is named - plainly, persistently, without the softening euphemisms of "polarization" and "dysfunction" - the treatment will continue to miss the disease.

The second step is building the counter-power that makes the diagnosis politically consequential: unions, solidarity networks, community institutions, economic boycotts, civil disobedience, truth networks that operate outside the attention economy, education grounded in universal human rights and social justice. Every mechanism that Christofascist movements like Trumpist MAGA work systematically to destroy is, not coincidentally, a mechanism by which democratic socialism becomes possible. That is not a coincidence. It tells you exactly whose interests those movements serve - and exactly where the work of resistance must be directed.

Name the disease. Build the counter-power: [democratic socialism](#).

3 Author

Victoria Stuart, Ph.D. (she/her/hers) is a democratic socialist researcher and advocate based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. She writes at [Mastodon.social](#) and [Persagen.org/wpi/](#)

Ph.D., Biology, University of Victoria, 2000

Founder, Persagen.org

Vancouver, B.C., Canada

e: mail@Persagen.org [preferred] | Victoria.A.Stuart@gmail.com

w: <https://Persagen.org/wpi/>

s: <https://mastodon.social/@persagen>

I gratefully acknowledge that I live and work on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples: the xmkym (Musqueam), Swxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Slílwta (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

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4 Recommended reading

- Gibbs, David N., *Revolt of the rich: How the politics of the 1970s widened America's class divide* (Columbia University Press, 2024).¹ Traces the elite coalition-building of the Nixon and Carter eras as the origin point of the modern free-market turn: Friedman-aligned laissez-faire economists, the Mont Pelerin Society, the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Enterprise Institute, The Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institution, mobilization of the Christian right, and the wedge-issue tactics and populist rebranding of "liberty"/"freedom" rhetoric.
- Although slightly dated, Jane Mayer's *Dark Money: The hidden history of the billionaires behind the rise of the radical right* (2016)² remains topical. *Dark Money* documents conservative and libertarian billionaires' ideologies - which includes the subjugation of women and women's rights,ⁿ¹ eliminating the separation of church and state,ⁿ²⁻ⁿ¹¹ [dominion theocracy](#), eliminating taxation on wealth, eliminating social programs and services, and privatizing federal agencies (e.g. United States Postal Serviceⁿ¹²⁻ⁿ¹⁶).
- Likewise, Nancy MacLean's *Democracy in Chains: The deep history of the radical right's stealth plan for America* (2018)³ documents conservative attacks on democracy;
- Grant Kien's *Communicating with Memes: Consequences in post-truth civilization* (2019)⁴ documents the influence and toxicity of social media;
- Anne Nelson's *Shadow Network: Media, money, and the secret hub of the Radical Right* (2019);^{5,n17}
- Mary Zeigler's *Dollars for Life: The anti-abortion movement and the fall of the Republican establishment* (2024);⁶ and
- Legal scholars Jon Michaels and David Noll document the weaponization of state-sponsored citizen vigilantism in their 2024 book *Vigilante Nation: How state-sponsored terror threatens our democracy*.⁷ That socially devastating strategy originated with attorney [Jonathan Mitchell](#)'s antiabortion [Texas Heartbeat Act](#) (Texas Senate Bill 8 of 2021) [[Persagen.org](#) entry].ⁿ¹⁸ In that legislation Mitchell devised the novel enforcement mechanism of avoiding judicial review of the legislation by prohibiting government officials from enforcing the statute, and empowering private citizens to bring lawsuits against those who violate it. This [was engineered](#) to deny abortion providers the opportunity to seek federal-court injunctions against the enforcement of the statute. Since the law cannot be enforced by state officials but only by private individuals, it is difficult for abortion providers to identify the proper defendants to sue in a pre-enforcement lawsuit, which prevents them from challenging the constitutionality of the act prior to its taking effect. U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice [John Roberts](#) wrote that "the statutory scheme before the court is not only unusual, but unprecedented."
- The Nobel Prize in Literature 2005 was awarded to [Harold Pinter](#) *who in his plays uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle and forces entry into oppression's closed rooms*. Harold Pinter's Nobel Lecture was pre-recorded, and shown on video on 2005-Dec-07, in Börssalen at the Swedish Academy in Stockholm. Speaking with obvious difficulty in the lecture while seated in a wheelchair, Pinter distinguishes between the search for truth in art and the avoidance of truth in politics. Watch the video and/or read the transcript here: [Art, Truth and Politics](#).ⁿ¹⁹
- Canadian ecosocialist activist [Ian Angus](#) is writing a new book with the working title *Social Murder: Capitalism's assault on our health and survival*. Ian posted (2026-Jun-12) a draft chapter - [How Obama, Trump, and Biden blocked court action on climate](#) on his excellent [ClimateAndCapitalism.com](#) website. Check out his 2026 book *Metabolic Rifts: Capitalism's assault on the Earth system*.⁸

