

Progressive Media Ecosystem Atlas (US)

A Five-Layer Structural Analysis of the US Progressive-Media Cohort, 2024–2026

DOCUMENT	Long-form report
VERSION	1.1 · May 2026
PROJECT WINDOW	2024–2026
ENTITY UNIVERSE	197 entities across 12 sections
SOURCE PHASES	Phases 1 through 9c, plus master index
FORWARD APPLICABILITY	Through 2028 before structural revision warranted
Companion to Option C executive deck · Option A web atlas shelved per fast-and-light plan	

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A Five-Layer Structural Analysis of the US Progressive-Media Cohort, 2024–2026

LONG-FORM REPORT — VERSION 1.1, MAY 2026 — PART 1 OF 3 (FRONT MATTER, §1–§3)

Project window: 2024–2026 **Source phases:** 1 through 9c, plus master index **Entity universe:** 197 unique entities across 12 sections **Companion deliverables:** Executive deck (Option C, built); interactive web atlas (Option A, scoped, currently shelved per fast-and-light publication plan)

Executive Summary

THE PROGRESSIVE MEDIA ECOSYSTEM ATLAS (US) PROJECT RAN FROM 2024 TO 2026 TO PRODUCE A STRUCTURAL account of the US progressive-media cohort — the set of entities producing reporting, analysis, commentary, or accountability journalism with a recognizable progressive editorial valence, broadly defined to include Never-Trump-Republican, socialist-left, Substack-anchor center-left, nonprofit investigative, and worker-cooperative tiers. The project’s five-layer architecture covers 197 unique entities across 12 sections, with cross-cutting cluster taxonomy (A through J, plus multi-cluster bridges) and citation-band classification (A, B, and C, tracking platform behavior).

The atlas’s findings sit in an explicit three-tier hierarchy. Tier one is the project’s *foundational diagnostic finding*: the cohort produces investigative and accountability journalism that mainstream legacy press cites at roughly five-to-fifteen times the rate at which it cites mainstream press back. This finding is foundational in a specific sense — it reframes how the cohort’s structural position is understood, from “alternative” to “upstream supplier.” The other findings extend, qualify, or operationalize what this reframing implies; they do not independently produce a comparable reframing. The finding originates in the Phase 8b mainstream-press interface analysis and is methodologically grounded in entity-disclosed citation counts, structured citation trackers, and Pulitzer-event anchors as documented in §7.1 of this report.

Tier two is the project’s *load-bearing structural findings*: four findings that operate inside the upstream-supplier reframing, each structurally consequential and well-substantiated. First, the cohort has bifurcated by citation platform — approximately 68% of platform-classified entities are now Bluesky-primary, 27% are cross-platform bridges, and 5% remain X-primary. The bifurcation tracks editorial substance: Band A (Bluesky-primary) skews investigative and accountability; Band C (X-primary) skews commentary and creator. Second, the right-coded media ecosystem has consolidated around fewer, larger entities while the progressive cohort has diffused into many smaller ones, producing a structural asymmetry with compounding implications for resilience and connective-tissue stress. Third, the IRS 501(c)(3) regulatory mechanism produces a measurable correlation between funder concentration and editorial stance, structural rather than motivational in origin. Fourth, the Section 9 ↔ Section 3 cross-publication partnership pattern — state-nonprofit reporting paired with national investigative-nonprofit amplification — has been Pulitzer-validated across multiple cycles (Marshall Project + AL.com + IndyStar + Invisible Institute 2021 National Reporting for “Mauled”; ProPublica back-to-back Public Service 2024 and 2025 for “Friends of the Court” and “Life of the Mother”; ProPublica + CT Mirror 2026 Local Reporting for “On the Hook”) and represents one of the cohort’s most durable structural advantages.

Tier three is the project’s *supplementary structural findings* emerging from Phase 9a synthesis. Crooked Media operates as a coordinating hub via three formal cross-cluster pairings: SpeechCenter with Bulwark (Cluster D), Liberal Tiers with Brian Tyler Cohen and the Chorus cluster (B), and Crooked on MS Now with Versant. The Atlantic functions as a re-absorption destination for Substack-departed creators (Linker, Chait, Warzel), making it a load-bearing bridging entity rather than merely a Section 1 anchor. And the worker-cooperative tier (Section 6d —

Defector, 404 Media, Hell Gate, Aftermath, Flaming Hydra, Discourse Blog, Hearing Things, The 51st) functions as a structural interface where legacy-media labor-shock events convert into new cohort entities. These tier-three findings are real structural features visible in the project window but operate at smaller scale than the tier-two findings. The hierarchy reflects analytical weight, not data quality — all three tiers rest on the substrate produced across phases 7a, 7c-partial, 8a, and 8b, with data-quality coding documented per finding.

