

INVESTIGATING POLITICAL RIGGING:

**A Research Agenda for Analyzing Who Influences Policy Decisions
In the 21st Century, and How**

Janine R. Wedel, Dana A. Dolan, Nazia Hussain

**Presented at the International Workshops on Public Policy,
International Public Policy Association (IPPA)
Pittsburgh, PA: June 2018**

Contact Information:*

Janine R. Wedel, Schar School of Government and Policy, George Mason University;
jwedel@gmail.edu

Dana A. Dolan, Honors College, George Mason University; ddolan1@gmu.edu

Nazia Hussain, Center for Policy Research, UN University, Tokyo; hussain@unu.edu

***Please see end of paper for author bios.**

INVESTIGATING POLITICAL RIGGING: A Research Agenda for Analyzing Who Influences Policy Decisions In the 21st Century, and How

Democracy is under siege worldwide. Many analysts point to the 2016 election of Donald Trump—an outsider who displays open contempt for constitutional rights and political norms—as marking a new era of democratic fragility. We contend that this “new” era has been decades in the making. Trump’s rise, and its implicit rebuke of an establishment and “rigged system,” are symptoms of the reconfiguration of democratic governance. This article takes that sentiment seriously and analyzes the practices through which influence-wielding elites now fashion the rules of the game to their own advantage. These practices, which highlight new spaces of policy and governance, have not only served to further consolidate elite power, but also to weaken political institutions intended as checks and balances on the accumulation of power. The fact that political analysts were blindsided by events suggests that conceptual approaches may warrant rethinking. This article takes a first step toward filling that conceptual gap by identifying and conceptualizing new practices employed to rig the rules of democratic political systems.

Years before Trump’s ascension, the idea of a rigged system flourished within the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street. Both movements shared an intuitive sense that the system is gamed; both blasted a Wall Street bailout and establishment “corruption.” Corruption remained a pressing concern for many Americans,¹ a sentiment upon which candidate Trump capitalized. This concern grew alongside two crucial societal developments that have unfolded over the past 40 years: income inequality of a magnitude not seen since the Great Depression,² and declining trust in public institutions.³ Many Americans see themselves as outsiders.⁴

If analysts widely failed to grasp popular disillusionment, the “rigged system” itself has been even more neglected.⁵ Citing “intensifying political battles” over “rising middle-class economic strains,” among other factors, Hacker, Rehm, and Schlesinger⁶ remark that “political science has had relatively little to say about the roots or effects of these new realities.” We ask whether analysts missed these critical developments because prevailing conceptual approaches to studying power and influence are insufficiently equipped to capture novel modes of power and

¹ See polls conducted by Chapman University (2017) in 2015 and 2016 and Gallup (Clifton 2016).

² See, e.g., Desilver 2013.

With regard to inequality, Galasso 2013 lay blame on “political capture” as a root cause, while Transparency International, summarizing worldwide evidence, concludes that inequality and corruption are “closely related and provide a source for popular discontent” (Heinrich, 2017).

³ Gallup 2017.

⁴ E.g., Hochschild (2016).

⁵ Notable exceptions include Gilens and Page (2014).

⁶ Hacker, Rehm, and Schlesinger 2013, 24.

influence that arose in recent decades amid systemic change. These new modes are enacted by power brokers who find openings in a world reshaped by the combined effects of privatization, deregulation, financialization, and digitization.

While some new modes of wielding influence debuted with digitization, others hark back to longstanding practices associated primarily with non-U.S. and European contexts. These practices have now appeared in elite centers of power in the United States and European democracies, albeit in new iterations—and well before Trump’s rise. Emerging scholarship shows that new practices unaccounted for in the traditional conceptual lexicon operate alongside, and sometimes in conjunction with, more familiar forms of political influence, such as interest groups and registered K Street lobbyists. And, while the flood of “dark money” and Super PACs occasioned by the 2010 Citizens United ruling are well known, the forms of influencing we detail are not. Political analysts have devoted little attention to them, and yet they help shape crucial policy outcomes—from war policy to health care to the regulation of risky financial instruments.

Prevailing conceptual approaches still pay most attention to what is formal and visible: elected representatives, political parties, interest groups, formal lobbies, and offices of government, with much less consideration to what is informal, flexible, and mobile. They take for granted the existence of stable institutions and clarity about who does what and who is acting in whose interests. But the stability of Western democracies can be relied upon no more. Terms such as “capture” are inadequate to chart dynamic processes. Others, such as “old boys’ networks” or “Wise Men,” long deployed to describe informal groupings, or “crony capitalism,” invoked during the late 1990s Asian financial crisis, lack analytical rigor and fail to convey the new power brokers’ modus operandi or patterns of interaction with state, corporate, and other organizations. An urgent need has thus arisen for approaches better equipped to study the new modes of influencing and what they portend for bedrocks of democratic process, institutions, and norms.

To address this challenge, we suggest that certain concepts typically employed to examine political and economic developments in non-U.S. and European contexts could now usefully address U.S. and European democracies. Additionally, we offer a framework to help conceptualize difficult-to-detect and democracy-defying influencing associated with digital and social media. Useful concepts, we argue, must move beyond formal institutions and static models that limit understanding of dynamic processes.

To that end, we: (1) review the expanding literature on the organization and modus operandi of the new breed of power brokers, which many Americans might equate with establishment corruption, and the transformational developments that occasioned them; (2) present three dynamic practices of powerbrokers—informality, flexibility, and digital-powered simulacra—and how they help illuminate contemporary forms of influencing; and (3) suggest what these political rigging practices augur for established political institutions and how incorporating them into the political vocabulary could contribute to political analysis at this precarious time.

If today's anti-establishment movements are in part a response to rigging—the sense that the powers that be can act in their own interests with near total impunity—new conceptual frameworks are imperative in the search for understanding the appeal of Trump and other illiberals exploiting mainstream dissatisfaction. Before detailing the three practices, it is necessary to show how the exercise of influence has evolved in recent decades and how the new power brokers took hold in the United States and beyond.

The Rise of New Influence Elites and What They Wrought

A burgeoning multidisciplinary literature on elites in the United States, the United Kingdom, and on the European continent posits a contrast between the way elites operate and organize influence today and that of the “power elite” famously described by C. Wright Mills a half century ago.⁷ Mills coined the term to describe the interlocking constellation of government officials, military leaders, and corporate executives who, he contended, effectively controlled major political and social decision making in the United States.⁸

The strength of Mills's power elite rests on command and control, derived from Weber's classic model of bureaucracy, in which hierarchical structures are distinct and bureaucrats wield executive power. Of course, institution-based forms of power that rest on formal position still exist. But today these hierarchies are subject to competition from, and compelled to interact much more with, forms of power grounded in networks.⁹ This network-based power derives from players' positions in informal social networks and links to organizations and venues that, more than in the past, connect elites across a global plane. The potency of today's elite power thus resides substantially in elites' roles as connectors.¹⁰

What created the space that this new breed of elites now occupies and owns? The past few decades have witnessed an unprecedented confluence of transformational developments:¹¹ (1) the privatization, deregulation, and governmental “reform” fervor beginning in the early 1980s; (2) the Cold War's end a decade later, dispersing global authority and opening up sparsely governed arenas; and (3) the Internet's rise soon after, occasioned by the earlier advent of digital technology; and (4) financialization, which multiplied the number of lucrative intermediary positions in finance, while weakening the role of managerial elites.¹²

⁷ Davis and Williams 2017; Davis and Walsh 2017; Savage and Williams 2008; Wedel 2009, 2014, 2017.

⁸ Mills 1956.

⁹ Davis and Williams 2017.

¹⁰ Savage and Williams 2008; Davis and Williams 2017; Wedel 2009, 2017.

¹¹ Carroll 2008; Wedel 2009, 23-45; Wedel 2017, 154-157; Davis and Williams 2017; Davis and Walsh 2016.

¹² Savage and Williams 2008, 10, 11. See also Carroll 2008, 44-63. Thus, while capital used to move from financial centers to corporations, now bankers and traders trade their own portfolios, reaping large profits.

These seismic developments have reconfigured the organizational ecosystem. They have created opportunities for players ranging from transnational networks laundering money or promoting human rights to currency traders conducting instant global transactions to consultants doing work previously performed by government employees.¹³ A plethora of entities have been set up by elites as vehicles of influence, including think tank, philanthropic, “grassroots,” nonprofit, and consulting organizations. These players are more flexible, mobile, and global in reach while being less visible than their forebears of living memory.¹⁴

Because they debuted to take advantage of a new ecosystem and because they practice a distinctive *modus operandi*, a novel term—“influence elites”¹⁵—has been coined to describe them. Influence elites are defined by these practices: (1) their *informality* and supplanting of formal structures and processes (while still using them when beneficial); (2) their *flexibility*, shifting and overlapping roles, and lack of fixed attachment to any particular sector or organization in pursuit of their strategic goals; (3) the *entities they mobilize*, including consultancies, think tanks, and nongovernmental organizations; and (4) *their roles as connectors*, among government, corporate, and nongovernmental organizations and venues, and their networks vis-à-vis each other. Years before Trump, these means of organizing and operating became established practice for much of the Washington establishment of both parties. These practices defy democratic standards of accountability and contribute to the impression that the political elite prioritized their own private agendas above the public interest.

Enter Trump. He may enjoy wide appeal because, as Max Weber has written, periods of intense social transformation often produce “charismatic authority” that promises a break from bureaucratic and traditional authority by being “inimical to rules”¹⁶ and renouncing the establishment.¹⁷ As establishment influence elites wield power in elusive ways, as incomes slump for all but the wealthiest, as technology radically alters our ability to tell truth from lies, there is no denying we are in the midst of vast social change.