References

- [1] David N. Gibbs (2024). *Revolt of the Rich: How the politics of the 1970s widened America's class divide*. Columbia University Press. Inequality in the United States has reached staggering proportions, with a massive share of wealth held by the very richest. How was such a dramatic shift in favor of a narrow elite possible in a democratic society? David N. Gibbs explores the forces that shaped the turn toward free market economics and wealth concentration and finds their roots in the 1970s. He argues that the political transformations of this period resulted from a "revolt of the rich," whose defense of their class interests came at the expense of the American public.

Drawing on extensive archival research, Gibbs examines how elites established broad coalitions that brought together business conservatives, social traditionalists, and militarists. At the very top, Richard Nixon's administration quietly urged corporate executives to fund conservative think tanks and seeded federal agencies with free-market economists. Even Jimmy Carter's ostensibly liberal administration brought deregulation to the financial sector along with the imposition of severe austerity measures that hurt the living standards of the working class. Through a potent influence campaign, academics and intellectuals sold laissez-faire to policy makers and the public, justifying choices to deregulate industry, cut social spending, curb organized labor, and offshore jobs, alongside expanding military interventions overseas.

Shedding new light on the political alliances and policy decisions that tilted the playing field toward the ultrawealthy, *Revolt of the Rich* unveils the origins of today's stark disparities.

Excerpt: ... in 2018, the political scientists Benjamin Page and Martin Gilens concluded, "The wealthy, corporations, and organized interest groups have substantial influence" over the U.S. political process, while "ordinary citizens have little or no independent influence at all." It was during the 1970s that these trends were set in motion. [Columbia University Press](#), June 2024.

- [2] Mayer, Jane (2016). *Dark Money: The hidden history of the billionaires behind the rise of the radical right*. Doubleday. [\[Wikipedia entry\]](#) Who are the immensely wealthy right-wing ideologues shaping the fate of America today? *Dark Money* is an electrifying work of investigative journalism that uncovers the agenda of this powerful group. In her new preface, Jane Mayer discusses the results of the most recent election and Donald Trump's victory, and how, despite much discussion to the contrary, this was a huge victory for the billionaires who have been pouring money in the American political system. Why is America living in an age of profound and widening economic inequality? Why have even modest attempts to address climate change been defeated again and again? Why do hedge-fund billionaires pay a far lower tax rate than middle-class workers? In a riveting and indelible feat of reporting, Jane Mayer illuminates the history of an elite cadre of plutocrats - headed by the Kochs, the Scaifes, the Olins, and the Bradleys - who have bankrolled a systematic plan to fundamentally alter the American political system. Mayer traces a byzantine trail of billions of dollars spent by the network, revealing a staggering conglomeration of think tanks, academic institutions, media groups, courthouses, and government allies that have fallen under their sphere of influence. Drawing from hundreds of exclusive interviews, as well as extensive scrutiny of public records, private papers, and court proceedings, Mayer provides vivid portraits of the secretive figures behind the new American oligarchy and a searing look at the carefully concealed agendas steering the nation. *Dark Money* is an essential book for anyone who cares about the future of American democracy. [Doubleday](#), January 2016.
- [3] MacLean, Nancy (2018). *Democracy in Chains: The deep history of the radical right's stealth plan for America*. Penguin Random House. [\[Wikipedia entry\]](#) Behind today's headlines of billionaires taking over our government is a secretive political establishment with long, deep, and troubling roots. The capitalist radical right has been working not simply to change who rules, but to fundamentally alter the rules of democratic governance. But billionaires did not launch this movement; a white intellectual in the embattled Jim Crow South did. *Democracy in Chains* names its true architect - the Nobel Prize-winning political economist James McGill Buchanan - and dissects the operation he and his colleagues designed over six decades to alter every branch of government to disempower the majority. In a brilliant and engrossing narrative, Nancy MacLean shows how Buchanan forged his ideas about government in a last gasp attempt to preserve the white elite's power in the wake of the 1954 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, [Brown v. Board of Education](#). In response to the widening of American democracy, he developed a brilliant, if diabolical, plan to undermine the ability of the majority to use its