The project identifies four connective-tissue stress points that anchor its five-year forward priors. Aggregator-keystone tier contraction (Public Notice, MeidasTouch) at roughly 60% probability within 24 months. Bridge-keystone personal-continuation risk (Strict Scrutiny and the academic-law Cluster J) at 60% within 36 months. Foundation withdrawal (OSF, Ford) at 40% within 36 months. Substack platform pivot affecting Cluster C creators at 50% within 36 months. CBS News under Bari Weiss as Editor-in-Chief (appointed October 2025 when Paramount, a Skydance Corporation, acquired The Free Press) is flagged as the project's one explicitly-monitored transitioning-entity case, with structured 6-month, 12-month, and 24-month observation windows.

The atlas operates on a layer-specific refresh cadence: annual for entity universe, financial structure, and network classifications; semi-annual for audience; event-driven plus annual review for editorial. A cross-cutting 6-month stress-point scan is recommended independently of layer refreshes. The first scheduled action is the November 2026 stress-point scan; the first annual atlas refresh is due in Q1 2027. The project documents forward applicability through 2028 before structural revision becomes warranted.

This report is the long-form companion to the executive deck. Where the deck answers “what is this and what should I worry about” in ten slides, this report answers “what does the full picture look like, with methodological honesty visible” in considered linear prose. An interactive web atlas (Option A) is scoped but currently shelved per the fast-and-light publication plan; the atlas substrate remains intact in the project Drive folder and Option A reactivation is available if convening outcomes warrant it.

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§1 Introduction and Method

— 1.1 What this report is

The Progressive Media Ecosystem Atlas (US) is a research project that ran from 2024 to 2026 to map the structural shape of the US progressive-media cohort. The term “atlas” is used in its analytical sense — a reference framework for understanding a complex landscape — not in its cartographic sense. The project produced 21 phase deliverables organized around a five-layer architecture, a 197-entity per-entity profile table with 21 attribute columns, and a synthesis layer comprising forward priors anchored on identified stress points, a refresh cadence, and a project capstone.

This report is the long-form companion to the executive summary deck (Option C, built and delivered) and an optional companion to the interactive web atlas (Option A, scoped but currently shelved). The deck condenses the project into ten slides for cohort-principal and funder audiences. This report places the analytical work in narrative form, with sources cited and limits acknowledged.

The report is intended for newsroom leadership, editors-in-chief, and executive directors of nonprofit investigative entities; foundation program officers reading at the strategic-grantmaking level; journalism researchers and journalism-school faculty — who want to understand the analytical reasoning rather than only its headline findings. It is also intended for adjacent professionals: think-tank policy analysts who cite cohort journalism, podcast hosts evaluating partnerships, and Substack creators making platform decisions, for whom the atlas is reference material rather than cover-to-cover reading.

— 1.2 The cohort, defined

The project’s unit of analysis is a deliberately bounded cohort. Three concentric definitions help locate the boundary.

Core cohort. Entities producing reporting, analysis, commentary, or accountability journalism with editorial valence that is identifiably progressive-left, socialist-left, or progressive-Democratic-establishment. Examples: The Nation, Mother Jones, ProPublica, Jacobin, Democracy Now’s adjacent universe, Crooked Media, Heather Cox Richardson’s Letters from an American, the Defector worker-cooperative.

Expanded cohort. Adjacent entities that participate substantially in cohort citation, collaboration, or editorial-substance flows even where their own editorial valence is heterodox-centrist or Never-Trump-Republican. The Bulwark is the canonical case: its self-identification is Never-Trump-Republican and center-right on most domestic issues, but it participates in cohort coordination via the formal Crooked-Bulwark SpeechCenter pairing identified in Phase 9a §4.6. Including it as cohort-adjacent captures a structural reality that excluding it would obscure.

Contested boundary. Entities whose cohort membership is contested or ambiguous and which the atlas documents as contested rather than forcing resolution. Vanity Fair: progressive-tinged cultural and political reporting within a Condé Nast corporate structure, with no progressive-identity self-conception. Slow Boring (Matthew Yglesias): center-left analytic output that some progressive readers consume regularly and others reject as outside-cohort. The Ezra Klein Show: post-NYT centrist-progressive, with contested cohort affiliation rooted in NYT corporate context. The atlas places these in their primary section with explicit contested-status flags rather than imposing a binary inclusion-exclusion decision.

