

PROPOSAL

This Proposal offers a strategic framework for creating a counterforce in America to the divisive movement whose current expression is the “Project 2025” document from the Heritage Foundation.

You can read an outline of This Proposal by skimming over the document from beginning to end, reading only the **bolded first sentences** of paragraphs.

A word on my bona fides. I am a retired Ph.D. mathematician and software/hardware entrepreneur. My brief Twitter/X bio is at https://x.com/conways_law. If you Google “Melvin Conway” you will read about a computer-science career, but you won’t read that my work changed course in early 2020. Since then I have dedicated myself to understanding the consequences of how we organize ourselves politically.

This proposal arises from what this research has taught me.

The American Experiment is under mortal threat.

Recent Supreme Court decisions, from Citizens United v. FEC to Trump v. United States, have foreclosed many conventional political and legal approaches to defending the American Experiment.

The threat is so deeply embedded that no outcome of the November election, by itself, will remove it.

That's because what we might now call "the MAGA network" is not a recent Trump-induced phenomenon, but has become deeply entrenched in American governance and economy over the last half century. The network's evolution originates in the 1971 [Lewis Powell memorandum](#) to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

(Read the memorandum [here](#). In this [tree of Twitter threads](#) I enumerate some of the social/economic/political changes over the half century caused by this network, including [damage to the labor movement](#), the ideology known as "[neoliberalism](#)", a [shift in the proceeds of ever-increasing productivity from labor to capital](#), [the destruction of some once-prosperous industrial regions in the US](#), and correlated increases of [income inequality and political polarization](#).

Later I will address another major change: the loss of diverse local journalism.)

We will call this half-century-old network the Powell/Heritage network.

Many observers have been surprised by relatively recent revelations that the Powell/Heritage network has decisively captured both SCOTUS and American Conservatism.

The extent of our surprise is one measure of the absence of Network Thinking in our public discourse.

The writers of Project 2025 are telling us that the Powell/Heritage network has evolved to the extent that it is on the verge of capturing American politics.

(I have a greater concern, that the attempted implementation of Project 2025 at scale could reduce the American economy to chaos and possibly trigger larger disruptions. That, too, must be considered as a possible outcome of the November election.) At the very least, we can believe the Heritage Foundation [when they tell us](#) that we're headed for deep conflict no matter the results of the November election.

We must develop a successful counter-strategy.

We have had none for a half century, because we have been thinking in terms of political movements, rather than a network with emergent outcomes. We must understand the operation of the Powell/Heritage network, both to a level of detail and in a form, that will lead to a workable counter-strategy. The rest of This Proposal offers a contribution to developing such a strategy.

“Network Thinking” is the theoretical basis of the counter-strategy proposed here.

Network Thinking is “The Big Lesson” at the bottom of page 2 of [this “Ubiquitous Connectivity” essay](#):

THINK NETWORKS FIRST, ACTORS SECOND.

(I am not asking you to read the whole essay, only page 2.)

Network Thinking tells us that, in highly connected networks, conventional thinking can lead us in the wrong direction.

For example, some of the overall behavior of the network might not be traceable to an identifiable cause, as is commonly assumed in [Root Cause Analysis](#), but might be a non-obvious emergent effect arising from a synergistic aggregation of many low-level interactions.

To understand the overall behavior of a highly connected network, one must understand it at both of two levels: the overall behavior and the numerous individual interactions among the elements of the network. (For more, see pages 10-12 of the [Ubiquitous Connectivity essay](#).)

Network Thinking leads to new intervention strategies in highly connected networks such as the American political/economic/social system.

Since the founding of the US two and a half centuries ago, the structures of its political and economic systems have evolved from simple networks understood by the Founders, to multiple interlocking networks understood by nobody.

Networks that work in one way at one scale of connectivity can qualitatively change their overall behaviors at a larger scale of connectivity. We call this “scale-induced change of function”.

The [Ubiquitous Connectivity essay](#) discusses in detail two examples of scale-induced change of function. Example 1 shows how the going-in premise behind Facebook, that greater connectivity will be a greater social good, is exactly wrong. Example 2 shows that the [public stock market](#), which has enabled [scaling up the US economy and population](#) by multiple orders of magnitude, is now a direct driver of environmental destruction, a side effect that was not initially considered.