numbers to level the playing field between the rich and powerful and the rest of us. Corporate donors and their right-wing foundations were only too eager to support Buchanan's work in teaching others how to divide America into "makers" and "takers." And when a multimillionaire on a messianic mission to rewrite the social contract of the modern world, Charles Koch, discovered Buchanan, he created a vast, relentless, and multi-armed machine to carry out Buchanan's strategy. Without Buchanan's ideas and Koch's money, the libertarian right would not have succeeded in its stealth takeover of the [Republican Party](#) as a delivery mechanism. Now, with Mike Pence as Vice President, the cause has a longtime loyalist in the White House, not to mention a phalanx of [Republicans](#) in the House, the Senate, a majority of state governments, and the courts, all carrying out the plan. That plan includes harsher laws to undermine unions, privatizing everything from schools to health care and Social Security, and keeping as many of us as possible from voting. Based on ten years of unique research, *Democracy in Chains* tells a chilling story of right-wing academics and big money run amok. This revelatory work of scholarship is also a call to arms to protect the achievements of twentieth-century American self-government. [Penguin Random House](#), June 2018.

- [4] Kien, Grant (2019). *Communicating with Memes: Consequences in post-truth civilization*. Lexington Books. *Communicating with Memes: Consequences in post-truth civilization* investigates the consequences of memetic communication, the causes of these consequences, and what action - if any - should be taken in response. Communicating with memes across social media networks has become a commonplace activity in today's world, despite the fact that just years earlier, this mode of communication was a rarity. The rapid adoption of this new mode of communication through ubiquitous social media and device use is resulting in a major transformation of the ways in which we think and behave in our digital world. From the election of Donald Trump, to online harassment and identity theft, to the resurgence of once-eradicated diseases due to the anti-vaxxer movement, Grant Kien analyzes fourteen major consequences of this shift and confronts the question of how to approach these consequences. [Rowman & Littlefield](#), 2019-Jun-03.
- [5] Nelson, Anne (2019). *Shadow Network: Media, money, and the secret hub of the Radical Right*. Bloomsbury Publishing. "Riveting.... Want to understand how so many Americans turned against truth? Read this book." - Nancy Maclean, author of *Democracy In Chains*.³

In 1981, emboldened by [Ronald Reagan's](#) election, a group of some fifty [Republican](#) operatives, evangelicals, oil barons, and gun lobbyists met in a Washington suburb to coordinate their attack on civil liberties and the social safety net. These men and women called their coalition the [Council for National Policy](#). Over four decades, this elite club has become a strategic nerve center for channeling money and mobilizing votes behind the scenes. Its secretive membership rolls represent a high-powered roster of fundamentalists, oligarchs, and their allies, from [Oliver North](#), [Ed Meese](#), and [Tim LaHaye](#) in the Council's early days, to [Kellyanne Conway](#), [Ralph Reed](#), [Tony Perkins](#), and the [DeVos](#) and [Mercer families](#) today.

In *Shadow Network*, award-winning author and media analyst [Anne Nelson](#) chronicles this astonishing history, and illuminates the coalition's key figures and their tactics. She traces how the collapse of American local journalism laid the foundation for the Council for National Policy's information war, and listens in on the hardline broadcasting its members control. And she reveals how the group has collaborated with the [Koch](#) brothers to outfit [Radical Right](#) organizations with state-of-the-art apps and a shared pool of captured voter data - outmaneuvering the [Democratic Party](#) in a digital arms race whose result has yet to be decided.

In a time of stark and growing threats to our most valued institutions and democratic freedoms, *Shadow Network* is essential reading. [Bloomsbury Publishing](#), October 2019.

- [6] Zeigler, Mary (2024). *Dollars for Life: The anti-abortion movement and the fall of the Republican establishment*. Yale University Press. The modern [Republican Party](#) (GOP) is the party of [conservative Christianity](#) and big business - two things so closely identified with the contemporary GOP that we hardly notice the strangeness of the pairing. Legal historian [Mary Zeigler](#) traces how the U.S. [anti-abortion movement](#) helped to forge and later upend this alliance. Beginning with the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision in [Buckley v. Valeo](#) (1976), right-to-lifers fought to gain power in the GOP by changing how [campaign spending](#) - and the [First Amendment](#) (U.S. Constitution: freedom of religion, speech, assembly, ...) - work.