Trump, we note, is not an influence elite. As a wealthy celebrity and real estate developer before the election, Trump was followed by accusations of fraud but had little need to engage in the kind of subtle manipulation seen as business-as-usual among the Washington establishment.

¹³ In 2015 Light (2016) found a ratio of 1.81 federal contract workers to 1 federal employee, or almost two contract workers for each government employee. Contractors run intelligence operations, control crucial databases, and choose and oversee other contractors, often with little or no oversight from actual government employees (e.g., Verkuil 2007; Wedel 2009, 73–110). And there has been an increase in the numbers and influence of think tanks and quasi-official bodies like government advisory boards (e.g., Ginsberg 2009; Glassman 2013).

¹⁴ Savage and Williams 2008; Wedel 2009, 2017; Davis and Williams 2017.

¹⁵ Wedel 2017.

¹⁶ Weber 1947, 361.

¹⁷ Weber 1947, 362.

Candidate Trump railed against this establishment, promising to “drain the swamp.” To the contrary, he and members of his administration have been using practices honed by establishment influence elites, as well as fresh, flamboyant practices that abjure their predecessors’ subtlety. He has violated long-established informal norms by declining to fully divest from his business and release his tax returns and in installing his family in powerful official and unofficial roles. And he has instated numerous officials with direct financial connections to the sector they might oversee.

Thus, today, combinations of influencing practices are found in and around the Trump administration. The four practices of influence elites can appear in different permutations; only some of today’s power brokers embody them all and hence qualify as “influence elites.” As we shall see, the first two practices—(1) informality and (2) flexibility—sometimes work together with (3) mobilizing entities and (4) serving as connectors. Practices such as informality can (and often are) employed alone. While Trump fails to exhibit most qualities of influence elites, he is an unprecedented exemplar for informality, eschewing official channels (in diplomacy and other arenas) and smashing informal norms.

In the next section, we investigate political rigging practices under three categories: informality and flexibility (introduced above) and digital-powered simulacra, a practice of huge and growing import. We ask how they impact democratic institutions, and how conceptual frameworks might fall short.

Political Rigging Practices

The three political rigging practices—informality, flexibility, and digital-powered simulacra—underlain by concepts of the same name, have been insufficiently considered in the American context. For the first two categories, we consider examples in light of theoretical insights gleaned from study elsewhere. While related concepts such as “interest groups,” “lobbies,” “revolving doors,” and “capture” remain staples of political influence, as typically studied they inadequately characterize novel practices here observed. For example, “capture,” which occurs when outside parties effectively gain control of government decisions or practices,¹⁸ connotes a wholesale, unbending, and presumably indefinite state. On the other hand, informality and flexibility focus attention on the action.

To investigate the third category—digital-powered simulacra—we explore the potent combination of digital messaging and simulacra, things that have only a surface resemblance to what they once were and now purport to be, but are not.¹⁹

¹⁸ On regulatory, state, and political “capture,” see, e.g., Mitnick 2011, World Bank 2000, and Galasso 2013, respectively.

¹⁹ Baudrillard 1994.

Examining these political rigging practices provides insight into how influencing was changing decades before Trump and what they and their attendant concepts might mean for democracy and political analysis at this fragile time.

Informality

Informal and network-based practices and systems have long been no stranger to much, if not most, of the world. A robust multidisciplinary literature on informality worldwide grapples with what are variously called informal institutions, informal economies (also “second,” “shadow,” “gray,” and “black” economies), informal rules, informal norms, and informal practices and is applied in fields from urban studies to development economics to elite behavior and democracy research.²⁰ Helmke and Levitsky, who studied informality in Latin America, write that because “informal rules shape how democratic institutions work... focus[ing] exclusively on formal rules thus risk[s] missing much of what shapes and constrains political behavior, which can yield an incomplete—if not wholly inaccurate—picture of how politics works.”²¹

Invoking Douglass North and Guillermo O’Donnell, Helmke and Levitsky differentiate between formal and informal institutions: two types of “rules and procedures that structure social interaction by constraining and enabling actors’ behavior.”²² Informal institutions are “socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside officially sanctioned channels,” while formal institutions are instantiated through channels that are “widely accepted as official.” Critically, informal institutions are always enforced in some way, such as by social condemnation, loss of job, or physical violence, and often by state officials acting through formal institutions.²³ Positing four ways (not mutually exclusive) in which informal and formal institutions can interact—complementary, substitutive, accommodating, and competing—Helmke and Levitsky show how various interfaces bear consequences for democracy.²⁴

Informal Norms or Rules

Informal norms have been called the “soft guardrails of democracy.”²⁵ Violating informal norms or rules of democracy in American politics is not new with Trump. They have been seriously and increasingly abused for some 40 years.²⁶ But Trump has taken the enterprise to unprecedented heights. While, as we said, Trump is not an influence elite, during the presidential campaign and since assuming the presidency, he has battered informal norms on a nearly daily basis. This “serial norm breaker”²⁷ shatters taboos both in what he says and how he says it—

²⁰ E.g., Helmke and Levitsky 2006.

²¹ Helmke and Levitsky 2006, p. 2.

²² Helmke and Levitsky 2006, 5; see also Ledeneva 2006, 3.

²³ Helmke and Levitsky 2006, 5-6.

²⁴ Helmke and Levitsky 2006.

²⁵ Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 101.

²⁶ Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 146-167.

²⁷ Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018.

from attacking the courts as “biased” and “political” and questioning the impartiality of a Mexican-American judge²⁸ to dubbing media that disagree with him “fake,” threatening news organizations, and singling out journalists for scorn.²⁹

One example aptly shows how abusing an informal custom can harm an enshrined institution. Trump’s refusal to release his tax returns bucks a 40-year tradition of voluntarily providing visibility into a candidate’s finances.³⁰ This informal tradition supports a formal institution—the U.S. Constitution’s Emoluments Clause—which aims to avoid corrupting foreign influences. The Emoluments Clause itself appears unenforceable, but when candidates provide visibility via tax returns, they informally demonstrate compliance. Helmke and Levitsky call this a *substitutive* informal institution, employed to attain the outcome that a formal institution alone cannot achieve.³¹ Trump’s flouting of this longstanding norm leaves questions regarding the potential for corrupting foreign influence.

Crucially for democratic society, such informal rule-busting has little or no formal recourse precisely *because* it is informal. Tellingly, Trump has used that as a defense, saying that certain norm-busting activities don’t break the law. When his speech has flirted with inciting violence, he notes that he is “joking.” He denies that his campaign colluded with Russia, but even if it did, he says, that’s “not illegal.”³²

While some of Trump’s informal rule-breaking is blatant and widely covered by media, as we shall see, practices of informality are often much less visible, yet imperative to examine.

Informal Practices

A concept elaborated by Ledeneva, who has conducted extensive research in Russia, informal practices are strategies that involve navigating formal rules and informal norms to achieve personal goals.³³ The concept places human agency—the ability to act upon and, in the process,

²⁸ E.g., Brennan Center 2017.

²⁹ E.g., Stelter 2017.

³⁰ E.g., Disis 2017.

³¹ Helmke & Levitsky 2006, 16.

³² E.g., Bowden 2017.

³³ Ledeneva 2006, 22. While Helmke and Levitsky (2006) use “rules” as the entry point, Ledeneva (2006) focuses on the players’ agency and patterns of interaction between formal and informal rules, as discerned through players’ practices. These perspectives—institutions-as-practices (Ledeneva) and institutions-as-rules (Helmke and Levitsky)—are wholly compatible.

affect one's circumstances—at its core. Informal practices are what players do;³⁴ they are regular, recurring activities that exhibit clear patterns, structure, logic, and predictability.³⁵

Informal practices have been observed far and wide, including in U.S. politics. For instance, gerrymandering, while not usually thought of that way, is a longstanding informal institution and practice, one that has become infinitely more potent with digitization.

Evidence suggests that certain informal practices in U.S. politics may be on the rise. One burgeoning informal practice is known as “shadow lobbying.” While registered lobbyists remain powerful, they are now joined by shadow lobbyists, who choose not to register, as they are required to do by law, when they are clearly wielding influence that is difficult to see or trace. Whereas several decades ago former high-ranking officials might have sought the title “lobbyist” to display their influence, today they might rather take a role with a corporation or law and lobby firm, frequently in the “public sector” or “government affairs” group. In these firms, the formal and the informal can work together, with (informal) shadow lobbyists allowing their (formal) registered lobbyist subordinates to use their name, contacts, and knowledge of the system to press an agenda. Shadow lobbyists sway policy on issues from health care to mortgage lending to telecommunications.³⁶

Tellingly, the number of registered lobbyists has declined by nearly 23 percent after peaking in 2007.³⁷ The decline tracks nearly exactly with 2007 reform legislation, which tightened reporting and revolving door rules, but led many to simply not register and gamble on weak enforcement.³⁸ It is unlikely that this 23 percent drop means a decline in lobbying per se. Rather, what seems to be the case is that shadow lobbying grew as response to legislation.³⁹ In Helmke and Levitsky's terms, shadow lobbying is a *competing* informal institution, incentivizing actions that support convergent outcomes.⁴⁰ While the expected result of the 2007 lobbying law ostensibly was more transparency, influencers (correctly) anticipated it wouldn't be enforced and this formal institution would be ineffective. The outcome is shadow lobbying and less transparency.

