

“Since We Are Greatly Outnumbered”

Why and How the Koch Network Uses Disinformation to Thwart Democracy

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A passage I came across in the research for *Democracy in Chains* haunts me in thinking about today’s radical-right-wing disinformation ecosystem: “It may be possible for ‘irrationally held’ views to in fact support good policies,” particularly if those backing the policies were to leverage insights from “cognitive science and perhaps evolutionary biology.” This was written at a time when researchers in both disciplines were becoming aware of the biases set off by perceived threats to the survival of one’s affiliative group. As that media ecosystem was taking shape, the radical right embraced the behavioral manipulation of listener identity.¹

The author was Professor Tyler Cowen, the Holbert L. Harris Chair of Economics at George Mason University and the partner with Charles Koch for over two decades now in the academic base camp of Koch’s political project, housed at GMU’s Mercatus Center. Cowen ventured the suggestion in a paper called “Why Does Freedom Wax and Wane?” that was commissioned by Koch’s Institute for Humane Studies to guide its “Social Change Project.” The “good policies” in question, “unpopular” though they were, would help eradicate the “restrictions on liberty” characteristic of twentieth-century democracies. The paper itself was a transnational survey that laid the conceptual groundwork for the “big bang” we have seen in US political life since, with accelerating force after the 2010 midterm elections.

Cowen found that “the freest countries [defining freedom as economic liberty] have not generally been democratic” – with Chile under General Pinochet as “the most successful” case in point. Through structural “reforms” locked in by constitutional revision, Chile starkly reduced “rent-seeking through government favors” (i.e., the ability of citizens to

get from government what they could not get as individuals from the market). Indeed, Cowen pointed out, of the very few success stories to date, “in no case were reforms brought on by popular demand for market-oriented ideas.” More challenging still, the libertarian cause had run up against a persistent problem: it wanted a radical transformation that “find[s] little or no support” in the electorate. How might the change agents get around this problem? Experience showed that “public toleration is more important than deep public involvement,” so a situation in which many felt “some form of radical change was necessary” might just prove sufficient, particularly if “traditional democratic constraints were to some extent attenuated.”

It is eerie how well the Trump era conforms to this scenario. Ill-informed backers of the president believe so deeply that norm-shattering radical change is needed that they are willing to accept policies that large majorities have consistently opposed, but that the Koch network is securing under the Trump administration. Without access to the private records of Tyler Cowen or Charles Koch and their associates, I cannot state with certainty that Cowen was suggesting that the libertarian cause apply the findings of cognitive researchers on how tribal instincts, stress responses, and the like are hardwired in human beings, such that manipulating these vulnerabilities could gain “toleration” for policies that voters who were thinking rationally and without undue stress might be expected to oppose. But I do find this an evocative hypothesis that future scholars and journalists might explore.

Because one thing *is* abundantly clear from the available evidence: operations funded by Koch and his wealthy allies through organizations such as Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce and Donors Trust have relied on disinformation and manipulation to advance their agenda of radical transformation, leveraging the specter of a supposedly threatening “liberal elite” and strategic racism (what Ian Haney López calls “dog whistle politics”) to compensate for lack of persuasive evidence by inciting clannish responses.² Indeed, after witnessing several years of the Tea Party doing precisely that, a Cato Institute publication boasted of libertarians’ role in encouraging the cause and exulted that Tea Party activism was pushing the GOP to become “functionally libertarian.”³

In this chapter, I examine one key source of the disinformation now rife in American public life: the network of extreme right donors, allied organizations, and academic grantees convened over decades by Charles Koch. I argue that the architects of this network’s project of radical

transformation of our governing institutions and legal system have adopted deceit precisely because they understand that the hard-core libertarian agenda is extremely unpopular, and therefore requires stealth tactics to succeed. As Koch himself said to an audience of grantees in launching the audacious project: “Since we are greatly outnumbered, the failure to use our superior technology ensures failure.”⁴

Even in an era of surging inequality and wealth concentration in the top 0.01 percent, the Koch fortune stands out: if the wealth of the multi-billionaire brothers Charles and the now-deceased David Koch were held by a single individual, that individual would be the wealthiest on the planet.⁵ More arresting, though, are the political ambitions of Charles Koch to transform American governance through the step-by-step imposition of a radical libertarian agenda that is taking aim at a century’s worth of public policy in domains from education to regulation, social insurance, and taxation. We know the sheer scale and audacity of the Koch network’s operations and how they have used “dark money” to distort public debate and democratic governance alike, from the groundbreaking and revelatory investigative journalism of Jane Mayer, in particular.

The donor network funds an infrastructure of literally hundreds of organizations. It includes dozens of ostensibly separate national bodies such as the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the American Legislative Exchange Council, and the Federalist Society, as well as over 150 state-level organizations whose work is aligned through the State Policy Network. The organizing enterprises include Americans for Prosperity, Concerned Veterans for America, the LIBRE Initiative, and Generation Opportunity; and includes centers at colleges and universities – with George Mason University as the flagship enterprise, but with faculty at over 300 campuses now receiving funding. We know also, from the superb scholarly research of Theda Skocpol and Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, that, in its engagement of the political process, this network is well-resourced and determined enough to rival and sometimes surpass the Republican Party and, indeed, has influenced that party in order to further its agenda nationally and in the majority of state governments.⁶

So, too, the exhaustive research of UnKoch My Campus, picked up by numerous leading newspapers and online media outlets, has shown how universities have become a central nexus of this project. Koch-funded campus centers supply vital resources: a long-sought talent pipeline; intellectual legitimacy for the organizational affiliates of the Koch infrastructure; and defensive capacity when the network is criticized. In addition, UnKoch My Campus has shown how Koch investment leads to violations

of academic integrity, including donor-influenced faculty appointments and student research topic selection; secrecy in place of transparency; and, in the case of George Mason University, administrators who have misinformed faculty and students to protect the donor.⁷

When speaking of the Koch network, then, I am referring to this exceedingly well-endowed and interconnected set of hundreds of operations and a growing stable of academic grantees. What my research adds to our understanding is its exposure of the core ideas guiding these efforts and how those ideas, in turn, explain the reliance on radical rules change (including change to the Constitution) being secured without alerting the public to the real endgame.

To be clear, efforts at honest persuasion are legitimate in a democratic society that relies on broad input and open debate to arrive at the best understanding and solutions. And Koch network grantees often engage in reasoned efforts to change minds. But Koch network operations *also*, at the end of the day, rely on disinformation where persuasion has failed. And that corrosive practice is my focus here. They are not, of course, the only source of calculated misinformation today. We know that Donald Trump, for one, has lied habitually while president. Less often noticed, because his are so audacious, is that disinformation has become a core tool of much of the contemporary American right. Trump is the strange fruit of this enterprise, but not the sower of the seed.⁸ For that, we can look back at least to southern segregationist editors and spokespeople, who developed the trope of the not-to-be-trusted “liberal media” to combat honest reportage on the civil rights struggle.⁹

Still, such precedents and analogous practices notwithstanding, there has been nothing in our history as ambitious, elaborate and calculated as the Koch network. And as it is the piece of the puzzle I know best, my focus here will be on its role in bringing us to the current crisis. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss a few key episodes in the evolution of the tactic of enlisting disinformation to secure adoption of otherwise unsalable policies and changes in the legal system. The advantage of such a historical narrative is that it allows us to pinpoint key moments when Koch allies (and Charles Koch himself) came to understand that honest persuasion and organizing would not get them where they wanted to go.