The anti-abortion movement helped to revolutionize the rules of money in U.S. politics, and persuaded conservative voters to fixate on the federal courts. Ultimately, the campaign finance landscape that abortion

foes created fueled the GOP's embrace of [populism](#) and the rise of [Donald Trump](#). Ziegler offers a surprising new view of the slow drift to extremes in American politics - and explains how it had everything to do with the strange intersection of right-to-life politics and campaign spending [[dark money](#)]. [Yale University Press](#), February 2024.

- [7] Michaels, Jon and Noll, David (2024). *Vigilante Nation: How state-sponsored terror threatens our democracy*. Simon & Schuster. readers of [How Democracies Die](#), two legal scholars expose the [MAGA Republican](#) strategy to roll back civil, political, and privacy rights and subvert American democracy - and prescribe a plan for beating the Christian nationalists at their own game.

Time and again, when confronted with serious challenges to their power and privilege, white Christian nationalists seek solace - and satisfaction - in state-supported forms of vigilantism. ... Legal vigilantism has made a surprising, roaring comeback in the months and years following the failed coup of 2021-Jan-06 ... Overlapping networks of right-wing lawyers, politicians, plutocrats, and preachers have resurrected state-supported vigilantism.

Vigilante Nation tells this story of the American Right marginalizing, subordinating, and disenfranchising the increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan members of the American polity. [Simon & Schuster](#), 2024-Oct-08.

- [8] Angus, Ian (2026). *Metabolic Rifts: Capitalism's assault on the Earth system*. Monthly Review Press. Like an autoimmune disease that attacks the body it dwells in, capitalism is tearing apart the very planet that feeds it. *Metabolic Rifts: Capitalism's Assault on the Earth System*, builds on Karl Marx's insight that while capitalism is dependent on the natural world, it is also waging war on the natural systems that sustain life on Earth.

Focusing on deadly rifts in two of the most important natural systems - the carbon and nitrogen cycles - Ian Angus explains and elaborates on the Marxist view that capitalism is massively disrupting essential exchanges of matter and energy between society and the rest of nature, putting the entire Earth System in danger. After tracing the long-neglected history of metabolic rift theory in scientific and socialist writing, Angus draws on a wealth of modern research to extend and deepen the natural science basis of Marxist ecology. In clear, non-technical language, *Metabolic Rifts* offers a scientific basis for understanding the deep causes of today's environmental crises, and a program for action to prevent catastrophe in our time. [Monthly Review Press](#), March 2026.

Endnotes

- [n1] Sarah Stankorb (Feb. 2025). *The Christian nationalist plot to disenfranchise women voters*. The [Safeguard American Voter Eligibility \(SAVE\) Act](#), which purports to fend off the phantasmal threat of voter fraud, would throw millions of women off the voting rolls. [The New Republic](#), 2025-Feb-21. Accessed 2025-Feb-22.
- [n2] Madhani, Aamer and Smith, Peter (Feb. 2025). *After prayer breakfast, Trump creates task force to root out "anti-Christian bias"*. ... Trump signed an [executive order](#) 2025-Feb-06 directing the new task force to identify unlawful policies, practices, or conduct by all executive departments and agencies, and recommend any additional presidential or legislative action. Early in the day Trump joined the [National Prayer Breakfast](#) at the U.S. Capitol, a more than 70-year-old Washington D.C. tradition that brings together a bipartisan group of lawmakers for fellowship. He told lawmakers there that his relationship with religion had "changed" after a pair of failed assassination attempts last year [2024], and urged Americans to "bring God back" into their lives. ... [The Associated Press](#), 2025-Feb-06. Accessed 2025-Feb-06.
- [n3] McShane, Julianne (Feb. 2025). *Trump just outlined his plan to hand power to Christian nationalists*. "We want to bring religion back - stronger, bigger, better than ever before." We always knew that Trump's return to the White House would bring Christian nationalism to the highest levels of government. There's [Russell Vought](#), an avowed Christian nationalist and an author of [Project 2025](#), who is Trump's pick to lead the [Office of Management and Budget](#) - which leads the implementation of the president's policies, regulations, and funding decisions across the federal government, as my colleague Isabela Dias [has written](#). And there was the pair of Christian podcasters who, at a rally the night before Trump's inauguration, thanked God for "choosing President Donald Trump as a vessel for your nation," as my colleague David Corn [covered](#).