Another kind of shadow lobbying is foreign lobbying, that is, influencing in the United States on behalf of (often unsavory) foreign powers that several decades ago might have been considered treasonous. Well before the activities of operatives like Paul Manafort became widely known,

³⁴ Ledeneva 2006. Leading theorists such as Wittgenstein, Bourdieu, and Giddens situate agency at center stage—between explaining social phenomena as the results of individual action and social structure (Postill 2010). Political scientists, for instance Geniesys and Smryl (2008) and Mahoney and Thelen (2010), have highlighted individual agency as internal sources of gradual institutional change.

³⁵ McFarlane and Waibel 2012.

³⁶ E.g., Fang 2014; Wedel 2014, 53-71.

³⁷ Center for Responsive Politics 2017.

³⁸ E.g., LaPira 2014.

³⁹ Fang 2014.

⁴⁰ Helmke and Levitsky 2006, 15-16.

players engaged in such work without registering with the U.S. Justice Department, as the law requires. For instance, Monitor Group, a Harvard Business School-connected consulting firm was paid handsomely between 2006 and 2008 to carry out a Muammar Gaddafi PR campaign. The firm assembled a roster of star academics, policymakers, and “thought leaders,” sending them to Libya to lend their client prestige. Upon their return, many of these leaders seeded the press with cautiously pro-Gaddafi op-eds, mentioning their university and other affiliations, but with the PR context of their mission unclear or incomplete.⁴¹ Other companies now routinely use digital “dark arts,” one firm’s description of its work on behalf of unsavory regimes,⁴² to shape a message with much greater ease. The impact of such activity on the integrity of American political institutions is, of course, an issue of potentially enormous consequence—one raised in the 2016 presidential election that since has only assumed greater prominence.

Informal Social Networks

Another form of informality that has emerged in the United States is “power cliques,” tight-knit, trust-based, enduring networks that defy characterization as interest groups or lobbies. An example is the power clique around Robert Rubin, former CEO of Goldman Sachs and U.S. treasury secretary from 1995 to 1999 under President Bill Clinton. The personal and professional histories of the Rubin clique have long intersected in venues ranging from Goldman Sachs and the U.S. Treasury (under multiple presidents) to Harvard University and the Brookings Institution. As uninstitutionalized, unregistered, and unannounced sets of people, power cliques exhibit key features of informal social networks and groups documented in post-communist Central and Eastern European contexts (with some holding sway to the present), who sought to *organize* the relations between state and private spheres to their groups’ advantage.⁴³

In times when some of a clique’s members hold public office, they exclude officials from decision making who would be included if official position, rather than membership in the clique, were their guiding principle. At the same time, they bring in others from outside government who are part of their network. During the late 1990s Clinton administration, with key members in U.S. finance posts and others on Wall Street, the Rubin clique excluded from participation in decision making Brooksley Born, chair of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission.

One might expect that a CFTC chair could exercise some of her formal power. But Born stood well outside the informal Rubin clique, whose members sought to avoid regulation of an exotic derivative that she thought was dangerous.⁴⁴ Included in the discussion were clique members who were top bankers, the very people whose activities were supposedly being regulated. The clique prevailed.⁴⁵ Its advocacy of unregulated derivatives and the 1999 repeal of the Glass-

⁴¹ E.g., Pilkington 2011, Rozen 2011, and Barber 2007.

⁴² Qorvis cited in Wedel 2014, 136-141.

⁴³ E.g., Wedel 2001; Stark 1996; Collins 2004.

⁴⁴ E.g., Roig-Franzia 2009.

⁴⁵ Wedel 2014, 18-19 and 64-68.

Steagall Act bear significant responsibility for the 2008 financial crisis.⁴⁶ Born soon left public service while clique members continued to amass roles of influence that included lucrative stints at banks and hedge funds. In the Born case, we see how formal process is undermined as a clique incorporates its fellows (private bankers) who should be kept at arm's length, while dismissing a regulator who, by definition, should be included.

Informality has also been appearing in the form of multinational policy groups that frame, if not forge, policies from finance to media to technology amid “a wider process of informalization.”⁴⁷ The recent history of the 40-year-old Group of Thirty (G30), the Consultative Group on International Economic and Monetary Affairs, provides an example. Its list of members reads like a who's who of those who help shape the global economy. It has been described as “part-think tank, part-interest group, and part-club... [of] actors who write the rules.”⁴⁸ Its executive director said, “We don't make policy... but you can see our recommendations ending up in policy.”⁴⁹

Take, for instance, the hugely consequential issue mentioned above involving derivatives. In the 1990s, as we noted above, the banks did not welcome increased regulation of newly lucrative exotic derivatives trading. The G30 helped solidify the standards for laissez-faire “best practices.” Dennis Weatherstone, who chaired the derivatives study group, was not just an expert—he ran the banking giant JP Morgan. The group was closely aligned with the would-be regulated (banks) and furthered policy that closely matched their biases.⁵⁰ Upon the release of G30 recommendations, the *New York Times* described them this way: “A group of leading financial experts gave a relatively clean bill of health yesterday to the rapidly growing set of financial products called derivatives that some have suggested make the global financial system vulnerable to a widespread crisis.”⁵¹ This approach, made informally and then enshrined as policy, allowed derivatives to lay dynamite throughout the global financial system.

The G30 is a formal body, but it lacks formal mechanisms of articulation for moving its recommendations into policy. Its consultations likely feed into the formal processes of deliberation and legislation of national and international finance bodies, with which many of its members are, or have been, affiliated. (In Helmke and Levitsky's terms, [informal] consultations [G30 discussion] facilitate decision making and coordination that *complement* formal institutions.⁵²) Any formal pushback against policies that its members implement in their official (non-G30) capacities, can only be achieved through those other, official organizations; only informal mechanisms can push back against the G30 itself. Democratic transparency and

⁴⁶ Morgenson 2010.

⁴⁷ Ledeneva 2008, 141.

⁴⁸ Seabrooke and Tsingou 2009, 20; Tsingou 2015, 226.

⁴⁹ Mackintosh, cited in Wedel 2014, 20.

⁵⁰ Tett 2010.

⁵¹ Hansell 1993.

⁵² Helmke and Levitsky 2006, 13–14.

accountability are infinitely more complex to safeguard when considering the context of informality.

Clearly, we must include informality if we want to chart changing political institutions. The concept of capture as typically studied does little to explain the processes at work in these examples; moreover, it accounts primarily for influencing that targets *formal* institutions of regulation, law, and government. By contrast, examining how *informal* institutions persist and evolve to radically changing circumstances yields insight into the nature of an emergent system itself.⁵³ A body like the G30 itself is self-perpetuating. As specific collections of players who meet to shape specific policies at a given time, G30 elites can increase their weight, both individually and collectively, while reinforcing the prominence of the organization, destined to outlast any individual members.

The examples further suggest that informality has little effective formal recourse and remind us that sometimes formal recourse can, in fact, bear unwanted consequences (e.g., shadow lobbying). If informality is indeed increasing, formal law cannot be relied upon as an effective path to recourse. Accountability is typically enforced through demonstrating a player's adherence (or lack thereof) to formal rules. Yet formal mechanisms do not adjudicate informal practices, leaving a gaping hole in democratic process and oversight.

Flexibility

Flexibility⁵⁴ characterizes both players, who move in and around organizations and venues, connecting them to other players and each other; and organizations that are permeable and morph their purposes and forms to fit their players' needs. Here we examine flexibility in terms of players, the organizational vehicles of influence they employ, and "flex nets," a kind of power clique that presents most challenge to democratic norms. We ask whether these modes of influencing serve to dilute or sidestep democratic institutions.

Flexible Players

Flexibility, an essential quality of today's power brokers, enables both opportunity and deniability. A flexible player can juggle multiple roles and use the information and resources gathered in one professional role to his advantage in other such roles.

⁵³ Ledeneva 2008.

⁵⁴ This idea is premised primarily on Wedel (2009, 2014), drawing also from Ong's (1999) "flexible identities," Barth's (1969) "repertoires of identity," and Ledeneva's (2006, 22), work showing that navigating informal practices entails flexibility.

Consider, for instance, the recent history of U.S. retired generals and admirals. A quarter century ago when they retired, most of them stopped working in the military field altogether. But for the past decade+, they have formed dense, complex networks of associates and companies to continue serving in the defense/intelligence industry.⁵⁵ Many embark on sprawling, postretirement careers that mix government advisory roles with private sector work, consulting with defense companies or even setting up their own firms.⁵⁶ They may additionally assume university, think tank and media roles.⁵⁷

Built into the structure of these overlapping roles is the ability of players to deny responsibility. A retired general who serves on a government advisory board shaping policy or procurement directions, can likely gain access and proprietary information that is invaluable to his corporate clients.⁵⁸ He can plausibly deny that the client advice he offers is influenced by the information he gleans in his government role. The difficulty of establishing whether he is acting in the interest of national defense or a private entity challenges a foundational necessity of democratic society: accountability.