I should note at the outset that while the archives to which I had access did not include significant materials on Koch investments in media, celebrity sources of disinformation have been significant draws at Koch seminars, including Rush Limbaugh, John Stossel, and Glenn Beck.¹⁰ I hope

others will explore those connections. As the ever-strategic Grover Norquist has made clear, that which contributors to this volume bemoan is cause for celebration to Koch network participants like himself. Exulting over the declining viewership of the once “Big Three” stations, Norquist conflates “breaking through the establishment media” with “conservatives rising,” and celebrates “cutting out the middlemen” – the gatekeepers of old. He notes that the huge profits and listenership of those such as Limbaugh and Beck ensures that “the new media will have a stake in electing congressmen, senators, and presidents” that side with the coalition that legalized their output. Aligning incentives to achieve the desired, if unpopular, outcomes is key to Koch strategy.¹¹

REPACKAGING SOCIAL SECURITY PRIVATIZATION AS “REFORM”

Because the Koch project now sails under the false flag of “conservatism” so it can reach large numbers of voters, it is worth remembering that years ago Charles Koch and his grantees were more honest. They proclaimed themselves root-and-branch radicals, albeit radicals of the right, who spurned conservatives, and particularly disdained the kind of cold war and religious right conservatives on whom the project now relies for votes. Back then, Koch’s favored thinker was Murray Rothbard, the grantee who suggested that his patron read Lenin to appreciate the necessity of cultivating a revolutionary “cadre.” Koch did, and the Cato Institute became their joint project to launch the effort in the 1970s. After all, they sought revolutionary change: a world in which liberty was preserved by the total absence of government coercion in any form. No one could have mistaken Cato libertarianism with conservatism at time of the Institute’s founding. Indeed, Rothbard instructed readers of the first publication of the newly established think tank that the latter label should be “despised,” because “conservatism is a dying remnant of the ancien régime of the preindustrial era,” and thus at odds with the wholly free capitalism that libertarians sought. “In its contemporary American form,” Rothbard explained, conservatism “embodied the death throes of an ineluctably moribund, fundamentalist, rural, small-town white Anglo-Saxon America.”¹²

In a demonstration of the extremism of their position, Cato’s first leader, Edward Crane, never forgave Barry Goldwater, the Republican presidential nominee whose views proved too far right for the electorate, for “[running] away from the issue of privatizing Social Security.” Charles

Koch funded his brother David to run against Ronald Reagan in 1980, as the candidate of a Libertarian Party that called for an end to government coercion in any form, including minimum wages, child labor laws, taxation, and prosecution for drug use or voluntary prostitution. In the view of the hardy cadre of libertarians Koch built up in the 1970s and 1980s, the whole “establishment” had to be overthrown, its conservative wing as much as its liberal one. The future, said Crane, belonged to the only “truly radical vision”: “repudiating state power altogether.” The libertarians proudly proclaimed themselves “the party of revolution.”¹³

What led the Koch cause to discard this initial, uncompromising candor? As near as I can tell, it was something that often sets off social movements: “the threatened loss of new possibility.”¹⁴ The program of neoliberal transformation pushed through after the 1973 coup in Chile by the Pinochet government thrilled advocates of economic liberty; their vision was no long utopian, but now instantiated in a modern nation. Thus invigorated, they then watched in despair as the new US President Ronald Reagan, who talked their talk, backed away in his very first year in office from carrying out the draconian program urged by his libertarian Office of Management and Budget Director David Stockman. Why? Because the president realized how unpopular it would make him. The much-ballyhooed Reagan Revolution, Stockman concluded, could not succeed in “the world of democratic fact.” The coincidence of these contrasting experiences – success in a controlled environment and failure in the wider democracy – led the Koch cause to turn, more and more frequently in the ensuing decades, to stealth strategies reliant on misinformation.¹⁵

The year after the Pinochet regime crafted a new “Constitution of Liberty” to embed neoliberalism in the lasting rules of national governance, Charles Koch moved the Cato Institute from San Francisco to Washington, DC, in a display of his new interest in policy relevance. Having seen the Chilean junta’s success in imposing retirement pension privatization (and ending employer contributions), the Cato Institute made social security privatization its top policy goal. It invited James McGill Buchanan, a founder of “public choice” political economy and a deeply committed libertarian who had just relocated his operation to George Mason University, to advise on how it could be done. To make a long story short: not with honest persuasion.

As Cato’s advisor on the Chilean constitution and an adjunct scholar, Buchanan launched the project with a lengthy 1983 article in the *Cato Journal*. He labeled the existing system a “Ponzi scheme,” a framing that

as one critic pointed out, implied that the program was “fundamentally fraudulent,” indeed, “totally and fundamentally wrong.” But Buchanan’s main concern was the politics of social security: first, to explain why “support for the system [was] so universal” that it was treated as “sacrosanct,” and any questioning of it “political suicide” – as the Reagan administration had just learned the hard way. The answer was straightforward: the majority of voters wanted the system to continue as it was. “There is no widespread support for basic structural reform, among *any* membership group” in the American polity, he noted, the italics his own: “among the old or the young, the black, the brown, or the white, the female or the male, the rich or the poor, the Frost Belt or the Sunbelt.”¹⁶ The near-universal popularity of social security meant that any attempt to fight it on honest philosophical grounds was doomed.

Buchanan therefore suggested a more circuitous and sequential approach that obscured the truth. “Those who seek to undermine the existing structure,” he advised, must alter beneficiaries’ understanding of social security’s viability, because that would “make abandonment of the system look more attractive.” His counsel grew more cunning as it continued. “When short-run ‘reforms’ are needed,” he recommended, “those who seek to undermine the support of the system (over the longer term) would do well to propose increases in the retirement age and increases in payroll taxes.” In other words, to make social security less well-liked, recipients had to pay more and work longer to retire. Another shrewd move would be to tax high earners at higher rates than others in order to sully the image of the program as an insurance contract. Making the wealthy pay more in the near term could also lead more of them to oppose the program. Taken together, such a “patchwork pattern of ‘reforms’” (the quotation marks around “reform” his own, to communicate the message that reform was not the true endgame) could pare off, one after another, groups that currently supported social security. Better still, the member groups of a once unified coalition that protected it might be induced by such changes to fight one another. When that happened, the broad phalanx that had upheld the system for a half century might finally fracture.¹⁷ The follow-up plan by two staff members at the Heritage Foundation was aptly titled “Achieving a ‘Leninist’ Strategy.”¹⁸

The Machiavellian advice Buchanan gave to his allies in Cato’s orbit pointed to a larger truth: that the goal was never to ensure social security’s long-term viability, as elected officials advised by the libertarian cadre would portray it to the wider public, but rather to defeat its inner essence. What the libertarian right depicted as “reform” was but a camouflaged

step toward the destruction of the social insurance system, which depended on large pools of contributor-beneficiaries to balance actuarial risks. The libertarian thinkers and operatives acknowledged among themselves that privatization – wherever it was applied – was a strategy to weaken the collective organizational capacity of the people and discourage individual citizens' tendency to look to government for solutions to their common problems. Along the way, privatization would also enrich the corporations that took over the former functions of government, and that, too, would alter power relations in ways that advanced the libertarian revolution.¹⁹

As the political scientist Jeffrey Henig noted, in the second half of the 1980s, privatization “moved from an intellectual fringe to become a centerpiece in contemporary public policy debates.” Buchanan’s so-called Virginia school of political economy (a subset of the broader field of public choice economics), helped effect “the intellectual de-legitimation of the welfare state” that prepared the way for such privatization and, with it, in the words of one enthusiast, advanced “the goal of fundamentally and irreversibly changing” the very nature of modern politics. Where the external advocacy focused on questions of cost, competition, and efficiency, the internal think tank discussions always involved long-term calculation about how best to alter the structure and incentives of political life in order to radically shrink what members of the public might decide to do collectively.²⁰ Privatization was thus a key element of the crab walk to the final, albeit gradual, revolution – the ends-justify-the-means way of thinking that allowed for the use of disingenuous claims.

CITIZENS FOR A SOUND ECONOMY AND TOBACCO DISINFORMATION

While the turn to “discourse sabotage” (to borrow a phrase from Kathleen Hall Jamieson via Jane Mayer) as strategy seems to have begun with social security, it soon appeared in other arenas as well.²¹ It became apparent in the growing ties between Buchanan’s students and colleagues (often the same people, as he liked to hire his own advisees) and the tobacco industry, a leading corporate sector in Virginia, where they worked. He recommended “a fine publicist for applied economics” for one of the growing number of donor-created and ideologically defined faculty positions on US campuses, a tobacco-funded “Philip Morris Chair of Free Enterprise.”²²

Other Buchanan allies at George Mason University began publishing on contract to the Tobacco Institute, in a form of profitable academic

entrepreneurship that made them, in the apt phrase of Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, “merchants of doubt.” Sample titles include *Smoking and Society: Toward a More Balanced Assessment* and *Clearing the Air: Perspectives on Environmental Tobacco Smoke*. Their stock-in-trade was the use of a patina of public choice economics to discredit promoters of public health as self-seeking actors, hiding their real interests beneath claims about a fictitious common good. The character assassination by insinuation was enlivened by a filipp of right-wing populism that branded regulators as elitist “paternalists” who used “coercion” in their social engineering.²³ Along with the academic books, came a larger and lucrative project run from George Mason’s Economics Department called “Cash for Comments” (C4C), which paid economics faculty to front for the ever more embattled tobacco corporations.²⁴