But at the [National Prayer Breakfast](#) - a decades-old, purportedly interfaith annual event - in Washington, D.C. 2025-Feb-06, President Trump laid out the steps he will take, now that he's in office, to make those dreams of [Christian nationalist](#) power a reality. "We want to bring religion back - stronger, bigger, better than ever before," he said. These measures will allegedly include:

- Creating a so-called Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty, which he so eloquently claimed will "be a very big deal;"
- Signing an executive order ordering newly-confirmed Attorney General [Pam Bondi](#) to "eradicate anti-Christian bias" inside the federal government and "prosecute anti-Christian violence and vandalism in our society;" and
- Creating a new Faith Office in the White House, which will be led by the [televangelist and Trump acolyte](#) Rev. [Paula White](#) - who, as my colleagues [Stephanie Mencimer](#) and [Kiera Butler](#) [have written](#), is often associated with an [evangelical](#) Christian movement known as the [New Apostolic Reformation](#), whose leaders claim that God speaks directly to them and "that Christians are called to wage a spiritual battle for control of the United States." ...

[Mother Jones](#), 2025-Feb-06. Accessed 2025-Feb-06.

- [n4] The Associated Press (Feb. 2025). *What is "ordo amoris"?* Vice President JD Vance invokes this medieval Catholic concept. Vice President JD Vance recently cited medieval Catholic theology in justifying the immigration crackdown under President Donald Trump. "Just Google 'ordo amoris,'" he posted 2025-Jan-30 on the social media platform X. He posted this in reply to criticism over statements he made in a Fox News interview: "You love your family, and then you love your neighbor, and then you love your community, and then you love your fellow citizens in your own country. And then after that, you can focus and prioritize the rest of the world." He claimed that the "far left" has inverted that. ...

What is 'ordo amoris'? It's been translated as "order of love" or "order of charity." It's a concept discussed by [St. Augustine](#) ("Augustine of Hippo"), an ancient theologian, who said everyone and everything should be loved in its own proper way. ... [The Associated Press](#), 2025-Feb-06. Accessed 2025-Feb-06.

- [n5] Elliott, Stephen (Sept. 2018). *Beaman Divorce Case Includes Allegations of Emotional Abuse, Use of Prostitutes*. Wife of car magnate and conservative donor claims "degradation, control, manipulation and abuse." Auto dealer and conservative political mega-donor Lee Beaman is due in court next week in his multimillion-dollar divorce case. In her trial brief, Beaman's fourth wife Kelley alleges that Lee Beaman made her watch videos of him having sex with a prostitute - what he called "training videos." On more than one occasion, Kelley Beaman

alleges, her husband persuaded her to have joint sexual encounters with prostitutes. Kelley Beaman says that Lee Beaman was so addicted to pornography that he would watch it on his iPad while sitting in the same room as his family, including his minor son. ...

Lee Beaman, a board member at both [Belmont University](#) (a private Christian university) and [Montgomery Bell Academy](#), has used his fortune to fund his favored political causes for years. ... Among his frequent donations to both local and national conservatives, Beaman made a maximum contribution to [Roy Moore's](#) U.S. Senate campaign three days after The Washington Post reported allegations that the former Alabama judge [had sexual relationships with teenagers](#) while he was in his 30s. Beaman has given more than \$40,000 to groups supporting [Marsha Blackburn's](#) campaign for U.S. Senate. ... [Nashville Scene](#), 2018-Sep-07. Accessed 2025-Feb-28.

- [n6] Saint Dymphna (Aug. 2021). *The binding of Grace Chapel: How Steve Berger sacrificed his church on the altar of authoritarianism*. Where outsiders could only see cracks in the foundation before, the public implosion of [Grace Chapel Church](#) [Franklin, Tennessee; [Calvinist theology](#); now [Southall Church](#)]'s congregation on Sunday morning has exposed the deep rifts in its leadership. ... One source spoke of [Steve Berger](#) specifically targeting wealthy, successful, and well-connected newcomers and demanding their loyalty - not to God or the church, but Berger himself. Perhaps this explains why a disproportionate segment of the congregation consists of politicians, business moguls, and lawyers. ... Vaguely biblical rants seem to be among his favorite tools to berate and publicly humiliate people. ...