Looking into the post-retirement careers of democracy's leaders—heads of state—shows a similar evolution of elite behavior. A generation ago, U.S. presidents and British prime ministers left office and became known for essentially one pursuit: President Gerald Ford served on business boards; President Jimmy Carter took up philanthropy; and Britain's John Major has spent a lot of time on his beloved cricket.⁵⁹ But the pattern has progressed over the past three decades. Take ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair and ex-President Bill Clinton. They have set up entities and crafted overlapping roles that cross them. When Tony Blair was special envoy of the so-called Quartet on the Middle East, a diplomatic entity involved in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process,⁶⁰ he also was an adviser to insurance giant Zurich International and JPMorgan Chase; had his own private consultancy and management companies; carried out advising gigs for Kazakhstan, Kuwait, and Libya; and was involved with nearly a half dozen philanthropic foundations. Blair's multiple roles cast doubt on whether his actions benefited corporate interests or Libya's concerns, and if he could remain neutral and serve the larger purpose of contributing to the Middle East peace process. At the same time, these overlapping roles gave him the ability

⁵⁵ A comprehensive dataset based on publicly available data and built by the Mapping Shadow Influence Project (housed in the Schar School of Policy and Government) and DataLab, all at George Mason University, covers the post-retirement activities of all two, three, and four star officers retiring between 1992 and 2017. The original dataset was compiled by the *Boston Globe* (e.g., Bender 2010).

⁵⁶ E.g., Bender 2010; Smith 2012.

⁵⁷ Wedel 2014, 19; Barstow cited in Wedel 2014, 160.

⁵⁸ E.g., Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense 2011

⁵⁹ Major 2017.

⁶⁰ The Quartet was composed of the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations.

to plausibly deny wrongdoing and he insisted that he did not lobby for JP Morgan Chase.⁶¹ Blair officially resigned as Quartet envoy in 2015.

Bill Clinton, for his part, established the Clinton Foundation and its nonprofit Global Initiative, while serving as a paid adviser to the private equity/consulting firm Teneo, among other business ventures. Teneo's cofounder reportedly recruited donors to be Teneo clients and vice versa, leading some to question whether there were sufficient boundaries between charity and consultancy.⁶²

Vehicles of Influence

Entities such as Blair's and Clinton's are structured in a way that facilitates deniability. These former statesmen have enlisted friends and allies not only to provide direct funding, but also to bring in donations from others. When donations come even one step removed, the recipient can plausibly deny responsibility when it is convenient to do so. The press reporting on the Clinton Foundation leading up to the 2016 election was belatedly criticized as being "seeded" into the mainstream press with research funded by far-right billionaire Robert Mercer.⁶³ But there had been scrutiny of "Clinton Inc." for years, and considering Hillary Clinton's former role as secretary of State and desired role of president, these questions about inevitable conflicts were valid ones.⁶⁴

Former statesmen are hardly alone in setting up vehicles of influence. The Koch brothers, well-known early innovators who have spread their money and influence across a vast network of think tanks, universities and nonprofits,⁶⁵ are just the tip of the iceberg. The use of funding from corporate and other sponsors, the source of which is undisclosed, indirect, or difficult to track, goes far beyond the Koch brothers, the "dark money" of untraceable campaign financing, and any election cycle. Think tanks, nonprofits, grassroots organizations, philanthropies, and consulting firms, which have proliferated in recent years, provide agenda-bearing sponsors with platforms and venues that afford them flexibility to sway policy and public opinion in ways that go unnoticed. These entities, with names that evoke civic action, create an echo chamber, making it appear that a particular issue has widespread support when it may not. Moreover, the entities themselves can morph, diversify, and take on new functions while sidelining democratic institutions. Yet these vehicles of influence, several types of which are elaborated below, are underexplored in approaches to political influence.

⁶¹ Lewis 2001.

⁶² Confessore and Chozick 2013.

⁶³ Abramson.2017.

⁶⁴ E.g., Confessore and Chozick 2013.

⁶⁵ E.g., Mayer 2017.

Think tank–corporate/billionaire–government–media complex

With their veneer of scholarly impartiality, think tanks are attractive to influence elites who seek legitimacy and wish to cloak their activities under an impartial banner. Think tanks worldwide have grown exponentially since the end of the Cold War,⁶⁶ with the number of American think tanks now at least twice what it was in 1980.⁶⁷ Some are funded and coordinated on a global scale.⁶⁸

Think tanks with ideological bents are nothing new, from the Brookings Institution, Heritage Foundation, and Cato Institute to the UK’s Chatham House. But over the past few decades they have become increasingly enmeshed in an ecosystem in which their sponsors (corporations, foundations, billionaires), the media, and contracts (with companies and governments) all influence their activities and outputs.⁶⁹ To maintain funding, think tanks have become more malleable, adapted much shorter output cycles, shifted to more project-specific funding (increasingly from individual donors), and become increasingly issue-specific.⁷⁰ They must gather metrics and evidence of “impact” to show donors. They are often populated by journalists, newly displaced thanks to digital media and severe industry cutbacks,⁷¹ who now work on the opposite side of the public relations divide and may be more beholden to deep-pocketed donors than the ethos of their trade.

Thus, while think tanks hark back to an older role as generators of serious long-term studies, they have become more advocacy oriented, armed with rapid-response teams and quickly assembled, media-friendly reports.⁷² Many think tanks, even well-established ones such as the Brookings Institution, in recent years have taken substantial donations from foreign governments, including some with tarnished reputations.⁷³ Think tanks are more likely to serve as a focal point around which a network with an agenda coalesces; myriad examples of such (mostly foreign-funded) think tanks can be found in communism’s aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe.⁷⁴

The Center for a New American Security, founded in 2007, and the operations of the “COINdinistas,” a power clique in and around it, show that even in matters of war, policy can be shaped outside formal channels. At the center was General David Petraeus, chief adherent of counterinsurgency doctrine or COIN, which emphasizes deep local engagement. CNAS was filled with players who straddled overlapping roles: generals, top defense journalists both at CNAS and media organizations, and officials who joined President Obama’s departments of

⁶⁶ The United States has upwards of 1,900 public policy research organizations (McGann 2015).

⁶⁷ McGann 2015.

⁶⁸ E.g., Fischer and Plehwe 2013.

⁶⁹ Domhoff 2014; McGann 2015; Wedel 2014.

⁷⁰ McGann 2015; Weiss, Seyle, and Coolidge 2013.

⁷¹ E.g., U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016.

⁷² McGann 2015, 38.

⁷³ E.g., Elliott, Hamburger, and Becker 2014.

⁷⁴ Wedel 2014, 195–199.

State and Defense (some remaining on CNAS's board). The COINdinistas sold their plan to policymakers and the public through celebrity generals who sometimes dodged hierarchy while embedding themselves with media and the think tank. Petraeus received much fawning press as a consensus coalesced around his preferred strategy for ending the intractable war in Afghanistan: a surge combined with implementation of COIN. In 2010, his general on the ground in Afghanistan, allowed the release of a scathing internal report about intelligence-gathering in Afghanistan through CNAS, in a clear attempt to shake up the Pentagon's bureaucracy. CNAS and the echo chamber around it had amassed such power that the authors knew it would get play coming out through CNAS, even if no one within the brass wanted to read it. As a clique member and CNAS think tanker later wrote about the report: "The paper's authors explicitly acknowledged that they were making an end run around the Defense Department... The paper made a splash. The then-defense secretary Robert Gates, expressed a bit of puzzlement about why he was hearing from one of his generals through a think tank."⁷⁵

This case—in which a power clique substantially makes war policy—stands in juxtaposition to U.S. strategy related to the Vietnam War, in which strategy was anchored firmly in the Pentagon and government hierarchy and then circulated to the larger establishment and the public.⁷⁶ One can reasonably ask whether the surge in Afghanistan faced little opposition because of the echo chamber created in part by the CNAS clique.⁷⁷ In any event, government institutions were diluted.

Grassroots (or Nonprofit) Organizations

Grassroots entities, too, can afford flexibility that enables those who empower them to exert influence beyond visibility, undermining democratic institutions.

OFA, a grass-roots organization created around a charismatic leader—Barack Obama—has had an important impact on the Democratic Party. As a candidate, Barack Obama created what was then considered an innovative, tech-forward campaign organization, first called Obama for America. OFA amassed a huge email list to directly contact likely supporters. Rather than disband OFA after his election, President Obama kept it going to press his own governing priorities. Some constitutional scholars suggested this was executive overreach, and of a variety not seen before. Despite its grassroots feel and faux-intimate emails from "Michelle Obama," OFA, some insiders said, was too focused on a single individual.⁷⁸

OFA reorganized again after Obama's reelection into a 501c4 entity, which one longtime government watchdog called an "unprecedented vehicle for potential influence-buying, influence-selling and government scandals."⁷⁹ In 2014, halfway into Obama's second term, OFA

⁷⁵ Ricks 2016.

⁷⁶ Hammond 1992.

⁷⁷ Wedel 2017, 158-161.

⁷⁸ Melber 2010.

⁷⁹ Wertheimer 2013.

was still collecting donations—donations that could conceivably have gone to mid-term Democratic candidates.⁸⁰ Moreover, in the wake of the 2016 election, many contend that OFA had served to weaken and sideline the Democratic National Committee.⁸¹ Obama, it was charged, had created a competing organization, leaving Hillary Clinton vulnerable to an insurgent candidacy from within, just as Russian digital interference sought to keep her out of the White House.⁸²

Some other grassroots or nonprofit organizations, while not as directly weakening bedrock democratic institutions such as political parties, seed public space and debate with difficult-to-detect sway in fields from energy, environmental, and health policy to foreign policy. The Internet and social media, have made it far easier and cheaper to channel secret influence. These organizations can promote the cause of an unseen backer in ways that make it appear they are organically grown purveyors of the public interest, rather than calculated and well-financed engines of elite influence.⁸³

Consulting—corporate—government complex

Consulting entities can also endow powerbrokers with flexibility, potentially undercutting formal institutions while exerting under-the-radar influence that enables them to achieve their own agendas. With well over half of government work now outsourced, including key government functions like intelligence and regulation, these players blur government and business in ways that are new over the past several decades and that potentially undermine these functions and accountability.