This work was a leading example of the new collaborations coming from an organization funded by Charles and David Koch in 1984, to lobby for market-fundamentalist policies such as deregulation and privatization – and to aid corporations that found themselves in trouble with government. Citizens for a Sound Economy (CSE) was a discourse-polluting enterprise from the outset. It was also, notes the former head of a strategic communications firm that took on the organization as its first client, “in effect, a wholly owned subsidiary of Koch Industries.”²⁵ At the helm was Buchanan’s GMU colleague, Richard (Richie) Fink, a believer in Austrian economics and a peerless academic entrepreneur, who became Charles Koch’s chief political advisor in this period. Fink stocked the organization with GMU economics PhD alumni including Michael Becker, Wayne T. Brough, Jerry Ellig, Wayne Gable, and Wayne A. Leighton.²⁶

The ultimate mission of CSE was to solve a problem that had long plagued organized libertarianism: the cause was all officers and no troops. The idea was to build a lobbying apparatus beyond the capital, out in the districts, for the proposals its corporate members produced – and to use this apparatus to pressure legislators to carry out the donor agenda. As early as 1978, Charles Koch had preached that “we need a movement” for just this reason.²⁷ After all, an enterprise that numbered in the thousands, as libertarianism then did, could never realize its vast ambitions. That is why Fink and Koch created a mobilizing outfit that could expand the audience for their ideas and push policymakers to act on them. Citizens for a Sound Economy (CSE) thus billed itself as “a grass-roots organization with 200,000 members across the country” which aimed “to build support for market-oriented policy initiatives and reduce government interference in private decision making.”²⁸

Those at the helm showed few scruples about how they arrived at such numbers. Even the *Wall Street Journal* in time complained that CSE operated in a “secretive” manner and claimed as members organizations that had no idea they were listed as such, including the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.²⁹

With Fink as the group’s “Founder, President, Chief Executive Officer,” CSE reached out to corporations to recruit them to the cause and seek their monetary help. The organization’s astroturf membership was part of the lure: people who could be tapped to lean on their state legislators and congressional representatives. In fact, Patricia Schroeder, a liberal member of Congress, launched a formal ethics complaint that Fink was using his position on Reagan’s Commission on Privatization to solicit money for CSE, and that he had claimed to his marks that President Reagan backed CSE’s push for privatization. “It’s not often a President personally takes time to seek the support of a citizens’ group like us,” wrote Fink in fundraising for his “pro-taxpayer” and “deficit-reduction” group. Fink had indeed secured a letter from the president, which addressed him on a first-name basis and expressed appreciation for CSE’s work for a balanced budget, to include with his pitch. Duly chastised by a White House staff member, “Mr. Fink said he was sorry and would not do it again.” One overruled critic suggested, presciently, “Sanction would have been stronger.” But the apology was deemed adequate because CSE “does support many of the Administration’s programs.”³⁰

As Fink learned the need for more finesse, the group managed to block some popular measures while also laying groundwork for the future. All the strategies being used today by Americans for Prosperity, the much larger and more sophisticated organizing outfit that succeeded CSE, had their first trials here, above all the leveraging of corporate funding to sustain a nation-wide apparatus of engaged voters. Their mobilization could change the incentives for elected officials on matters from taxes to health care, energy policy, and corporate regulation.³¹

A case in point: with the vast monies Charles and David Koch and their allies provided, CSE tested its prowess in fights against government health care provision. When Senator Orrin Hatch, a conservative Republican from Utah, cosponsored a bill with Senator Edward M. Kennedy, a liberal Democrat from Massachusetts, to provide health care coverage to about ten million children, CSE “launched a \$35,000 a week radio blitz” in Hatch’s home state that upbraided him in what he rightly called a “false and misleading” fashion.³²

But that was nothing compared to the role CSE played in the fight against the Clinton administration's health care plan. Described by one staff member as CSE's "biggest single effort," it included "organized demonstrations that shadowed the Clinton Administration's pro-health care bus tour" – with, noted two journalists, "protesters far better organized than proponents of universal health care."³³

Reaching out to corporations that faced challenges from government, CSE offered them support in order to demonstrate the value of political investment and win their leaders' commitment for the long fight ahead. The tobacco company Philip Morris was one such convert. The Clinton health care plan floated the idea of new taxes on tobacco for part of its funding, which might also reduce cancer rates. This outraged the company's management. One element of its multipronged shadow strategy to defeat "Hillarycare" was a \$400,000 contribution to CSE for "a grassroots program aimed at 'swing' Democrats" on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, "a key battleground" for the plan in Congress. The Kochs were little known at the time, but the *Washington Post* reported that, while the protesters came from varied organizations, CSE was "the principle organizer" in many cities across the country. A flummoxed and furious President Clinton denounced the "demagoguery" of those "who disseminate false information," pummeling the lectern at a press conference "so hard that he knocked the presidential seal to the ground." In vain. "The [orchestrated] controversy emanating at the grassroots level" helped put the plan to death.³⁴

In light of the subsequent success of the Koch-funded attacks on the Obama administration and the Affordable Care Act, the candidacy of Hillary Clinton, and so much else, it is enlightening to revisit the best single account of the campaign to defeat universal health care. In their book-length narrative, the veteran Washington reporters Haynes Johnson and David S. Broder tracked what was then "the most heavily financed and sophisticated lobbying in America ever." And, lo, Citizens for a Sound Economy drove it from the start. Its Washington office sent out the first deceitful attacks – calling the Clinton proposal "government-run health care" that would force providers to "ration care." The CSE office, three blocks from the White House, then "became the nerve center for strategy sessions" with ultimately some thirty organizations – from corporate interests to the Christian Coalition and the NRA – all determined "to kill what they derisively called 'Hillarycare.'" In classic Koch style, they referred to themselves as "the No Name Coalition" and held their meetings "off the record" and "hidden from public scrutiny." But CSE

orchestrated the entire fight, which was “nothing less than a war without quarter, waged until one side thoroughly defeated the other,” by upending the normal rules of fair play and systematically misinforming the media and the public. “It’s as if you can’t debate substance” anymore, one despairing long-time staffer for Bob Dole said of the sudden change: “You’ve got to talk about personalities” and engage in “personal attack.” Thanks to the unrelenting, “pounding” efforts of the lobbying, compromise was no longer an option for Republicans.³⁵

“Nothing was left to chance” by Citizens for a Sound Economy. The pro-reform bus caravan found itself faced with opponents “lying in wait like a guerrilla army,” as the CSE team coordinated “closely—and secretly—with Newt Gingrich’s Capitol Hill office and with Republican senators.” The agitation was so intense that Hillary Clinton acceded to repeated Secret Service appeals and wore a bulletproof vest at one rally, where they arrested several menacing attendees and confiscated two guns and a knife. Rush Limbaugh spoke daily with operatives of Citizens for a Sound Economy about the latest talking points, also pushed out by the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*. CSE made huge media advertising buys, some to air hourly, out in the states, while conservative Christian churches lathered up their parishioners against the prospect of abortion coverage. It was all so well executed that the combined effort not only defeated the once-popular Clinton push for universal health care, but also enabled the swashbuckling 1994 Republican takeover of Congress, ending decades of Democratic control.³⁶

Indeed, CSE was becoming more formidable than its bumbling origins might lead one to imagine. According to the eyewitness and researcher Jeff Nesbit, CSE was also the crucial late-stage operations manager in a gambit which the federal judge who held the tobacco companies liable “for RICO violations for fraudulently hiding the health risks associated with smoking” called “a massive 50-year scheme to defraud the public.” Deliberate disinformation was the very core of the scheme, along with the secretive practices for which Koch has become known.³⁷

Similarly, in 1996, CSE involved partners such as the American Petroleum Institute and the Chemical Manufacturers Association to start what the *National Journal* called “a \$5 million, multi-year campaign to weaken environmental laws in favor of big business.” The project coupled multimedia efforts with the hiring of “field directors to coordinate grass-roots work in the districts.” Again, others called foul. Dubbing CSE “the polluters’ front group,” the Sierra Club lambasted it for using “a

phony pediatrician” who brandished “wildly improbable figures” on the cost of adhering to new air pollution standards.³⁸

THE KOCH NETWORK AND CLIMATE SCIENCE DENIAL

It was not a great leap from such stealth efforts in defending industry in other areas to assisting the fossil fuel industry in its fight against honest science when global warming began to receive public attention. After all, fossil fuel was the core of Koch Industries and its most reliable cash cow. Majority opinion was becoming a big problem for the industry and libertarian zealots in this era, as Americans came to embrace environmentalism to one degree or another, recognizing the need for government action to promote it. While corporations such as Exxon Mobil had withheld information to protect their investments and future profits, they could not hold the fort alone, with public opinion and many elected officials awakening to their products’ impact upon the planet. Koch network operations would not be alone in aiding the fossil fuel industry, but their support was significant, and had outsized – and continuing – impact.³⁹

In 1997, as the global climate negotiations got underway which would lead to the Kyoto Protocol of 1998, Citizens for a Sound Economy warned its corporate allies that 76 percent of Americans thought of themselves as environmentalists. “Worse, 65 percent” told industry pollsters that they “do not trust business” to take action against pollution; “79 percent of voters think current regulations are about right or ‘not strict enough.’”⁴⁰ That was an existential challenge for a cause committed to radical deregulation. The lesson the cadre took from such findings was that it could not win majorities for its true goals.