After being alienated by the mentors that helped shape his faith - and, it seems, tethered him to reality - Berger began endorsing [conversion therapy](#), the Ugandan "Kill The Gays" bill [Uganda's [Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2014](#) | [Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023](#)], and a much more rigid idea of [complementarianism](#) [a theological view in some denominations of Christianity, Rabbinic Judaism, and Islam, that men and women have different but complementary roles and responsibilities in marriage, family, and religious life]. He soon settled into a more rabid anti-social-justice niche, preaching against feminism, socialism, and any other efforts to change society for the better.

Around 2014 he first hosted sermons by [Amir Tsarfati](#), a far-right Christian Zionist, who was soon followed by Dr. [Michael L. Brown](#), a Messianic Jew with a raging hatred for 2SLGBTQIA+ people. In 2018 Berger was first invited to the [National Prayer Breakfast](#), and now sits on the board of the Jerusalem prayer breakfast, both linked to shadowy political pressure group "Fellowship International".

Since then Berger has started preaching a dogma of [Christian supremacy](#), [Dominionism](#), and [Reconstructionism](#). For those blissfully unaware of these theological concepts, *Dominionism* is an evangelical movement trying to take dominion of the United States, placing influential Christian leaders in strategic areas of public life like government, culture, and economy. *Reconstructionism*, while it is typically disavowed by even the more extreme Evangelicals, is a highly influential school of thought that advocates the reconstruction of society under Biblical Law according to the interpretation of the preeminent writer of the genre, [R.J. Rushdoony](#). According to the controversial author, that includes for example the stoning of homosexuals, "loose women" and unruly children. ...

Among Berger's adherents are the Governor and First Lady of Tennessee, [Bill](#) and Maria Lee, Tennessee State Senator [Jack Johnson](#), his wife, Judge Deanna Johnson, and real estate tycoon and Republican megadonor Reese Smith III. Berger also has close ties to U.S. Senators [Marsha Blackburn](#) (R-TN) and [Bill Hagerty](#) (R-TN), former U.S. Senator [Bob Corker](#) (R-TN), and former CIA Director and Secretary of State [Mike Pompeo](#). Of late Berger has been spotted on [Telegram](#), a messaging app, soliciting prayers for meetings with congressmen in Washington D.C. ... [Saint Dymphna](#), 2021-Aug-31. Accessed 2025-Feb-28.

- [n7] Willis, Alexander (Dec. 2021). *Steve Berger resigns from Grace Chapel Elder Board following chaotic church service*. [Grace Chapel Church](#) [Franklin, Tennessee; [Calvinist theology](#); now [Southall Church](#)] founding Pastor Steve Berger announced Monday [2021-Dec-27] that he had resigned from his role as a church Elder Board member, and added that he will no longer preach at nor attend the church he and his wife Sarah Berger started more than 26 years ago. ... Berger added that he and his wife will now be "100% focused on ASI," or [Ambassador Services International](#), Berger's nonprofit discipleship program in Washington, D.C., designed to

cater toward elected officials. Grace Chapel is notably the home church of Tennessee Governor [Bill Lee](#). ... [Williamson Scene](#), 2021-Dec-31. Accessed 2025-Feb-28.

- [n8] Daryani, Connor (Sept. 2022). *Trustee Lee Beaman back on board despite past controversy*. [The [Belmont Vision](#) is the official, award-winning online news resource for Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee.] Lee Beaman is back on the Belmont University board of trustees following his highly publicized divorce - a proceeding filled with allegations of verbal and sexual abuse from his fourth wife, Kelley Beaman. ... [Belmont Vision](#), 2022-Feb-16. Accessed 2025-Feb-28.
- [n9] Kaplan, Joshua and Elliott, Justin and Mierjeski, Alex (Feb. 2025). *Speaker Mike Johnson is living in a D.C. house that is the center of a pastor's secretive influence campaign*. In 2021, [Steve Berger](#),^{n6,n7} an evangelical pastor who has attacked the [separation of church and state](#) as "a delusional lie" and called multinational institutions "demonic," set off on an ambitious project. His stated goal: minister to members of U.S. Congress so that what "they learn is then translated into policy." His base of operations would be a six-bedroom, \$3.7 million townhouse blocks from the U.S. Capitol. The house is owned by major Republican donor and Tennessee car magnate [Lee Beaman](#),^{n5,n8} who has joined Berger in advocating for and against multiple bills before Congress. U.S. House Speaker [Mike Johnson](#) has been staying at the home since around the beginning of 2025, according to interviews and videos obtained by ProPublica. ... Berger is vehemently opposed to the World Health Organization, which Trump moved to withdraw the U.S. from last month ... [and] same-sex marriage, saying "it opens the door to all manner of sexual depravity and wickedness" ... In Washington, D.C. Steve Berger quickly made connections at the highest levels of the Republican Party, holding Bible study sessions with senators, representatives and congressional aides. ... [ProPublica](#), 2025-Feb-28. Accessed 2025-Feb-28.
- [n10] Downen, Robert (Mar. 2025). *In Texas, Christian right grows confident and assertive*. Emboldened by court rulings and election victories, the [Christian right](#) is outspoken as it pushes its moral views through the Texas Legislature. ... Efforts by the Christian Right to put more of their religion in public schools are not new. But the tone of those debates in Texas has shifted this session, with bill supporters and some lawmakers openly arguing that such legislation is crucial to combating dropping church participation rates and what they say is a directly related decline in American morality. ...