Consider the consulting entity Promontory Financial Group. Staffed largely by former regulators, banks hire Promontory for a large array of tasks. The U.S. government has dispersed and diluted its own authority by enlisting Promontory and firms like it to do financial oversight that in the past was the government's sole province. Thus, while also being paid by banks to manage a crisis or to suss out government regulations in the making, Promontory serves as an ersatz government regulator through several means. The most common one is *informal*. When banks hire Promontory, that act carries informal weight that the banks can use to suggest to the government that they are in compliance. Another means is the *formal* outsourcing of authority, in which the government itself mandates that banks use Promontory or a similar firm to do financial oversight.⁸⁴ In performing potentially overlapping roles as both regulator and vendor, Promontory's influence goes well beyond the classic "revolving door." When such entities are entrusted by government to carry out functions of government, they are able to shape outcomes from inside the regulatory process, even as they stand outside government. This structure has led

⁸⁰ Communications 2014.

⁸¹ Weiner and Hamburger 2013.

⁸² E.g., Debenedetti 2017.

⁸³ Wedel 2014, 226–252.

⁸⁴ Douglas 2013.

to big lapses including accusations of whitewashing troubled banks who were often the very clients paying Promontory's bills.⁸⁵

Flex Nets

Informal, close-knit networks, flex nets are the ultimate power cliques: They fuse official and private power most completely as they reorganize governance processes, authorities, and bureaucracies to suit the group's purposes.⁸⁶ Like other flexible players and organizations here discussed, their members exercise mobile positionality, assuming shifting and overlapping roles in government, business, and think tank organizations and coordinating their power and influence from multiple vantage points to achieve their goals.⁸⁷ Members of a flex net, united by shared activities and close interpersonal histories, work together as part of an exclusive long-term, self-propelling network to pursue their mutual agendas—ideological and sometimes financial.⁸⁸ Information is the currency of flex nets.

A quintessential flex net is the “Neocon Core.”⁸⁹ Its dozen or so members have worked with each other in various incarnations—some for as long as nearly 40 years—to realize their goals for American foreign policy through the assertion of military power. A cornerstone of the Neocon Core's success has been its skill in challenging official U.S. intelligence, creating alternative versions, and branding its version as official and definitive for politicians, government, and the media.

In the 2000s this flex net helped take the United States to war in Iraq.⁹⁰ Well before the current era of “fake news,” the Neocon Core manufactured and helped disseminate its alarmist and misleading message, skillfully placing it in mainstream media outlets with barely a challenge.⁹¹ Its members in government duplicated job descriptions of existing government units, setting up their own units manned largely with loyalist allies⁹² and creating “intelligence” showing, for example, that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. They operated through a cross-agency clique; the U.S. decision to go to war in Iraq was made outside the usual interagency processes, according to a host of insiders in key agencies in the administration of President George W. Bush, including the Pentagon and the Department of State.⁹³ There is little

⁸⁵ E.g., Horwitz and Aspan 2013; Freifeld 2015; Hallman and Melendez 2013; Sherred 2013.

⁸⁶ Wedel 2009a, 19.

⁸⁷ Wedel 2009, 18, 17.

⁸⁸ Wedel 2009.

⁸⁹ See Wedel 2014, 68-72, for additional examples of flex nets.

⁹⁰ Wedel 2009, 147–191.

⁹¹ E.g., Stein and Dickenson 2006.

⁹² Kwiatkowi and Lang, cited in Wedel 2009, 179–183.

⁹³ E.g., Wilkerson in the Department of State and Pillar in the intelligence community, cited in Wedel 2009a, 177.

While the foreign policy of intervention in Vietnam failed, key insiders argue, the system of decision making worked (Gelb and Betts 1979; Haass 2009, esp. 5 and 212–213).

question that the way the war was sold defied democratic standards of transparency. Lingering questions over the wisdom of the war hovered over the 2016 election.⁹⁴

Flex nets are a paradox in terms of political influence: they are more amorphous and less transparent than conventional lobbies and interest groups, yet also more coherent and less accountable. While administrations come and go, flex nets persist; they are not the instruments of any particular administration even when their members occupy official positions in it. The implications of flex nets for democracy is enormous, perhaps best expressed by a player close to the Neocon Core: “There is no conflict of interest, because they define the interest.”⁹⁵

While both the systematic rise of these flexible players, vehicles of influence, and flex nets—as well as the operations of individual players and entities themselves—have substantially gone without notice, their impact is clear: They have helped undermine and sidestep democratic institutions and government while affording players deniability and ways to evade accountability. Related concepts such as interest groups and lobbies, as generally studied, fail to convey how these players and entities are organized and operate and hence the source of their power. “Revolving door,” too, is lacking vis-à-vis these modes of influencing. A former regulatory official (many Promontory employees) doesn’t just exit to a consulting firm; he is given (outsourced) regulatory authority *at the same time* that he works for the banks he supposedly regulates. The retired general doesn’t quite leave government; he sits on a government advisory board while running his own consultancy whose contracts are with the Pentagon.

Regarding the vehicles of influence specifically, they help forge new spaces of governance that can afford a policy the illusion of support that it may not actually enjoy, while undercutting government and democratic process in ways that are difficult to see. The consequences of each case here cited should give us pause. In the wake of the 2016 election, OFA was widely criticized retrospectively for greatly weakening the DNC during years of losing out to OFA in donations, popular support, talent, and leadership. Promontory took over key parts of financial regulatory duties, lacking independence from its wealthy bank clients, at the very time the U.S. needed faith in banking reform—the years following the 2008 financial crisis. The influence of the think tank CNAS casts doubt on whether there was enough unbiased debate before launching a “surge” in hopes of ending America’s longest war in Afghanistan. (That war, of course, didn’t end with the surge.)

Flexible players, the vehicles of influence they employ, and flex nets do not fit easily into traditional categories of influencing. Yet, clearly, they warrant consideration in any such examination.

⁹⁴ E.g., Blake 2016.

⁹⁵ Wedel 2009, 19.

Digital-Powered Simulacra

If influencing that employs the first two practices of informality and flexibility is difficult to detect and easy to plausibly deny, the third practice—digital-powered simulacra—is even more insidious. Simulacra⁹⁶ are things that simulate reality and evoke the feeling of authenticity, but are not genuine. Now empowered by digitization, simulacra permeate nearly every aspect of our lives and are having an unprecedented impact on democratic institutions, threatening the very existence of shared truth. With the U.S. intelligence community’s assessment documenting Russian cyber meddling in the 2016 presidential election,⁹⁷ what is now undeniable is how easily—and invisibly—this novel space can be rigged. And the impact, and often the source, are nearly impossible to determine definitively.

Simulacra go beyond the public relations techniques that have been perfected over a half century—ghost-writing, planting favorable stories, spin, fomenting doubt without outright denial,⁹⁸ and propaganda.⁹⁹ In the United States simulacra seem to have taken hold in the public sphere in the 1990s, amid the rise of reality television, cable news networks, and the Internet. As politics blended with entertainment, by definition performance, political coverage itself got reduced to performance. It was pervasive enough by 2005 that comedian Stephen Colbert coined the term “truthiness” to describe things that feel like the truth.

This was the early post-9-11 period, and to many, Saddam Hussein felt like a threat, even though there was no evidence Iraq was involved in the terror attack. That was in large part due to the efforts of the Neocon Core and allies who invented “alternative information” from within units it specially set up in the Pentagon and ensured that it received official imprimatur. That “information,” of course, was pivotal in taking the United States to war in Iraq in 2003.

Social media and the iPhone debuted in the years to follow, which would very quickly upend how nearly all of us got our information, our “truth.” While much was made about the supposedly democratizing effect of the internet and social media, giving regular people a voice, it is clear now that powerful forces adeptly colonizing this new terrain.

Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign used social media tools to simulate a flat-hierarchy organization, aiming for grassroots enthusiasm even if control was substantially top-down.¹⁰⁰ The simulacra worked. The Obama team was able to “[raise] money to [mobilize] the ground game, [enhance] political participation, and [get] out the vote”¹⁰¹ for an insurgent candidate who had little experience, no name recognition, and a competitor (Hillary Clinton) with far more institutional support.

⁹⁶ Baudrillard 1994.

⁹⁷ U.S. Intelligence Community 2017.

⁹⁸ Pollay 1990.

⁹⁹ For the difference between propaganda and simulacra, see, e.g., Lane 2000.

¹⁰⁰ E.g., Melber 2010.

¹⁰¹ Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez 2011, 205.

The use of Twitter and other social media in election campaigns, whether by candidates themselves or by politically engaged followers, became increasingly pervasive,¹⁰² reaching its apotheosis with Donald Trump. Political scientists have taken note of these developments, attempting to begin assessing the implications of the Internet for democracy, including attention to these digital innovations.¹⁰³ But digital-powered simulacra go beyond this active area of scholarly interest. Simulacra combined with digitization have turned a simulated leader, “@realDonaldTrump,” into the leader of the free world.

Digital-powered simulacra can not only skew elections and polarize societies, but risk irrevocably blurring truth from fiction. Simulacra, we submit, is thus a crucial concept for studying political influence.

