The Public Influence Triad:
Fixing Polarization Requires Appreciating its Complexity
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Problem: Public discourse is severely broken in America. Common characterizations are: political polarization; tribalization; political sectarianism; epistemic polarization; echo chambers; filter bubbles; alternative realities.

Diagnosis: To solve the problem, we must understand its scope. A unifying conceptual framework identifies a *complex systems* model comprised of five major categories of *belief holder and influencer*, linked by pathways of influence among them:

- ***Political Leaders:*** In the U.S, ~500k elected office-holders responsible for governmental decisions.
- ***Platformed Thought Leaders:*** People with access to and influence over broadcast, print, digital, and speech media reaching significant segments of the populace. ~10k –1M depending on how you count.
- ***Grassroots Thought Ecosystem:*** Ordinary citizens who consume established platform media and participate in in-person and social media thought sharing networks.   ~150M Americans.

These categories of belief holder-influencer form the core Public Influence Triad that underpins Democracy. Two additional types of influence actor play critical roles:

- ***Moneyed Interests*** possess the means to deliberately influence public discourse for a multitude of purposes, depending on the actor and their motivations.
- ***Malevolent Agitators*** inject propaganda and disinformation into the public belief influence system on an organized basis.

System Complexity: The Public Influence Triad describes a system of interacting parts. The emergent outcome---coherent function or else breakdown of democracy---arises from setpoints and parameters of the system elements---i.e. the rules of the game. Many policy interventions have been suggested.

Solutions: The situation behaves like---in the language of complex systems theory---a dynamic attractor. That means that the factors that have brought on today's political polarization are self-reinforcing. Tweaking one or a few laws or regulations will not cure the polarization problem. Instead, policy adjustments are needed across many of the elements and interaction pathways. If it seem as if we are stuck in a rut, well, we are. Everybody needs to get out of the car and push in the same direction.
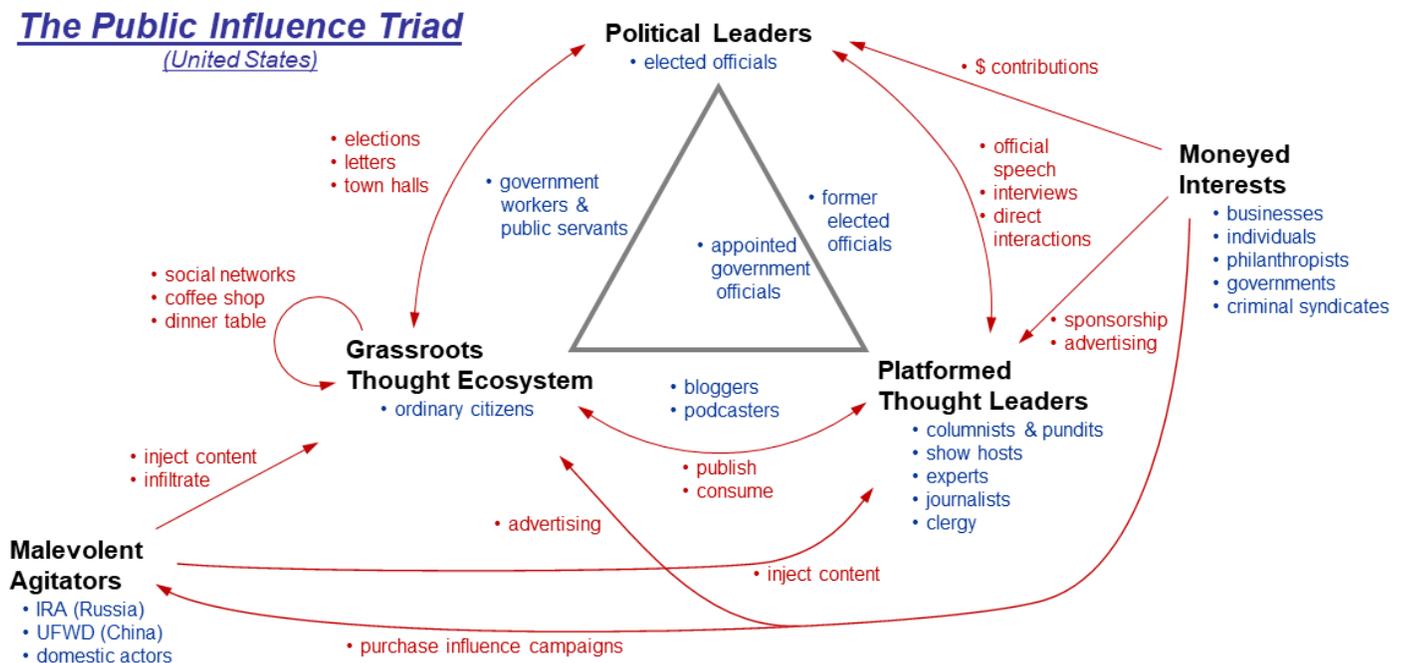
To see and contribute to a catalog of policy options, view the full whitepaper: *The Public Influence Triad: Understanding and Addressing Polarization in our System of Public Discourse* at www.saund.org.