Such statements have struck even longtime scholars and observers of the Religious Right as setting a new, more strident tone after years in which terms like "religious freedom" were the norm. Many in the movement had avoided explicitly centering Christianity in bills because doing so could prompt court challenges and discrimination complaints. The shift, experts said, reflects a Religious Right emboldened by recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions, the [second Trump administration](#), and the broader normalization of Christian nationalism in the [Republican Party](#) (GOP). ...

In Texas, the Christian Right's rising influence has coincided with the state GOP's alignment with two West Texas oil billionaires, [Tim Dunn](#) and [Farris Wilks](#), who have given tens of millions of dollars to push their far-right religious and social views. And groups like [Project Blitz](#), a coalition of Christian groups with deep Texas ties, have used that long-term approach to steadily normalize their views and chip away at [separation of church and state](#)ⁿ⁹ without drawing widespread opposition.

"Part of their legislative strategy is to be additive," said [Amanda Tyler](#), executive director of the [Baptist Joint Committee For Religious Liberty](#), which advocates for a strong church-state wall. "The idea is that you start lawmakers out with what appear to be lower-stakes legislation, and then once they take votes on that, they will move to more and more extreme versions of the legislation." "What we're seeing now is that strategy really coming to bear in Texas," she added. ... Texas has for years been an incubator for Christian Right policies that are exported to other states or codified into federal law by courts. ... [The Texas Tribune](#), 2025-Mar-17. Accessed 2025-Mar-17.

- [n11] Bollinger, Alex (May 2025). *Donald Trump says America should "forget about" the separation of church and state*. Trump said that instead of a separation of church and state, he will bring "religion back to our country." ...
- The executive order says that religious liberty is being violated by "discrimination or hostility from the Government" towards people who are just trying to "practice their faith." It says that some of these attacks have included ones that "infringe upon longstanding conscience protections, prevent parents from sending their

children to religious schools, threaten loss of funding or denial of non-profit tax status for faith-based entities, and single out religious groups and institutions for exclusion from governmental programs."

While the order doesn't get more specific, many of these could apply to LGBTQ+ rights. For example, adoption and fostering agencies that receive government funding have been restricted in some states from discriminating against same-sex couples. Many on the right see this as a form of religious discrimination, arguing that those organizations are religious in nature and therefore can't place children with same-sex couples, and that denying them government funding is a form of religious discrimination. [LGBTQ Nation](#), 2025-May-02. Accessed 2025-May-02.