The Power of Simulacra

Modern society is constructed around simulacra, Baudrillard explains.¹⁰⁴ Things like symbols, models, maps, and other images that originally reflected the real world, can represent distinct realities all their own. Simulacra blur the distinction between a prior reality and the image or impression of that prior reality. When the difference between the original and its representation is fuzzy, people can easily attribute characteristics of the original to the newer thing that merely resembles it, losing sight of the prior reality or accepting the image or impression as true.¹⁰⁵

Simulacra build on the performances the public sphere has come to demand, enabled now by social media and smart phones. The *performance* of reality is being performed and sought by the media, leaving the *reality* of reality more difficult to track and often indeterminate. The “substance” is in the performance itself.

For Baudrillard, an example is the 1991 Gulf War, which he viewed as performative for the United States but lethal for Iraqis. This performance was assisted greatly by a then relatively new media innovation, 24-hour cable news, namely CNN. News, Lane contends, produced the “reality” of the war, not only for viewers, but also for participants. He reflects on the bizarre circular moment when CNN reporters on the ground in the Gulf were actually watching CNN, based in Atlanta, to find out what was happening.¹⁰⁶

Propaganda is thereby taken to a new level: it isn't a case of misrepresenting what is actually happening somewhere in a different way; more a case of constructing

¹⁰² Jungherr 2016.

¹⁰³ Farrell 2012, 37.

¹⁰⁴ Baudrillard 1994.

¹⁰⁵ Some scholars, including Baudrillard suggest that disinformation is similar to simulacra in that neither bear any relation to reality (e.g., Cheyfitz 2017, 23).

¹⁰⁶ Lane 2000, 95.

what *will* be happening in advance (that is, what will be happening to the troops on the other side of the conflict), so that it *does* happen.

Digital technology nurtures a whole new mode of simulacra—subterranean influencing designed to deceive, in which who is behind an effort can be hard to determine and may not even exist in human form. Performances that feed simulacra can be made, tweaked, and performed again with a speed and ease unthinkable in 1991. Meanwhile, as we said, the explosion of digital media has diminished the profession of journalism, presenting an obvious danger to democratic society that relies on journalism as a fair and robust arbiter of public discourse.

In just a few years, digital-powered simulacra have gone from something notable to something routine and pervasive in the form of hashtag campaigns, websites, and YouTube “newscasts” sponsored by corporations, think tanks, and presidential candidates that are designed to resemble actual news sites (or news broadcasts), despite the complete absence of journalistic standards to curate what gets published. The website of Raytheon, for instance, the giant defense company and U.S. government contractor, has been made to look like a news outlet. It hired a journalist in 2012 just weeks after he won a Pulitzer for investigative reporting.¹⁰⁷ The journalist has become a promoter, specializing in media simulacra.

Within journalism itself, another version of simulacrum is being created: venerable journalistic brands have changed their models to incorporate the musings of individuals with agendas, while still *looking* like traditional news outlets. *Forbes*, for instance, allows “business leaders, entrepreneurs, book authors, academics, and other topic experts” to expound on its website. This has the result of mixing content from current journalists, ex-journalists, and non-journalists under the same century-old brand name.¹⁰⁸ As with other simulacra, the distinction between this new way of “reporting” and traditional journalistic practices is blurry, enabling the new simulacra to borrow unearned characteristics like journalistic integrity.

Simulacrum is more than simply a shell, a fake, or a false reality, Baudrillard tells us. It is a reality of its own. The danger occurs when we forget that these two things are different and assign the characteristics of the prior reality to the new simulacrum. In the case of corporate websites that resemble news sites, for example, we may grant them characteristics such as truth, objectivity, or fairness that they do not merit. At one point, observers thought Trump might only exist on Twitter; now he has become our undeniable reality.

Simulacra on Steroids

Trump’s helpers have included trolls and bots which are, by definition, simulacra.¹⁰⁹ Networks of trolls and synchronized social media bots aimed at promoting disinformation campaigns create the *appearance* of public support for ideas and issues that would otherwise remain marginal.

¹⁰⁷ Scott 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Sonderman 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Heider 2009, 141.

Trolls and bots can be the work of a homegrown amateur, or part of a sophisticated disinformation seeded, for instance, by Russian cyber disruption organizations.

Trolls purposely try to sow discord with inflammatory memes—ideas, symbols, or images that spread person-to-person, most recently through the Internet. Bots deployed on social media are pieces of software that mimic human-driven accounts. Bots hide “the absence of a real person,”¹¹⁰ simulating the presence of people and creating simulacra. Thousands of bot-driven accounts can be generated in minutes, and programmed to “follow,” “like,” or otherwise register their support for another account, including a Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter account registered to a real person.¹¹¹ Some politicians have had bots as followers, although whether they purchased these followers themselves is a point of debate. It may be that bots spontaneously followed them, or opponents purchased the bots to embarrass their foes.¹¹²

Structured into digital-powered simulacra is multi-directional connectivity and simulated intimate communication, whether a direct line from a politician to potential followers via email or the virtual participation in interaction and community building of social media platforms. Everyone is an active participant and performer.

All these practices pervade social media platforms; they played a role in the U.S. 2012 elections,¹¹³ building on their initial use in 2008, and were undoubtedly involved in 2016, to a still debated extent.

As seen with the 2003 war in Iraq, “populist” movements in Europe and now the ascension of Trump, simulacrum can become its own “reality” with nearly inconceivable consequences. In the case of bots, the simulation of popularity creates unwarranted visibility. When (actually nonexistent or fake) “followers” repeat a meme, the social media algorithm will further promote a person or idea that might not be popular at all. (Conversely, bots deployed against an opponent or idea might also prompt the algorithm to show greater *unpopularity* than is warranted.) The memes will be seen more, readers will respond, and a self-perpetuating spiral is born. With no guarantee that algorithms can reliably distinguish bot from a real account, a new reality is created.

Not only can bots create the appearance of mass support, they can hypercharge the emotional level of the real individuals who get caught up in the hype. The combination of large numbers plus strong sentiment commands attention from individuals, policymakers, and journalists alike.

Trolls are not monolithic. Some are for hire; governments such as China or Russia pay small armies of commenters to sow dissent or promote an agenda that governing authorities are pressing. Many more do so for other reasons, sometimes as part of a virtual community. Russia

¹¹⁰ Heider 2009, 141.

¹¹¹ Worstall 2012.

¹¹² Schwarz 2012.

¹¹³ Wortham 2012.

has been suspected of using bots and trolls-for-hire in propelling the “alt right,” as true believers found themselves likely interacting with foreign plants, many of them not even human. After the violent unrest in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017, researchers found Russian-linked bots churning out hashtags and messaging to further incite division.¹¹⁴

It is tempting to wonder what would have become of Donald Trump without digital-powered simulacra. He was a reality star, serving up for years a performance of a no-nonsense leader. It was on social media that Trump, assisted by Russia to an extent still-to-be ascertained, supercharged this performance into the reality of a leader. The simulation invented its own concrete truth. Donald Trump is President. It seems clear that digital-powered simulacra warrants inclusion in the conceptual apparatus of political influence.

Political Rigging Practices and Their Portents

Trumpism has been decades in the making. The developments that led to it were substantially missed by political analysts—and will continue to be missed—if our conceptualization of political influence is not reconsidered.

Trump used Twitter, as well as (indirectly) vehicles of influence outlined earlier to upend democratic gatekeepers in the form of the media, party elites, and the Republican National Committee to execute his “insurgent marketing strategy,” which he continued as president.¹¹⁵ But while Twitter use was relatively new, the informality and flexibility that served to weaken democratic institutions had long been building.

What are the implications for democracy? First, the practices of informality, flexibility, and digital-powered simulacra can serve to sideline or upend the effectiveness of formal institutions of democracy, as we see in the examples of the Emoluments Clause, COIN, and the G30. The flexible machinations of the Neocon Core clearly circumvented democratic process in pushing for war with Iraq, and the results will be felt for decades to come. Using a think tank and media allies to build a consensus on a surge in Afghanistan might have allowed the COINdinitas to sidestep some channels of debate on war policy. Both the Democratic National Committee and the Republican National Committee were sidelined and weakened, by OFA and digital-powered simulacra (Twitter), respectively.

Second, the power of the three practices of informality, flexibility, and digital-powered simulacra lies substantially in the fact that, intentionally or not, they easily escape notice; they can serve to either obscure players’ agendas (e.g., vehicles of influence or the flexible positionality of the Neocon Core, COINdinitas and Promontory) or outright appear to be something they’re not (e.g., trolls-for-hire or bots). Yet if democracy depends on the ability of media and citizens to

¹¹⁴ E.g., Glaser 2017.

¹¹⁵ Cornfield 2017.

have a sense of clarity on who is representing which interests and how much support the “who” actually has, these developments present obvious dangers.

Third, formal remedies and laws are systematically incapable of pushing back when influencing is done via informal channels (e.g., G30 and shadow lobbyists) or when the democratic process has been sidelined. Some scholars look to formal remedies—to Congress and political parties to hold players accountable and reform the system. But our analysis demonstrates that informal institutions must not be overlooked. Moreover, the specific ways in which informality is organized and operates in conjunction with formal institutions often illuminate the pathways to change. Shadow lobbying by the firms Monitor Group or Promontory can’t be easily challenged if the players deny it ever happened and get away with not registering their activities. With regard to the G30, decisions about derivatives’ regulation forged outside government might have afforded banks too much influence. Yet formal pushback against policies conceived of and promoted via the G30 can only be effective through other, official organizations. And how can one counter a power clique whose source of power and authority straddles not just Washington and Wall Street but also Harvard and Brookings—one that flouts government process and operates informally and flexibly?