So, what was to be done? Caught between citizen support for environmental action, on the one hand, and, on the other, its members’ resolve to protect corporations from any interference and abiding belief that government could do no good, the libertarian cause came to deny the findings of science rather than concede the need for federal action. The problem is an inescapable one for their ideology: the pollution that produces planetary warming confirms the downside of free enterprise – what economists call market failure. This is a conclusion the ideologues cannot tolerate, because it shows the value of government intervention. The chair of the Economics Department at George Mason thus proclaimed that “sound skepticism of government action to prevent global warming is itself based on science” – the science, that is, of public choice. “It might be hard to admit,” said

Donald J. Boudreaux, but because a government cure would be worse than the disease, global warming “is best left alone.”⁴¹

But that was not a persuasive proposition with the public, so Koch-funded organizations also promoted climate change denial, using donor funds to expand efforts to make the citizenry believe the science was inconclusive and controversial. These efforts have also been directed at Republican voters, most of whom, even conservative ones, want action on global warming. The cause aims to ensure that they do not get it – indeed, that they are systematically deceived.⁴² The Cato Institute, which Buchanan helped Charles Koch launch, and the Independent Institute, on whose board of advisers the economist sat until his death in 2013, are among the circle of libertarian think tanks driving what Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway describe as systematic “misinformation campaigns.” Nearly all the ostensibly separate but connected wings of the Koch apparatus have participated, from Citizens for a Sound Economy, to the Capital Research Center, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the many affiliates of the State Policy Network, and, of course, Americans for Prosperity.⁴³

As on other issues, vastly wealthy people are paying operatives to prevent the political process from acting on the will of the majority. Just as it enlists the threat of primary challenges to force Republican elected officials to pledge not to support taxes that the majority approves, so does the cause use the same bludgeon to secure pledges of inaction in this area. The coercion works. Senator John McCain was but the best-known Republican to flip his position after a Tea Party primary challenge. By 2014, only eight of 278 Republicans in Congress were willing to acknowledge that man-made climate change was a reality. That pattern of Leninist-like discipline in denial of the scientifically indisputable has no counterpart elsewhere in the world – which makes sense, because no other nation yet has an apparatus like the Koch network in America. “We’re looking at a party,” Paul Krugman points out, “that has turned its back on science at a time when doing so puts the very future of civilization at risk.”⁴⁴

To say all this another way: if the Koch-funded scholars, institutions, and elected officials were not in the conversation, the public would know that the evidence of science is overwhelming and government action to prevent further global warming is urgent.⁴⁵ Stop the flow of libertarian corporate cash and the nation might just turn to an honest reckoning with the economic model and energy sources that have wrought such havoc.

So determined is the Koch network to stop action on climate change, however, that a cause which came into being with odes to the Age of

Reason and which presents its grantees on university campuses as “classical liberals,” has turned to schemes that defame and intimidate professional scientists. Efforts to discredit their findings having failed, operatives seek to smear individuals and bully them into silence. Invoking public choice thinking, a Koch-subsidized organization thus argues that climate scientists are seeking personal monetary rewards, and not doing honest research in the public interest. “All Aboard the Climate Gravy Train,” reads a typical headline.⁴⁶ Merely for doing their jobs as researchers, climate scientists are being hounded by members of the cadre. Among other practices, these operatives abuse the Freedom of Information Act to demand access to the scientists’ correspondence in hopes of proving that the scholars are crying wolf in the pursuit of personal gain.⁴⁷ Those funded by the Koch network to advance the liberty cause have shown that they will say anything, quite literally, to achieve their goal of preventing government action.⁴⁸

The amounts being spent are astronomical, it bears mentioning. According to Greenpeace researchers, Koch Foundations over the period from 1997 to 2017 contributed over \$127 million to ninety-two organizations that engage in climate science denial.⁴⁹

USING THE MYTH OF VOTER FRAUD TO RESTRICT THE ELECTORATE

As the scale of the perceived threat grew, with more ambitious environmental action joining other ominous auguries for economic liberty, such as the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (popularly known as “motor voter”), which brought millions of low-income voters into the political process, the Koch-allied right came to view restricting the electorate as vital to achieving its goals. Here again, Koch grantees in the academy made the intellectual case. Interestingly, the first pilot program for voter ID requirements came from the very Virginia counties (Arlington and Fairfax) that were home to the flagship Koch outpost at George Mason University. It was promoted by a Republican governor, James S. Gilmore III, whose support was crucial to that Koch outpost.⁵⁰

While I do not yet have information to confirm Mercatus team input on the proposal, Koch allies and grantees on the GMU faculty, including Tyler Cowen and Bryan Caplan, have published works which argue that the expansion of the electorate in the twentieth century harmed economic liberty. Cowen observed that “the expansion of the voter franchise” beyond “wealthy male landowners” had led to enlarged public sectors,

anathema to libertarians. It seemed that when other citizens, women among them, could influence government policy, taxes went up and government became more intrusive. For example, Cowen noted, "the elimination of poll taxes and literacy tests leads to higher turnout and higher welfare spending."⁵¹ Calling voters who do not share the cause's economics "a public nuisance," Caplan suggested that it might be wise "to reduce or eliminate efforts to increase voter turnout."⁵² The economist was not specific about how to do it, but implied the desirability of voter suppression.

The task of applying that counsel with practical measures fell to operatives in the integrated Koch network infrastructure. Here again, widespread and well-funded disinformation has proved essential to securing the desired outcomes. Any politician who openly argued for keeping from the polls those citizens likely to disagree with one's policy goals would face outrage and fierce opposition. And the Constitution now rules out poll taxes, limiting the options.

But crab-walking could get the desired result: use deliberate misinformation to change the terms of debate. Hence, Koch-funded organizations, among them the American Legislative Exchange Council, spread the falsehood of mass voter fraud – and continue to, even after repeated studies have exposed it to be a non-existent problem. In turn, elected Republican officials allied to the Koch network enlisted this helpful myth and used the products of the smog-generating organizations to pass measures that have since helped throw elections their way. The years 2011 and 2012 alone saw more than 180 bills proposed in forty-one states to make voting significantly harder by requiring photo identification (while disallowing public assistance and university ID cards), limiting early voting, ending programs that provided for automatic registration of high school students, and moving polling places to harder-to-reach locations. All this in a nation that was 138th of 172 democracies in its level of participation.⁵³

The belief that low-income voters lacked legitimacy was a staple of Buchanan's Virginia school of political economy. It modernized southern white conservative intellectual traditions reaching back to the suppression of voting rights in the South after Reconstruction and the more sweeping disenfranchisement of Black and low-income whites after the success of the Peoples Party in biracial electoral fusion campaigns in the 1890s.⁵⁴ The will to limit the electorate by class also spread in the Mont Pelerin Society, which launched in 1947 (and today is chock-full of climate change deniers). Pointing to Virginia school ideas about the need to curtail democracy, the

economist George Stigler had urged fellow members of the society at a meeting in the late 1970s to consider how the franchise might be restricted “to property owners, educated persons, employed persons, or some such group.”⁵⁵ Otherwise, Grover Norquist later warned, a nation risked “creating an underclass that votes rather than works for a living.”⁵⁶

Such elitist thinking is widespread on the libertarian right, which depicts modern majoritarian democracy as a calculated project of coalition building by the “nonproductive” to exploit wealthy taxpayers – or, in the words of Cato Institute spokesman David Boaz, borrowing from Buchanan, “the predators and the prey.” “Registering the poor to vote,” complained a libertarian pundit more crudely, “is like handing out burglary tools to criminals.”⁵⁷ Such thinking, however commonplace on the right, could not be expected to provide sufficient cover to legislators or persuade reporters, let alone survive court review.