- [n12] Gibson, Brittany (July 2020). *One billionaire vs. the mail*. The story of billionaire [Charles Koch](#)'s connections, influence, and ideological push to weaken and ultimately privatize one of America's most essential public services. A new [report \[pdf\]](#) details Charles Koch's 50-year war on the [United States Postal Service](#). [The American Prospect](#), 2020-Jul-09. Accessed 2025-Feb-22.
- [n13] Nguyen, Alex (Feb. 2025). *Is This the end of USPS?* [Mother Jones](#), 2025-Feb-22. Accessed 2025-Feb-22.
- [n14] Shankar, Vishal (Mar. 2025). *Wall Street bankers salivate over postal privatization*. At a [Morgan Stanley](#) conference last week, [Elon Musk](#) told attendees the U.S. federal government should privatize "as much as possible" - and singled out the [United States Postal Service](#) as a top target. Musk's comments are the latest in an alarming push from [Trump](#)'s team to strip-mine America's oldest and second-most popular agency (the USPS narrowly trails the [National Park Service](#), another victim of Musk's austerity chainsaw). Trump - who has long feuded with the U.S. Postal Service over [mail-in balloting](#) - stated in December 2025 he was "looking at" privatizing the USPS. [Revolving Door Project](#), 2025-Mar-12. Accessed 2025-Mar-12.
- [n15] Meyers, Nathan (Mar. 2025). *Elon Musk is accelerating a 50-year government privatization project*. Trump's [DOGE](#) campaign accelerates a longtime Republican trend. [Salon](#), 2025-Mar-22. Accessed 2025-Mar-22.
- [n16] Prescod, Paul (Mar. 2025). *Wells Fargo is plotting to privatize the post office*. A newly released [memo](#) from the banking giant Wells Fargo outlines a predatory scheme to dismantle the USPS: sell off profitable parts, slash union jobs, and raise prices by up to 140 percent. [Jacobin](#), 2025-Mar-22. Accessed 2025-Mar-22.
- [n17] Lee, Sabina (Nov. 2019). *How the American Right gets its message out*. Professor [Anne Nelson](#) reveals how the right-wing media have proliferated in the U.S. and infiltrated American voters in her new book *Shadow Network: Media, money, and the secret hub of the Radical Right*.⁵ [Columbia News](#), 2019-Nov-15. Accessed 2025-Mar-07.
- [n18] Pearson, Arn and Armiak, David (Oct. 2023). *After 50 years, this right-wing law factory is crazier than ever*. The [American Legislative Exchange Council](#) (ALEC) is where corporations and far-right groups go to buy government policy. ... Inspired by then California Governor [Ronald Reagan](#) and the [Powell Memorandum](#) (1971), three right-wing legislators in Chicago originally founded ALEC in 1973 as the Conservative Caucus of State Legislators. By 1975, the group designed to promote a socially conservative and pro-corporate agenda at the state level, was renamed the American Legislative Exchange Council, and moved to Washington, D.C. under the leadership of [Paul Weyrich](#), a Christian right activist who also helped found [Heritage Foundation](#) and the [Moral Majority](#). ...

The journey to passage of an ALEC [model bill] typically begins at a luxury resort hotel during one of ALEC's summer annual meetings or late-fall policy summits. Once there, corporate leaders and ALEC legislators - many of whom receive "[scholarships](#)" for their travel and lodging paid for by corporate lobbyists in their home states - meet in one of ALEC's ten policy [task force](#) meetings to consider legislative proposals typically drafted by corporations, trade associations, or right-wing think tanks. ... ALEC currently [claims](#) to have 300 corporate and foundation members, and more than 2,000 legislative members, with [over 200](#) in state leadership positions. ...

ALEC allowed the Family Research Council to tack on a [Pro-Life Legislative Summit](#) at the end of its December 2022 policy summit that featured [Jonathan Mitchell](#), "the author of the groundbreaking [Texas Heartbeat Act](#)," speaking on "how states can respond to one of the most eagerly awaited Supreme Court cases - [Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization](#) - and see successful legislation like the Texas Heartbeat Act [[Persagen.org](#) entry] passed in your state."

This summer [2023] ALEC kicked off its annual meeting with a reception for its legislators and [Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America](#) (SBA) to discuss the "post-Dobbs policy environment and state jurisdiction to protect the right to life." Attendees at that meeting were fed a [constant diet](#) of anti-abortion arguments and misinformation from SBA and the National Right to Life Committee. ... Nearly [700 ALEC legislators](#) in 22 states have already voted to ban abortion. ...

[The American Prospect](#), 2023-Oct-04. Accessed 2025-Mar-10.

- [n19] Stuart, Victoria A. (Apr. 2020). *Harold Pinter (2005): Art, Truth and Politics*. The Nobel Prize in Literature 2005 was awarded to [Harold Pinter](#) *who in his plays uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle and forces entry into oppression's closed rooms*. Harold Pinter's Nobel Lecture was pre-recorded, and shown on video on 2005-Dec-07, in Börssalen at the Swedish Academy in Stockholm. Speaking with obvious difficulty in the lecture while seated in a wheelchair, Pinter distinguishes between the search for truth in art and the avoidance of truth in politics. [Persagen.org](#), 2020-Apr-29. Accessed 2026-Jun-13.