Similarly, a scale-induced change of function has happened to the consensus-forming process based on the interaction of “The Press” and “The People” that is essential to the American Experiment.

One manifestation of this change is the [disappearance of diverse local journalism](#) throughout the country.

A common consequence of scale-induced change of function is highly skewed distribution and a profound loss of diversity.

This can manifest in different ways, for example, as loss of business competition (monopoly), income inequality, political polarization, or mass disinformation/propaganda.

Here is a short briefing on how Network Thinking applies to the current threat to the American Experiment.

The “Crime Syndicate” Network Pattern is at the root of every political organization.

As an example consider anonymous death-threat messages left on voicemails of low-level election workers; these messages warn the workers that they had better do (or not do) something in order to affect the outcome of the election. Something like this has been happening all over the country during recent elections.

This kind of threat is a common process in the operation of what I am calling the “[Crime Syndicate](#)” network pattern. In order to obtain a particular outcome, behaviors have to be coerced.

In the Crime Syndicate pattern there are two sub-networks with two separate functions: the “Economy” function of the network (get the mission of the network done, e.g., get more votes counted for our candidates) and one or more “Enforcement” negative feedback loops of the network (keep people in line, e.g., make voters for the other candidate stay home). This seems to be true of all Crime Syndicate networks, from a neighborhood protection racket to a political party.

The Powell/Heritage network is a long-lived, evolving agglomeration of many interacting specific-purpose Crime Syndicate networks. I'll be calling such creatures "Crime Syndicate Aggregates" (CSA).

As a specific example, in "Shadow Network" [Anne Nelson](#) describes how the Council for National Policy and the Republican Party made a deal during the 2016 Presidential campaign, basically to trade voters for judges. This is an example of a merger of two CSAs into a more complicated CSA.

At root, however, a CSA is a Crime Syndicate network with multiple interconnected Economy and Enforcement sub-networks.

Note in particular how the Donor subnetworks of the Powell/Heritage network play both Economy and Enforcement roles.

In my view, donor subnetworks must be made more visible to the general public.

Network Thinking can lead to creative interventions not accessible to conventional thinking.

CSAs are hard to break up. Each component of a CSA is specifically designed to be internally stable, and there is a myriad of internal negative feedback loops that resist change.

You cannot successfully attack a CSA from the outside; you can only weaken it from the inside.

To do this you need to understand the function of the network in detail: its specific actors, pathways, and messages. Knowing the pathways and messages leads to information about inside vulnerabilities.

(Some networks will have thresholds such that when an amount of weakening crosses a threshold, the overall behavior of the network flips. For more, see pp. 10-17 of the [Ubiquitous Connectivity essay](#). In some disciplines this is called [phase transition](#).)

This proposal employs Network Thinking in the creation of its strategy.

Learning about the detailed functioning of a CSA involves collecting a lot of information. This is good news and bad news. The good news is that we have much of the information we already need in the products of investigative journalists such as [Jane Mayer](#) and [Anne Nelson](#), and others such as [Senator Sheldon Whitehouse](#). The bad news is that this knowledge is distributed around various print media and is sheltered in the professional domains of these journalists and politicians.

Another major victim of scale-induced change of function is an element of the American Experiment conducted by the interaction of The Press and The People which is key to formation of political consensus.

The [transformation of journalism](#), particularly the [loss of diverse local journalism](#), has been a major success of the Powell/Heritage network.

We need to re-imagine the process through which The Press and The People interact in the American Experiment.

We can weaken the effect of the Powell/Heritage network if we can find a way to re-introduce diversity in the People-Press interaction. Such diversity can weaken the synergy of interactions that generates socially undesirable emergent effects arising from exploitation of scale-induced change of function.

Such a re-imagining must involve many constituencies and, if it is permitted to occur at all, will be conducted in the face of powerful headwinds. So it must be done mindfully.

This re-imagining is the basis of This Proposal.

The Powell memorandum and its resultant network are based on a social vision of an inherently stable configuration of layered interests. The American Experiment is based on a social vision of a succession of metastable configurations that must continually be reinvented.

We must acknowledge from the start that the problem of weakening the Powell/Heritage network is new and hard and we might not get it right the first time.

So the strategy must incorporate an iterative learning process.