So, here again, the tactic of deception has proved essential. Fraud was the alleged hazard that justified all the efforts to make voting harder. Serious researchers have been unable to uncover *any* intentional voter fraud (just normal human error in overwhelmed systems and occasional, innocent lack of knowledge about eligibility). But so avidly has the right spread the big lie that mass fraud augured “stolen” US elections, that not only nearly half of registered voters but also even federal judges and Supreme Court justices came to believe it – and decide cases on those fallacious assumptions.⁵⁸

THE MISLEADING CAMPAIGN FOR A STATE-CONVENED CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

As effective as these campaigns to corrupt honest debate have been, the Koch-backed misinformation that may prove most consequential for the future of American governance is that which is currently getting the least attention from the media and the Democratic Party: the case for convening a constitutional convention as allowed by Article V – and the promotion of the fiction that its agenda could be contained. While the nation has been transfixed by the daily tweets of President Trump, the Koch network has quietly lined up authorizations from state legislatures to convene the first national constitutional convention since the Constitution was drafted. Common Cause has called the effort “the most serious threat to our democracy flying completely under the radar.” To date, twenty-eight of the thirty-four states needed have signed on. Until the 2018 midterms there were six GOP-controlled statehouses that had not yet committed but

could be expected to: Idaho, Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, South Carolina, and Virginia. (Now, after Democrats won one house of the Minnesota legislature, there are five.) As even Warren Burger, the conservative former chief justice of the Supreme Court noted, "there is no way to effectively limit or muzzle the actions of a Constitutional Convention."⁵⁹

Yet, central to all the arguments of convention promoters is the spurious claim that such a convention would not be a runaway convention, free to vote up any radical changes proposed by its delegates. Thus, the Convention of States, one of the leading proponents of the effort, assures visitors to its website: "Is it safe? Absolutely." How it could be safe yet also a "revolution" as promised by Mark Meckler, the Tea Party Patriots leader who heads the effort, is not explained.⁶⁰ Again, misinformation and stealth enable what otherwise would be unthinkable. "You really don't need people to do this," one Article V convention advocate told a Wisconsin state representative who attended an ALEC summit. "You just need control over the legislature and you need money, and we have both."⁶¹

USING DISINFORMATION TO CRIMINALIZE PROTEST

How convenient, then, that Koch network partners, representatives of the fossil fuel industry, and allied elected officials are also seeking new measures to punish protest, which, like the push for a constitutional convention, are attracting little attention, what with the mayhem in Trump's Washington. Some thirty-one states have considered bills to criminalize and discourage protest, and eight states have passed these laws. Most target specific types of dissent: critical infrastructure bills establish harsh criminal penalties for pipeline protestors and organizations that support them; campus free speech bills specify sanctions for student protestors following protests against incendiary speakers; and highway bills aim at protests by Black Lives Matter. Several of these bills are based on model legislation from ALEC.⁶²

Here, again, disinformation greases the skids to secure passage of laws that otherwise might be considered a violation of the First Amendment and the traditions of direct-action protest that have animated politics in America since the Revolution. Actors on the right, including the current president and right-wing media, have spread the narrative meme of "angry mobs," funded by George Soros, that must be deterred with aggressive new measures, leveraging anti-Semitism and white anxiety to stifle reason and convey urgency.⁶³

CONCLUSION

This is not the first time in our history that we have seen disinformation campaigns, nor are members of the Koch network the only practitioners on today's right. But what we are seeing now is worse, by a long shot. This is partly true owing to changes in media and technology, which other chapters in this volume address. But what is driving it, in the Koch case, is a new ruthlessness from a particularly ideological and threatened fraction of the capitalist class: an extremist minority, anchored in fossil fuels, that is breathtakingly well-funded and determined to win at any cost – and to make the transformation it seeks permanent. Through radical rule changes up to and including alteration of the Constitution, they aim to lock in the unpopular program of a tiny, messianic minority. And to stop action on the imminent climate catastrophe.

This chapter has outlined how the Koch network of extreme right donors, allied organizations, and many academic grantees have used disinformation as one strategy to achieve their agenda. Seeking changes radical and encompassing enough to constitute a quiet, slow-motion revolution, Charles Koch and his team have sought to mislead the public on matters as varied as social security, the harms of tobacco, climate science, alleged voter fraud, constitutional change, and direct action protest. Through it all can be seen the unifying thread of “wealth defense” so characteristic of oligarchs through the ages, but now modernized to leverage sophisticated technology and targeted media that would have been unimaginable to the oligarchs of old.⁶⁴

Nor is this wealth defense on the part of would-be oligarchs solely a US project; though anchored in the USA, it has gone global. While my own research has concentrated on the American core of the effort to enchain democracy through disinformation, the Koch-backed corporate-anchored libertarian cause is transnational. It operates through the Atlas Network, an international umbrella organization of over 450 affiliates in ninety-six countries, with extensive funding from US donors.⁶⁵

Scattered reports suggest that many of its affiliates engage in the kinds of practices explained here. For example, British journalists have discovered that the Institute for Economic Affairs, the leading UK-based Atlas affiliate, played a secretive role in promoting Brexit – one that has since landed it in legal trouble.⁶⁶ So, too, have Koch Industry representatives hosted visitors from Australia who sought their investment to “change the voting system” down under. Steve Dickson of the climate-denialist One Nation party was recorded telling Koch personnel: “We can change the voting system in our

country, the way people operate, if we’ve got the money to do it. . . . The ingredients are there, we just don’t have the petrol to put in the engine.” One can only assume that with any such petrol would come strategic disinformation and stealth efforts of the kind described here. Indeed, the ABC report continued, Dickson “and the Koch Industries representatives also discussed the laws and public disclosure requirements in Australia for political donations.”⁶⁷

Perhaps the most stunning revelations to date, however, concern the Koch-allied Heartland Institute. An Atlas affiliate in the vanguard of US climate science denial, it has advised and worked with the German neo-Nazi party, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), which is recruiting hard in troubled coal communities and trying to stop action on climate change.⁶⁸

What is needed to combat this transnational apparatus of discourse pollution and democracy subversion? My dream is that a group like the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), the network of investigative reporters from seventy countries that produced the Panama Papers, would start to seek out on information on Koch network allies across the globe, information that network participants so assiduously seek to hide. If such a team were able to do on Atlas what they did for tax offshoring and money laundering with the Panama Papers, we might just have a chance to save an imperilled planet from the toxic practices of these embattled fossil fuel magnates and the right-wing populist con men with which they and their allies defend the indefensible.⁶⁹

NOTES

1. Tyler Cowen, “Why Does Freedom Wax and Wane: Some Research Questions in Social Change and Big Government,” Mercatus Center, George Mason University, 2000. The piece was reprinted online in 2015. Because the original has no page numbers, subsequent notes to the document here will not cite it. For research grants to fund Cowen’s project from the Institute for Humane Studies, see Tyler Cowen and David Nott memorandum, May 13, 1997, Buchanan House Archives, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA (hereafter, BHA). For more context, see Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Viking, 2017). Among recent works popularizing the political implications of findings in the disciplines mentioned are Drew Western, *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007); Rich Shenkman, *Political Animals: How Our Stone-Age Brain Gets in the Way of Smart Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2016) and Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York:

- Pantheon, 2012). For how the insular right-wing media ecosystem weaponizes identity and political in-group affiliation, inviting consumers to feel anger and hatred, see Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts, *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
2. Ian Haney López, *Dog-Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). Haney López focuses on the broader Republican right; my research finds that Koch network allied organizations have used such appeals to powerful effect.
 3. David Kirby and Emily Ekins, “Libertarian Roots of the Tea Party,” *Policy Analysis*, no. 705 (August 6, 2012): 1. For the racial anxieties and hostilities of what the Cato authors were depicting as “functionally libertarian,” see Christopher S. Parker and Matthew A. Barreto, *Change They Can’t Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).
 4. Charles G. Koch, *Creating a Science of Liberty* (Fairfax, VA: Institute for Humane Studies, 1997); for more on the context, see *Democracy in Chains*, xxii, and ch. 12, “The Kind of Force that Propelled Columbus,” another quote from Koch, this one conveying the desired impact of the technology of liberty. On the need to mislead, see also Jane Mayer’s discussion of Koch’s first political and philanthropic advisor’s recognition of the need “to use ambiguous and misleading names, obscure the true agenda, and conceal the means of control.” Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York: Doubleday, 2016), 56.
 5. Calculated by George Monbiot, “How US Billionaires Are Fueling the Hard-Right Cause in Britain,” *The Guardian*, December 7, 2018, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/dec/07/us-billionaires-hard-right-britain-spiked-magazine-charles-david-koch-foundation.
 6. See, for example, Mayer, *Dark Money*; Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Theda Skocpol, and Jason Sclar, “When Political Mega-Donors Join Forms: How the Koch Network and the Democracy Alliance Influence Organized U.S. Politics on the Right and Left,” *Studies in American Political Development*, 2018. Also see Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), particularly the discussion of the impact of the aligned “roving billionaires.”
 7. See the many primary sources, reports, and links to media coverage on the website of UnKoch My Campus: [//www.unkochmycampus.org/](http://www.unkochmycampus.org/).
 8. See, for example, the brilliant work of Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010); the literature on right-wing think tanks, particularly Thomas Medvez, *Think Tanks in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and the journalistic accounts by Alexandra Kitty and Robert Greenwald, *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch’s War*

- on *Journalism* (New York: Disinformation Books, 2005); and David Brock, Ari Rabin-Havt, and Media Matters for America, *The Fox Effect: How Roger Ailes Turned a Network into a Propaganda Machine* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012).
9. Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006); David Greenberg, “The Idea of ‘the Liberal Media’ and Its Roots in the Civil Rights Movement,” *The Sixties* (Winter 2008–2009).
 10. Program for the January 2011 Koch seminar held at Rancho Las Palmas Resort in Rancho Mirage, CA, “Understanding and Addressing Threats to American Free Enterprise and Prosperity,” 12. On Russ Limbaugh’s singular role in the emergence of “outrage” media as a profitable industry, see Benkler, et al., *Network Propaganda*.
 11. Grover Norquist, *Leave Us Alone: Getting the Government’s Hands Off Our Money, Our Guns, and Our Lives* (New York: William Morrow, 2008), all quotes from ch. 13 on “The New Media.” The veteran Koch ally James C. Miller III described the following approach learned from James M. Buchanan: “When I see decisions not going in the right direction, I think of arrangements to provide the right incentives.” Ron Scherer, “Nobel Prize Winner Focuses on Government Self-Interest,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 20, 1986, 5.
 12. See ch. 9, “Never Compromise,” in MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*, for further discussion and documentation.
 13. MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*, 139–140.
 14. Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in Civil Rights and the New Left* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 221.
 15. David A. Stockman, *The Triumph of Politics: Why the Reagan Revolution Failed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 14. I tell those stories in chapters 10 and 11 of *Democracy in Chains*; in the interest of time, I give short shrift to them here, but both fronts, the foreign and domestic, provide necessary context.
 16. Edward H. Crane to Buchanan, May 6, 1983, BHA; James M. Buchanan, “Social Security Survival: A Public-Choice Perspective,” *Cato Journal*, 3, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 339–341, 352–353; Mancur Olson, “‘Social Security Survival’: A Comment,” *ibid.*, 355–356. Earlier that year, Buchanan had joined the board of advisers for the pro-privatization Family Security Foundation, serving alongside Joseph Coors, the right-wing philanthropist, and William Simon, the former treasury secretary; James M. Wootton to Buchanan, February 28, 1983, BHA.
 17. Buchanan, “Social Security Survival,” 339–341, 352–353.
 18. Stuart Butler and Peter Germanis, “Achieving a ‘Leninist’ Strategy,” *Cato Journal*, 3, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 547.
 19. James Buchanan, “Some Remarks on Privatization,” *Virginia Law Weekly*, October 23, 1987, 1.
 20. Jeffrey R. Henig, “Privatization in the United States: Theory and Practice,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 104 (Winter 1989–90): 649–650; Stuart M. Butler, “Privatizing Federal Spending,” Heritage Foundation (1985),

- 33, typescript in box 1078, Daniel Patrick Moynihan Papers, Library of Congress. See also Jeffrey R. Henig, Chris Hammett, and Harvey B. Feigenbaum, "The Politics of Privatization: A Comparative Perspective," *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, 1 (October 1988): 442–468; Monica Prasad, *The Politics of Free Markets: The Rise of Neoliberal Economic Policies in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 3, 14, 22, 24, 27.
21. Quoted in Jane Mayer, "How Russia Helped Swing the Election to Trump," *New Yorker*, October 1, 2018, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/01/how-russia-helped-to-swing-the-election-for-trump
 22. Buchanan to Charles Gallagher, July 1, 1992, BHA.
 23. Oreskes and Conway, *Merchants of*; Robert D. Tollison and Richard E. Wagner, *The Economics of Smoking* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1992), ix–xi, 140–142, 225. For another of Buchanan's GMU colleagues who attempted to discredit the wider field of public health in the same way, see James T. Bennett, *Public Health Profiteering* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001).
 24. See "Cash for Comments Economists Network," The Center for Media and Democracy, www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Cash_for_Comments_Economists_Network.
 25. Jeff Nesbit, *Poison Tea: How Big Oil and Big Tobacco Invented the Tea Party and Captured the GOP* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016), "About the Author." Nesbit was so repelled by what he saw that his new vocation is fighting climate change. His book lays bare how CSE worked, making use of the 14 million internal documents, including much correspondence, released in the tobacco legal settlement (now housed at the Truth Tobacco Industry Documents online collection at the University of California, San Francisco). Nesbit argues that "their alliance with the tobacco industry is what truly made the emerging Koch political empire a force to be reckoned with," one that transformed the Republican Party, among other achievements (16). See also Mayer, *Dark Money*, 159–160.
 26. "James Buchanan Center, Ph.D. Program Alumni," August 18, 1998, BHA. For Buchanan's recommendation of Fink in the year of CSE's creation for "a role as an entrepreneur, organizer, and coordinator in the sometimes-fuzzy intersections between the academic establishment, the business community, the established think tanks and the foundations," see Buchanan to Charles Koch, May 24, 1984, BHA. Fink had one of the slimmest publication records I have ever seen for a tenured faculty member; the few he had were for the libertarian cause, for example, Richard H. Fink and Jack C. High, eds., *A Nation in Debt: Economists Debate the Federal Budget Deficit* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1997), a collection that showcased prescriptions from staff at Koch-funded institutions.
 27. Koch, "The Business Community: Resisting Regulation," *Libertarian Review*, August, 1978.

28. Mari Maseng to Frederick J. Ryan Jr., January 5, 1987, White House Schedule Proposal, WHORM PR007: 471415.
29. David Wessel and Jeanne Saddler, “Foes of Clinton’s Tax-Boost Proposals Mislead Public and Firms on the Small-Business Aspects,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 20, 1993; Asra Q. Nomani, “Critics Say Antitariff Activists in Washington Have Grass-Roots Base That’s Made of Astro-Turf,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 17, 1995.
30. White House press release, September 3, 1987, in Thomas G. Moore Papers, SMOF, box 10, OA 18900, RRPL. “Memorandum for the Record: Allegations against Richard Fink,” and accompanying documentation, May 27, 1988, White House Confidential File 568942, FG 451, WHCF.
31. One corporation in need that CSE helped in a notable case was Microsoft when they were faced with antitrust prosecution, solidarity that attracted new corporate backing. Paul Becker and Erick R. Gustafson, eds., *Trial and Error: United States v. Microsoft*, 2nd edition (Washington, DC: Citizens for a Sound Economy, 2002).
32. Peter H. Stone, “From the K Street Corridor,” *National Journal*, June 2002.
33. Louis Jacobson, “Tanks on the Roll,” *National Journal*, July 8, 1995; Dan Balz and Abigail Trafford, “Clinton Warns Against Reform ‘Fearmongers,’” *Washington Post*, August 2, 1994, www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1994/08/02/clinton-warns-against-reform-fearmongers/b39c293b-63e3-415d-a9a7-96938c7a3ba9/
34. Tim Dickinson, “Echoes of Philip Morris and Hillarycare,” *Rolling Stone*, October 1, 2009, www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/echoes-of-philip-morris-and-hillarycare-111548/; Balz and Trafford, “Clinton Warns Against Reform ‘Fearmongers.’” See also Mayer, *Dark Money*, and Nesbit, *Poison Tea*, 67–70, 86–89. Nesbit also has fascinating information on the role Roger Ailes’s communications firm played both in assisting the tobacco companies in these years and launching Russ Limbaugh’s media career, a story that begs for further research in the context of this book’s subject (69–71).
35. Haynes Johnson and David S. Broder, *The System: The American Way of Politics at the Breaking Point* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1996), x, 52–53, 196–197, 386.
36. Johnson and Broder, *The System*, 386, 466–467, 529; Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Living History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 245–247. One cannot read the account of CSE’s superbly coordinated efforts against the fragmented, competing, and poorly organized supporters of universal care without gut-wrenching fear that similar determination and coordination on the Republican right and failure to learn from the debacle on the part of Democrats will enable more such routing.
37. Nesbit, *Poison Tea*, 127–128, 132. Noting that “CSE disbanded within months of the internal tobacco documents being available,” Nesbit speculates that the Kochs shifted operations to Americans for Prosperity, which would not carry the same documentary baggage – literally thousands of records exposing how it worked its influence on behalf of corporate backers – to say nothing of potential legal liabilities (134). Although it is not my focus in