What is bounded out. The project does not cover the right-coded media ecosystem at the same depth as the progressive cohort (Phase 8a §6 produces a comparative structural finding — consolidation versus diffusion asymmetry — but does not extend to entity-by-entity right-coded profiling, which would be a project of comparable scope to this one). The project does not cover mainstream press — New York Times, Washington Post, Associated Press, the broadcast networks — as primary subjects of analysis, though the cohort’s interface with mainstream press is the foundational diagnostic finding of Phase 8b. The project bounds itself to the United States; international progressive-media ecosystems are out of scope. The project does not cover non-political coverage even from cohort entities (a Section 1 entity’s cultural reporting, for instance, is not analyzed as cultural reporting per se but as part of that entity’s editorial profile).

— 1.3 The five-layer architecture

The atlas is organized around five layers, each addressing a different analytical question and supported by distinct phase deliverables.

The first layer, **the entity universe**, asks who is in the cohort. Phases 1, 1-spine-updates, 2.5, 3b, 3c, and 4c built this layer through iterative spine refinement. The result is the 197-entity inventory across 12 sections.

The second layer, **financial structure**, asks how cohort entities are funded. Phase 4-synthesis and Phase 4c built this layer, producing the six-category business-model typology (subscription-led, mixed-model, owner-subsidized, funder-mediated, worker-cooperative, corporate-network subsidiary) and the funder-concentration coding.

The third layer, **audience and reach**, asks how big cohort entities are. Phases 5-starter-kit, 5a-priority, 5b-longtail, and 5b-starter-kit built this layer. The output is subscriber, follower, and traffic-floor figures where measurable, with explicit data-quality coding where they are not.

The fourth layer, **editorial form and stance**, asks what cohort entities produce and where they stand. Phases 6-starter-kit, 6-starter-kit-rev, 6a anchor-profiles, and 6b-partial chorus-divergence built this layer. The output is editorial-form and editorial-stance characterization with sub-cohort splits where they are real (most notably the Section 6 split into 6a, 6b, 6c, and 6d).

The fifth layer, **network and citation**, asks how cohort entities are connected — both to each other and to broader press. Phases 7-8-9-starter-kit, 7a network-citation, 7c-partial Bluesky-qualitative, 8a cross-ecosystem, and 8b mainstream-press-interface built this layer. The output is the cluster taxonomy (A through J plus multi), the citation-

band classification (A, B, C), and the cohort-to-mainstream-press citation-flow analysis that produced the foundational diagnostic 5-15x finding.

The synthesis layer (Phases 9a, 9b, 9c, plus the master index) operates across all five and produces the integrated findings, the per-entity profile table, the forward priors, the CBS News monitoring framework, and the refresh cadence.

— 1.4 Project scope, deferrals, and what is bounded out

Several explicit scope decisions shaped the project. The 2024–2026 project window was chosen because it brackets two consequential periods: the late-2024 election cycle and aftermath, and the 2025–2026 period of accelerating right-coded political pressure on journalism (the Musk-Media-Matters litigation, the Trump-administration regulatory posture toward platforms, the CBS News editorial transition under Bari Weiss). The project was scoped to produce forward applicability through 2028 before structural revision becomes warranted; this is documented in Phase 9c §5.

The entity universe was bounded at approximately 200 entities. The atlas does not claim exhaustive coverage. Smaller cohort entities, particularly hyperlocal Section 9 outlets and individual-creator Section 11 entries, were included selectively based on structural significance rather than completeness. The project record is honest about this: many smaller entities have audience and financial figures coded “L” for low confidence, reflecting estimation rather than measurement.

Several deferrals are documented in Phase 9c §5.4 and revisited in §10 of this report. Phase 7b was not run as originally targeted; its scope (within-cohort small-entity citation patterns) was substituted by the Phase 8b mainstream-press-interface analysis, which yielded the project’s foundational diagnostic finding but did not directly cover the originally-planned within-cohort small-entity scope. Bluesky engagement metrics were treated qualitatively in Phase 7c-partial because the Bluesky API stability available during the project window did not support the kind of quantitative analysis that the X-platform analysis from earlier phases enabled. The right-coded comparison in Phase 8a §6 produced a structural finding but not entity-by-entity profiling.

A separate category of deferrals — within-scope items that remained partial or qualitative when the project window closed — is treated explicitly in §10 of this report. The distinction is between what falls outside the project’s chosen scope (this section §1.4) and what falls within scope but was bounded by data availability or session resources (§10).

— 1.5 Phase production sequence

The 21 phase files were produced in roughly the order their layer-letter implies. Phases 1 through 3 built the entity universe. Phase 4 and 4c built the financial layer. Phase 5 and its sub-phases built the audience layer. Phase 6 and its sub-phases built the editorial layer. Phases 7 and 8 built the network layer and the cross-ecosystem interfaces. Phase 9 produced the synthesis layer in three components: 9a synthesis core, 9b per-entity profile table (split into Part 1 covering Sections 1 through 6 and Part 2 covering Sections 7 through 12), and 9c forward priors plus capstone.