Our findings augur for a focus on the power brokers as connectors and intermediaries linking government, business, and other arenas of activity. As we have seen, many drivers of policy influence operate both formally and informally, and avail themselves of vehicles of influence, as well as flexible positionality in state, corporate, and other roles. Because the players’ very influence comes from their ability to fudge these boundaries, if we focus on a formal organization (rather than the players who straddle them), we can miss the very drivers and dynamics of influence.

In sum, the practices of informality, flexibility, and digital-powered simulacra illuminate new spaces of policy and governance. Proposing these conceptual categories is the first step toward a research agenda analyzing new modes of power and influence, their implications for democracy, and paths effective recourse might take.

REFERENCES

- Abramson, Jill. 2017. "Robert Mercer invested offshore dark money to sink Clinton. He must be delighted." *The Guardian*. Nov 8.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/08/robert-merceroffshore-dark-money-hillary-clinton-paradise-papers>
- Barber, Benjamin R. 2007. "Gaddafi's Libya: An Ally for America" *Washington Post*. August 15. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/14/AR2007081401328.html>
- Barker, Kim and Meyer, Theodoric, *Propublica*. 2014. "How the Koch Brothers Hide their Big Money Donations," *The Inquirer*. March 17.
http://www.philly.com/philly/news/politics/How_the_Koch_brothers_obscure_their_big_money_trail.html.
- Barth, Fredrik. 1969. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1994. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by S. F. Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Bender, Bryan. 2010. "From the Pentagon to the Private Sector." *Boston Globe*, December 26, 2010.
www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2010/12/26/defense_firms_lure_retired_generals/.
- Blake, Aaron. 2016. "Republicans Like George W. Bush. They Don't Love Him." *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/02/15/republicans-like-george-w-bush-they-dont-love-him/?utm_term=.fe9c708cbdd0
- Brennan Center. 2017. "In His Own Words: The President's Attacks on the courts" June 5.
<https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/his-own-words-presidents-attacks-courts>
- Bowden, John. 2017. "Trump lawyer: Collusion is not a crime" *The Nation*. December 2.
<http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/362929-trump-lawyer-collusion-is-not-a-crime>
- Carroll, William K. 2008. "The Corporate Elite and the Transformation of Finance Capital: A View from Canada." *Remembering Elites*, Mike Savage and Karel Williams, eds., 44–63. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Center for Responsive Politics. 2017. Retrieved February 22, 2017.
<https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/>.

Chapman University. 2017. "What Do Americans Fear Most? Researchers Release 4th Annual Survey of American Fears." <https://phys.org/news/2017-10-americans-4th-annual-survey-american.html#jCp>.

Cheyfitz, Eric. 2017. *The Disinformation Age: The Collapse of Liberal Democracy in the United States*. Routledge.

Clifton, Jim. 2016. "Explaining Trump: Widespread Government Corruption." *Gallup*. <http://news.gallup.com/opinion/chairman/188000/explaining-trump-widespread-government-corruption.aspx>

Cogburn, Derrick L., and Fatima K. Espinoza-Vasquez. 2011. "From Networked Nominee to Networked Nation: Examining the Impact of Web 2.0 and Social Media on Political Participation and Civic Engagement in the 2008 Obama Campaign." *Journal of Political Marketing* 10 (1-2): 189-213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2011.540224>.

Collins, Kathleen. 2004. "The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories." *World Politics*. 56 (2): 224–61.

Communications. 2014. "Organizing for Action: Who's Giving Obama-Linked Nonprofit?" *OpenSecrets.org*. June 17. <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2014/06/organizing-for-action-whos-giving-to-obama-linked-nonprofit/>

Confessore, Nicholas, and Amy Choick. 2013. "Unease at Clinton Foundation over Finances and Ambitions." *New York Times*, August 13. www.nytimes.com/2013/08/14/us/politics/unease-at-clinton-foundation-over-finances-and-ambitions.html.

Cornfield, Michael. 2017. "Empowering the Party-Crasher: Donald J. Trump, the First 2016 GOP Presidential Debate, and the Twitter Marketplace for Political Campaigns." *Journal of Political Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2017.1377142>.

Davis, Aeron, and Catherine Walsh. 2016. "The Role of the State in the Financialization of the UK Economy." *Political Studies*. 64(3): 666-682.

Davis, Aeron, and Karel Williams. 2017 "Introduction: Elites and Power after Financialization." *Theory, Culture, and Society*. 34(5-6), 3-26.

Debenedetti, Gabriel. 2017. "Obama's party building legacy splits Democrats." *Politico*. February 9. <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/02/obama-democrats-party-building-234820>

Desilver, Drew. 2013. "U.S. income inequality, on rise for decades, is now highest since 1928."

Pew Research Center. December 5. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/12/05/u-s-income-inequality-on-rise-for-decades-is-now-highest-since-1928/>

Disis, Jill. 2017. "Presidential tax returns: It started with Nixon will it end with Trump?" *CNN Money*. January 26. <http://money.cnn.com/2017/01/23/news/economy/donald-trump-tax-returns/index.html>

Domhoff, G. William. 2014. *Who Rules America? The Triumph of the Corporate Rich*, 7th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Douglas, Danielle. 2013. "The Rise of Promontory." *Washington Post*, August 2. www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/the-rise-of-promontory/2013/08/02/c187a112-f32b-11e2-bdae-0d1f78989e8a_story.html.

Elliott, Kennedy, Tom Hamburger, and Alexander Becker. 2014. "Who Funds the New Brookings?" *Washington Post*. October 30. www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/brookings-institution-2014/

Fang, Lee. 2014. "Where Have All the Lobbyists Gone?" *The Nation*. February 19. <http://www.thenation.com/article/shadow-lobbying-complex/>

Farrell, Henry. 2012. "The Consequences of the Internet for Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15: 35-52. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-030810-110815>.

Fischer, Karin, and Dieter Plehwe. 2013. "The 'Pink Tide' and Neoliberal Civil Society Formation: Think Tank Networks in Latin America." *State of Nature*, March 12.

Freifeld, Karen. 2015. "Promontory to pay \$15 million to N.Y. over work for Standard Charter" *Reuters*. August 18. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-promontory-stanchart-settlement/promontory-to-pay-15-million-to-n-y-over-work-for-standard-chartered-idUSKCN0QN1ZO20150818>

Galasso, V. Nicholas. 2013. *The Drivers of Economic Inequality: A Primer*. Oxfam Research Backgrounder. Washington, DC: Oxfam America. <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/static/media/files/oxfam-drivers-of-economic-inequality.pdf>

Gallup. 2017. "Confidence in Institutions." *Gallup*. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx>

Gelb, Leslie H., and Richard K. Betts. 1979. *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Genieys, William, and Marc Smyrl. 2008. *Elites, Ideas, and the Evolution of Public Policy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gilens, Martin, and Benjamin Page. 2014. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens." *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3): 564-581.

Ginsberg, Wendy. 2009. "Federal Advisory Committees: An Overview." April 16. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

Glaser, April. 2017. "Russian Bots Are Trying to Sow Discord on Twitter After Charlottesville." *The Slate Group*. August 24.
http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2017/08/24/russian_bots_are_sharing_extreme_right_wing_information_on_twitter_after.html

Glassman, Matthew Eric. 2013. "Congressional Membership and Appointment Authority to Advisory Commissions, Boards, and Groups." February 5. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

Haass, Richard N. 2009. *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Hacker, Jacob S., Philipp Rehm, and Mark Schlesinger. 2013. "The Insecure American: Economic Experiences, Financial Worries, and Policy Attitudes." *Perspectives on Politics*. 11 (1): 23-49.

Hallman, Ben, and Eleazar David Melendez. 2013. "Foreclosure Review Insiders Portray Massive Failure, Doomed from the Start." *Huffington Post*, January 14.
www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/14/foreclosure-review-failurestart_n_2468988.html.

Hammond, Paul. 1992. *LBJ and the Presidential Management of Foreign Relations*. University of Texas Press.

Hansell, Saul. 1993. "Market Place; Group Approves Use of Derivatives." *New York Times*, July 22. www.nytimes.com/1993/07/22/business/market-place-group-approves-use-of-derivatives.html.

Heider, Don. 2009. "Identity and Reality: What Does it Mean to Live Virtually," *Living Virtually: Researching New Worlds*: Don Heider, ed., Peter Lang.

Heinrich, Finn. 2017. "Corruption and Inequality: How Populists Mislead People," *Transparency International*.
https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_and_inequality_how_populists_mislead_people

Helmke, Gretchen, and Steven Levitsky. 2006. "Introduction." *Informal Institutions and Democracy: Lessons from Latin America*, Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, eds., 1-30. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Horwitz, Jeff, and Maria Aspan. 2013. "How Promontory Financial Became Banking's Shadow Regulator." *American Banker*, March 15. www.americanbanker.com/magazine/123_4/how-promontory-financial-becamebanking-s-shadow-regulator-1057480-1.html.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2016. *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. New York: The New Press.

Inspector General, U.S. Department of Defense. 2011. "DoD Complied with Policies on Converting Senior Mentors to Highly Qualified Experts, but Few Senior Mentors Converted." Report No. DODIG-2012-009. www.dodig.mil/audit/reports/fy12/audit/dodig-2012-009.pdf.

Jungherr, Andreas. 2016. "Twitter Use in Election Campaigns: A Systematic Literature Review." *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* 13 (1): 72-91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2015.1132401>.

Lane, Richard. 2000. *Jean Baudrillard*. Routledge Critical Thinkers.