- this section, the Koch-backed American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) also benefitted from Tobacco Institute largesse in return for help in bending legislators to the industry's will, at a respectable remove. See Sarah Milov, *The Cigarette: A Political History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 272–273.
38. Peter H. Stone, "From the K Street Corridor"; Tracy Baxter, "Great Lakes: What's Up, Doc?," *Sierra Club Bulletin*, May/June 1997. More broadly, see Judith A. Layzer, *Open for Business: Conservatives' Opposition to Environmental Regulation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012). CSE went on to experiment in electoral politics, with at least one dark ops effort. After years of denunciations by libertarians of the consumer advocate Ralph Nader, CSE worked to ensure that he was on the ballot in 2004. Why? So that he could siphon votes away from the Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry, as he had from Al Gore in 2000. "We could divide this base of support," CSE advised its members in Oregon in urging them to get Nader on the ballot. After exposure of the group's "dirty tricks" in Oregon, the then president, Matt Kibbe (trained by GMU), defiantly boasted that CSE would continue its efforts "in all the swing states." (In the Tea Party era, Kibbe went on to head FreedomWorks.) William Schneider, "Naderites of Convenience," *National Journal*, July 10, 2004.
 39. For an overall orientation to the climate crisis, which stresses the role of market-fundamentalist industry insiders and their grantees (in organizations such as the Koch-funded Cato Institute and Heartland Institute) in misleading the public to undermine the urgent concerted policy action needed, see Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014). A recent study by business reporter Christopher Leonard reveals that Koch funding of climate denial began very early, at the start of the 1990s when the problem of global warming was identified as actionable: *Kochland: The Secret History of Koch Industries and Corporate Power in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019).
 40. Giovanni Russonello, "Poll Finds That Two-Thirds of Americans Would Back a Binding Global Treaty," *New York Times*, December 1, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/12/01/world/americas/us-climate-change-republicans-democrats.html; Al Kamen, "Name That Tone," *Washington Post*, March 21, 1997, A25.
 41. Donald J. Boudreaux, "The Missing Elements in the 'Science' of Global Warming," *Reason*, September 7, 2006; Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt*, 237, 249. More generally, see Klein, *This Changes Everything*.
 42. Coral Davenport and Marjorie Connelly, "Most in G.O.P. Say They Back Climate Action," *New York Times*, April 9, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/01/31/us/politics/most-americans-support-government-action-on-climate-change-poll-finds.html; Coral Davenport, "Many Conservative Republicans [54 percent] Believe Climate Change Is a Real Threat," *New York Times*, September 28, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/09/29/us/politics/survey-of-republican-voters-shows-a-majority-believe-in-climate-change.html.
 43. Jane Mayer, "Covert Operations: The Billionaire Brothers Who Are Waging a War on Obama," *New Yorker*, August 30, 2010, www.newyorker.com/m

agazine/2010/08/30/covert-operations; Oreskes and Conway, *Merchants of Doubt*, 234, quote on 243. See also “Global Warming,” Cato Institute, www.cato.org/special/climatechange; on Americans for Prosperity, see Rick Piltz, “Americans for Prosperity: Distorting Climate Change Science and Economics in Well-Funded Campaign,” *Climate Science & Policy Watch*, March 18, 2010, www.climate-science-watch.org/2010/03/18/americans-for-prosperity-distorting-climate-change-science-and-economics-in-well-funded-campaign.

44. Eric Holmberg and Alexia Fernandez Campbell, “Koch: Climate Pledge Strategy Continues to Grow,” *Investigative Reporting Workshop*, July 1, 2013; Paul Krugman, “Climate Denial Denial,” *New York Times*, December 4, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/12/04/opinion/republicans-climate-change-denial-denial.html; Eduardo Porter, “Bringing Republicans to the Talks on Climate,” *New York Times*, October 13, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/10/14/business/economy/bringing-republicans-to-the-climate-change-table.html.
45. Every single “environmentally skeptical” book published in the 1990s, one scholarly study found, was connected to one or more right-wing foundations. Oreskes and Conway, *Merchants of Doubt*, 234, 236.
46. Iain Murray, Competitive Enterprise Institute, “All Aboard the Climate Gravy Train,” March 11, 2011. See also Michael S. Greve and Fred L. Smith Jr., eds., *Environmental Politics: Public Costs, Private Rewards* (New York: Praeger, 1992). See also Graham Readfearn, “The Idea that Climate Scientists are in it for the Cash Has Deep Ideological Roots,” *The Guardian*, September 15, 2017, www.theguardian.com/environment/planet-oz/2017/sep/15/the-idea-that-climate-scientists-are-in-it-for-the-cash-has-deep-ideological-roots. For my own experience with such actors, see Graham Readfearn, “Future Historians Will Look Back in Horror at Koch Network’s Attacks on Climate Policy, says Author Nancy MacLean,” *DeSmog*, September 19, 2017, www.desmogblog.com/2017/09/19/future-historians-will-look-back-horror-koch-network-s-attacks-climate-change-science-says-author-nancy-maclean.
47. “Attack the messengers” became the strategy, note Oreskes and Conway in *Merchants of Doubt*, 237; Klein, *This Changes Everything*, especially 32, 37–38. For a chilling personal account of such harassment, see Bill McKibben, “Embarrassing Photos of Me, Thanks to My Right-Wing Stalkers,” *New York Times*, August 7, 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/08/07/opinion/sunday/embarrassing-photos-of-me-thanks-to-my-right-wing-stalkers.html.
48. Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 35. On willful misinformation, see Ari Rabin-Havt and Media Matters, *Lies, Incorporated: The World of Post-Truth Politics* (New York: Anchor Books, 2016), 42–57.
49. See “Koch Industries: Secretly Funding the Climate Denial Machine,” Greenpeace, www.greenpeace.org/usa/global-warming/climate-deniers/koch-industries/.

I am grateful to Greenpeace researchers Connor Gibson and Charlie Cray for this information, which comes with the disclaimer that the annual 990

forms that Koch foundations, like all tax-exempt foundations, must file with the IRS to document their grant giving, only provide totals given to a group each year, without disclosing how those funds were spent (i.e., *not all of this money was spent on climate change denial per se*). “If IRS laws required better transparency around specific grants,” Gibson observes, “then we could get an exact total. Until that day comes, if ever, all we can do is a rough estimate based on the data provided.” For the devastating impact, see Layzer, *Open for Business*, 333–360.

50. R. H. Melton, “Va. High Court Panel Bars Voter ID Plan,” *Washington Post*, October 23, 1999, A16. For the service of GMU public choice economist Mark Crain on “a variety of advisory panels” for Governor Gilmore, on matters including “legislative redistricting, focusing on the constitutionality of race-based districts and the fiscal consequences of alternative district designs” (perhaps intellectual groundwork for 2010’s Project REDMAP), see Tyler Cowen to Richard M. Larry of the Sarah Scaife Foundation, October 2, 1998, BHA. For the reliance of the Koch outpost at George Mason University upon the backing of the state’s Republican political establishment, see MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*, ch. 12, particularly 199–204.
51. Cowen, “Why Does Freedom Wax and Wane?” For their part, James Buchanan and his longtime coauthor in the field of public choice political economy, Gordon Tullock, repeatedly argued that public-sector employees should not be allowed to vote. Wrote Tullock in 1998: “There is one proposal for reducing the voting population which I am in favor of and have mentioned several times in my writings, and that is that the people who are dependent upon the government for their livelihood should not be permitted to vote because they will have the strongest possible motive to vote almost entirely in terms of their own personal income.” Gordon Tullock, *On Voting: A Public Choice Approach* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, and the Locke Institute, 1998).
52. Cowen, “Why Does Freedom Wax and Wane?”; Bryan Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 197, 199, also 140–141. Caplan acknowledged “generous support” from the Koch-funded Mercatus Center as he created a veritable alibi for the supplanting of democracy by market-based decision-making; Caplan, *Myth of the Rational Voter*.
53. Ari Berman, *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2015), 260, 263; Andrew Young to the Editor, *New York Times*, June, 11, 2015; Wendy Weisner, “Voter Suppression: How Bad?,” *American Prospect*, Fall 2014.
54. On the earlier tradition’s fusion of race and class motives in voter suppression, see Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
55. George J. Stigler, “Why Have the Socialists Been Winning?” presidential address to the Mont Pelerin Society in Hong Kong, 1978 (Stuttgart: Gustav Fisher Verlag, 1979), 67. Graham Readfearn, “Exclusive: Mont Pelerin Society Revealed as Home to Leading Pushers of Climate Science Denial,”

- DeSmog, January 14, 2014, www.desmogblog.com/2014/01/15/exclusive-mont-pelerin-society-revealed-home-leading-pushers-climate-science-denial. The site traces the ongoing story.
56. Norquist, *Leave Us Alone*, 119. This is calculated demagoguery from someone who knows the data well enough to know that the poorest Americans are the least likely to vote.
 57. Chris Kromm, “Should the Poor Be Allowed to Vote?,” *Facing South*, September 6, 2011, www.southernstudies.org/2011/09/should-the-poor-be-allowed-to-vote.html; David Boaz, *The Libertarian Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 252. For more on public choice’s impulse to restrict voting rights, see Christopher Hayes, “Who’s Afraid of Democracy?,” *In These Times*, May 25, 2007, http://inthesetimes.com/article/3185/whos_afraid_of_democracy. “The fundamental divide is between makers and takers,” George Mason’s Tyler Cowen and a Mercatus colleague explain, arguing against the case made by the Occupy Wall Street movement that the bottom 99 percent was being hurt by the top 1 percent in the new economy. “Those who produce something of value” were on the good side of the social ledger, the Mercatus team argued; the real menace was “those who gain at the expense of others, usually through a mix of political connections and fraud.” Tyler Cowen and Veronique de Rugy, “Reframing the Debate,” in Janet Byrne, ed. *The Occupy Handbook* (New York: Little, Brown, 2012), 418.
 58. Lorraine Minnite, *The Myth of Voter Fraud* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 154–157; Editorial, “The Success of the Voter Fraud Myth,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/09/20/opinion/the-success-of-the-voter-fraud-myth.html.
 59. Efforts from the right for a constitutional convention go back decades, it should be noted. But the Koch network has revived that once-moribund cause and brought it dangerously close to fruition. Common Cause, “U.S. Constitution Threatened as Article V Convention Movement Nears Success,” Background Memo, July 2018, 1, 6, www.commoncause.org/resource/u-s-constitution-threatened-as-article-v-convention-movement-nears-success/; see also MacLean, “The GOP tax bill could kill two birds with one stone,” *The Hill*, December 27, 2017, <https://thehill.com/opinion/finance/366488-the-gop-tax-bill-could-kill-two-birds-with-one-stone>.
 60. See Convention of States Action, <https://conventionofstates.com/>.
 61. Brendan O’Connor, “Right-Wing Billionaires Are Buying Themselves a New Constitution,” *The Splinter*, April 4, 2017. See also Josh Keefe, “The Koch Brothers Want a New Constitution – And They’re Closer than You Think,” *International Business Times*, June 14, 2017, www.ibtimes.com/political-capital/koch-brothers-want-new-constitution-theyre-closer-you-think-2552039.
 62. See the International Center for Not for Profit Law US Protest Law Tracker at: www.icnl.org/usprotestlawtracker/; “Proposed National Park Service Regulations Would Drastically Curtail Freedom of Assembly in DC,” Proteus Fund, October 9, 2018, www.proteusfund.org/proposed-nps-rulemaking/. Two coalitions have come together to combat these efforts, the foundation-led Protect Dissent Network, and the Greenpeace-led Protect the Protest: <http://www.protecttheprotest.org/>.

63. Felicia Sonmez, “Trump suggests that protesting should be illegal,” *Washington Post*, September 5, 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-suggests-protesting-should-be-illegal/2018/09/04/11cfd9be-boa0-11e8-aed9-001309990777_story.html; Mike DeBonis, “GOP presses ahead in casting Soros as threat amid criticism that attacks are anti-Semitic,” *Washington Post*, October 29, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y84uu26b>; Matt Viser and Robert Cost, “‘An angry mob’: Republicans work to recast Democratic protests as out-of-control anarchy,” *Washington Post*, October 8, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/ybhwwvcl>; Eliza Newlin Carney, “Will the Next Women’s March Be Taxed?,” *American Prospect*, October 4, 2018.
64. On the historical pattern, see Jeffrey A. Winters, *Oligarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), and Sarah Chayes, *On Corruption in America: And What Is At Stake* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020).
65. For the directory, see www.atlasnetwork.org/partners/global-directory.
For the Atlas Network’s growing influence in Latin America, see Lee Fang, “Sphere of Influence: How American Libertarians Are Remaking Latin American Politics,” *The Intercept*, August 9, 2017, <http://theintercept.com/2017/08/09/atlas-network-alejandro-chafuen-libertarian-think-tank-latin-america-brazil/>. On US donors as leading funders of the transnational diffusion of American libertarian ideas, with Atlas based at Koch’s favorite university (GMU), see Steven Teles and Daniel A. Kenney, “Spreading the Word: The Diffusion of American Conservatism in Europe and Beyond,” in Jeffrey Kopstein and Sven Steinmo, eds., *Growing Apart? America and Europe in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. 148–149 and 167–168. For details of Atlas’s funding streams and grantees, see DeSmog, www.desmogblog.com/atlas-economic-research-foundation. Scholarly research on Atlas is in its infancy, but two groundbreaking pieces stand out: Marie-Laure Salles-Djelic, “Building an Architecture for Political Influence: Atlas and the Transnational Institutionalization of the Neoliberal Think Tank,” in Christina Garsten and Adrienne Sorbom, eds., *Power, Policy and Profit: Corporate Engagement in Politics and Governance* (London: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017); Marie-Laure Djelic and Reza Mousavi, “How the Neoliberal Think Tank Went Global: The Atlas Network, 1981 to the Present,” in Dieter Plehwe, Quinn Slobodian, and Philip Mirowski, eds., *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism* (London: Verso, 2020).
66. *The Guardian* ran a series of investigative exposures of the IEA role, including “Rightwing Thinktank Breached Charity Law by Campaigning for Hard Brexit,” February 5, 2019, www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/feb/05/rightwing-thinktank-breached-charity-law-by-campaigning-for-hard-brexit. See also George Monbiot, “How US Billionaires are Fueling the Hard-Right Cause in Britain.”
67. “One Nation Wanted Millions from the NRA while Planning to Soften Australia’s Gun Laws,” ABC News, March 26, 2019, www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-26/secret-recordings-show-one-nation-staffers-seeking-nra-donations/10936052.

68. I am grateful to editor W. Lance Bennett for sharing information on Heartland advising the AfD. See, for example, Vera Deleja-Hotko, Ann-Katrin Müller, and Gerald Traufetter, “AfD Hopes to Win Votes by Opposing Climate Protection,” *Der Spiegel*, June 5, 2019, www.spiegel.de/international/germany/afd-seeks-votes-by-opposing-climate-protection-a-1265494.html; Kert Davies, “Who is Paying for Heartland Institute Climate Denial-Palooza?,” Climate Investigations Center, March 24, 2017.
69. Some preliminary examples of the right-wing populist connections, beyond the United States, United Kingdom, Latin American and Australian cases noted above, can be found in Quinn Slobodian, “Neoliberalism’s Populist Bastards,” *Public Seminar*, February 15, 2018, <https://publicseminar.org/2018/02/neoliberalisms-populist-bastards/>. Several of the Australian Atlas affiliates and their work are examined in Dominic Kelly’s *Political Troglodytes and Economic Lunatics: The Hard Right in Australia* (Carlton, AUS: La Trobe University Press, 2019). I welcome inquiries and information from researchers on Atlas as I have been collecting material on its operations in various countries, often spurred by contacts who wrote me about *Democracy in Chains*, seeing the resonance with organizations and officials in their own nations.