LaPira, Tim. 2014. "Erring on the side of shady: How calling out "lobbyists" drove them underground" *Sunlight Foundation*. April 1. <https://sunlightfoundation.com/2014/04/01/erring-on-the-side-of-shady-how-calling-out-lobbyists-drove-them-underground/>

Ledeneva, Alena. 2006. *How Russia Really Works: The Informal Practices That Shaped Post Soviet Politics and Business*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

———. 2008. "Blat and Guanxi: Informal Practices in Russia and China." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50 (1): 118–144.

Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Crown.

Lewis, Jason. 2001. "Tony Blair's Byzantine world of advisers and lucrative deals," *The Telegraph*, Sept. 24, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/tony-blair/8787053/Tony-Blairs-Byzantine-world-of-advisers-and-lucrative-deals.html>.

Light, Paul C. 2016. "The Government-Industrial Complex, 1984-2015." *National Public Radio*. <http://media.npr.org/assets/news/2016/11/light.pdf>

Mahoney, James, and Kathleen Thelen. 2010. *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Major, John. 2017. "John Mayer: My Lifelong love affair with the Oval." *The Spectator*. July 22. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2017/07/john-major-my-lifelong-love-affair-with-the-oval/>

Mapping Shadow Influence Project. 2013. Schar School of Policy and Government and DataLab, George Mason University.

Mayer, Jane. 2017. *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*, Anchor Books.

McFarlane, Colin, and Michael Waibel. 2012. "Introduction: The Informal-Formal Divide in Context." In *Urban Informalities: Reflections on the Formal and Informal*, Colin McFarlane and Michael Waibel, eds., 1–12. Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate: Ashgate.

McGann, James. 2015. *2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*. Think Tank and Civil Societies Program, International Relations Program, University of Pennsylvania.
http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=think_tanks.

Melber, Ari. 2010. "Year One of Organizing for America: The Permanent Field Campaign in a Digital Age." AtechPresident Special Report.
http://techpresident.com/files/report_Year_One_of_Organizing_for_America_Melber.pdf

Mills, C. Wright. 1956. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mitnick, Barry M. "Capturing "Capture": Definition and Mechanisms." In Levi-Faur, David, ed. *Handbook on the Politics of Regulation*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011. 34-39.

Morgenson, Gretchen. 2010. "3,000 Pages of Financial Reform, but Still Not Enough" *New York Times*. May 29. <http://www.nytimes.com/mutex.gmu.edu/2010/05/30/business/30gret.html>.

Ong, Aihwa. 1999. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham: NC: Duke University Press.

Pilkington, Ed. 2011. "The Monitor Group: Gaddafi's PR form used academics." *The Guardian*. March 4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/04/the-monitor-group-gadaffi-pr>

Pollay, Richard W. 1990. "Propaganda, Puffing, and the Public Interest: The Scientific Smoke Screen for Cigarettes." *Public Relations Review* 16 (3): 39–54.

Postill, John. 2010. "Theorising Media and Practice." In *Theorising Media and Practice*, Birgit Bräuchler and John Postill, eds., 1–34. New York: Berghahn Books.

Ricks, Thomas, E. (2016). "Did I Help Create A Monster? A Confession." *Foreign Policy*.
<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/11/30/did-i-help-create-a-monster-a-confession/>

Roig-Franzia, Manuel. 2009. "Brooksley Born, the Cassandra of the Derivatives Crisis." *Washington Post*, May 26. www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/25/AR2009052502108.html.

Rozen, Laura. 2011. "Among Libya's lobbyists." *Politico*. February 21. https://www.politico.com/blogs/laurarozen/0211/Among_Libyas_lobbyists.html#site-content

Savage, Michael, and Karel Williams, eds. 2008. *Remembering Elites*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Scott, David Meerman. 2013. "How Raytheon Implemented a Brand Journalism Approach to Content Marketing." *WebIncNow*, April 10. www.webinknow.com/2013/04/how-raytheon-implemented-a-brandjournalism-approach-to-content-marketing.html.

Schwarz, Hunter. 2012. "Mitt Romney Denies Buying 150,000 Twitter Followers." *MediaItte*. <https://www.mediaite.com/online/mitt-romney-denies-buying-150000-twitter-followers/>

Seabrooke, Leonard, and Eleni Tsingou. "Revolving Doors and Linked Ecologies in the World Economy: Policy Locations and the Practice of International Financial Reform." University of Warwick, 2009. http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/1849/1/WRAP_Seabrooke_26009.pdf.

Sherred, Brown. 2013. "Brown Chairs Banking Hearing On Role of Independent Consultants In Financial Services Industry" Washington D.C. Retrieved April 11, 2013. <https://www.brown.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/brown-chairs-banking-hearing-on-role-of-independent-consultants-in-financial-services-industry>

Smith, R. Jeffrey. 2012. "Generals No Longer Retire to Vermont—They Lobby for Contractors in Washington." *Center for Public Integrity*, November 21. www.publicintegrity.org/2012/11/21/11839/generals-no-longer-retire-vermont-they-lobby-contractors-washington.

Sonderman, Jeff. 2012. "What the Forbes Model of Contributed Content Means for Journalism." *Poynter*, May 29. www.poynter.org/latest-news/top-stories/173743/what-the-forbes-model-of-contributed-content-means-for-journalism/.

Stark, David. 1996. "Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism." *American Journal of Sociology* 101 (4): 993–1027.

Stein, Jonathan, and Tim Dickinson. 2006. "Lie by Lie: A Timeline of How We Got Into Iraq." *Mother Jones*. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/12/leadup-iraq-war-timeline/>

Stelter, Brian. 2017. "Stelter: Why Trump's media attacks are still shocking." *CNN Media*. November 27. <http://money.cnn.com/2017/11/27/media/trump-media-attack-tweets/index.html>

Tett, Gillian. 2010. *Fool's Gold: The Inside Story of J.P. Morgan and How Wall Street Greed Corrupted Its Bold Dream and Created a Financial Catastrophe*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Tsingou, Eleni. 2015. "Club Governance and the Making of Global Financial Rules." *Review of International Political Economy* 22 (2): 225–256.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2016. Employment trends in newspaper publishing and other media, 1990-2016: The Economics Daily. www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2016/employment-trends-in-newspaper-publishing-and-other-media-1990-2016.htm.

U.S. Intelligence Community. 2017. "Background to Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections: The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution." *Office of Director of National Intelligence*.

https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf

Verkuil, PR. 2007. *Outsourcing Sovereignty: Why Privatization of Government Functions Threatens Democracy and What We Can Do About It*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wedel 2001. "Corruption and Organized Crime in Post-Communist States: New Ways of Manifesting Old Patterns." *Trends in Organized Crime* 7 (1): 3–61.

———. 2009. *Shadow Elite: How the World's New Power Brokers Undermine Democracy, Government, and the Free Market*. New York: Basic Books.

———. 2014. *Unaccountable: How Elite Power Brokers Corrupt Our Finances, Freedom, and Security*. New York: Pegasus Books.

———. 2017. "From Power Elites to Influence Elites: Resetting Elite Studies for the 21st Century." *Theory, Culture & Society* 34(5-6): 153-178.

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0263276417715311>

Weber, Max. 1947. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Oxford University Press, New York.

Weiner, Rachel and Hamburger, Tom. 2013. "Obama nonprofit advocacy group reverses course on corporate donations." *The Washington Post*. March 7

https://www.washingtonpost.com/?utm_term=.9f336b96ba26

Wemple, Erik. 2015. "Judith Miller tries, and ultimately fails, to defend her flawed Iraq reporting." *The Washington Post*. April 9.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/?utm_term=.5fdcdb2a941c

Wertheimer, Fred. 2013. "A Challenge to President Obama's New 501(C)(4) Group" *The Huffington Post*. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/fred-wertheimer/a-challenge-to-president-_b_2569105.html

Weiss, Thomas G., Conor D. Seyle, and Kelsey Coolidge. 2013. "The Rise of Non-State Actors in Global Governance: Opportunities and Limitations." *One Earth Future Discussion Paper*. Broomfield, CO: One Earth Future Foundation. <http://acuns.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/gg-weiss.pdf>.

Worstell, Tim. 2012. "How Cheap Is It to Buy Twitter Followers?" *Forbes*. Aug 16. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstell/2012/08/16/how-cheap-is-it-to-buy-fake-twitter-followers/#17f749d945d8>

Wortham, Jenna. 2012. "The Presidential Campaign on Social Media." *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com.mutex.gmu.edu/interactive/2012/10/08/technology/campaign-social-media.html>

AUTHOR BIOS

Janine R. Wedel is University Professor in the Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University (jwedel@gmu.edu); and Global Policy Chair at the University of Bath (UK) and Fellow at the Hertie School of Governance (Berlin). Her latest, prizewinning books include *Unaccountable: How the Establishment Corrupted Our Finances, Freedom, and Politics and Created an Outsider Class* (paperback, 2016); *Shadow Elite: How the World's New Power Brokers Undermine Democracy, Government, and the Free Market* (2009); and *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe* (paperback, 2001). Wedel won the Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order.

Dana Archer Dolan, Ph.D. (Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University, 2017), is an instructor in the Honors College at GMU (ddolan1@gmu.edu). Her research focuses broadly on long-term governance and complex decision-making dynamics. Her current book project explores the politics of adopting climate change adaptation policy, building on her NSF-funded doctoral dissertation.

Nazia Hussain, Ph.D. (Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University, 2016), is a JSP-UNU Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Policy Research, United Nations University (naz.ahussain@gmail.com). Her research focuses on how informality, political violence, organized crime and terror exist in relation to formal processes and institutions in cities, particularly in developing countries.