The master index, produced alongside Phase 9c, provides a single navigable entry point and surfaces the load-bearing findings, the forward priors, and the recommended refresh cadence at index level. The master index also contains the 6-month stress-point scan template that operationalizes the cadence.

— 1.6 Data quality and uncertainty

The atlas codes each field in its per-entity profile table for data quality on a three-level scale: H for high confidence (specific value anchored on prior phase deliverable), M for medium confidence (qualitative or range-level value from prior phase), and L for low confidence (synthesis-level inference where the specific source value was not retrievable during the project window).

The distribution across the 197-entity universe is roughly 12 H, 30 M, and 150+ L. The heavy L-coding is structural rather than incidental: many cohort entities have estimated rather than measured audience figures, especially in the long tail of small entities where Phase 5b-longtail documented data-availability limits inherent to entities with monthly traffic below 100,000 and subscriber counts below 25,000. Financial figures rest on 990 filings (annual, public) for 501(c)(3) entities but on estimates for LLC entities where revenue is private. The atlas is honest about this; readers should treat the L-coded fields as analytical inference rather than measurement.

Where the data quality matters for a specific finding, the report flags it. The 5-15x citation-ratio finding in Phase 8b is methodologically robust because it draws on observable citation patterns in published journalism rather than on financial or audience estimates. The four forward priors in Phase 9c are explicit about being conditional analytic frames rather than calibrated forecasts. The cluster taxonomy in Phase 7c-partial is grounded in observable citation and partnership patterns rather than on audience estimates. The findings the atlas most stresses are also the findings whose data foundations are most defensible.

— 1.7 The atlas's epistemic posture: diagnostic engine plus prescriptive output

The atlas operates across two distinct epistemic layers, and readers should understand which they are reading at any point.

The *diagnostic layer* covers what is. It comprises the entity universe (197 entities across 12 sections), the financial-structure typology, the audience-and-reach data, the editorial-form and stance characterization, the cluster taxonomy (A through J plus multi-cluster bridges), the citation-band classification (A, B, C), the cohort-to-mainstream-press citation-flow analysis producing the foundational 5–15× finding, the structural mechanisms identified at the 501(c)(3) regulatory layer and the cross-publication partnership level, and the four named connective-tissue stress points characterizing where structural pressure concentrates. Diagnostic-layer claims are descriptive — they describe observable patterns in the cohort, with data-quality coding making the strength of each observation explicit. The diagnostic layer answers questions of the form “what is the cohort’s structural position” and “where are its pressure points.”

The *prescriptive layer* covers what to do with the diagnosis. It comprises the four five-year forward priors with their named mechanisms and signal lists, the CBS News 6/12/24-month observation framework with explicit decision

rules at each window, the layer-specific refresh cadence with interrupt triggers, and the 6-month stress-point scan template that operationalizes recurring monitoring. Prescriptive-layer claims are action-oriented — they describe what to watch, when to revisit, and what decision rules apply when signals move. The prescriptive layer answers questions of the form “how should the diagnosis be acted on” and “when should the diagnosis be re-tested against evidence.”

The distinction matters because the atlas’s foundational diagnostic finding — the 5–15× upstream-supplier ratio — carries implicit prescriptive consequences for how funders, cohort journalists, and cohort entities should value the cohort’s structural position. These prescriptive consequences are real and worth naming, but they are separate from the diagnostic claim itself. Readers can adopt the diagnosis without committing to its prescriptive implications; conversely, the prescriptive layer remains intact even if individual diagnostic claims require refinement in successor research. Where prescriptive consequences are stated explicitly in this report, the report flags them as such; where the report draws only descriptive conclusions, no prescriptive implication is asserted. This distinction is what makes the atlas a working reference framework rather than a position paper.

§2 The Cohort Universe

— 2.1 The 197-entity inventory

The atlas covers 197 unique entities across 12 sections. The count reconciles to the Phase 9a §3.1 estimate of approximately 200–220 deduplicated entities, with the gap attributable to two factors. First, cross-listed entities — entities that appear in more than one section because they participate substantively in more than one sub-cohort — are rendered as a primary-section row plus cross-list reference rows rather than fully repeated across every secondary section. Second, the inclusion criteria for Sections 11 (beat-specific creators) and 12 (adjacent infrastructure) are tighter than the upper-bound estimate would have produced, reflecting analytical decisions about what counts as a distinct entity rather than an attribute of another entity.

The 197 figure includes the closed and historically-significant entries (BuzzFeed News, AlterNet, Liberal Patriot) and the contested-cohort entries (Vanity Fair, Slow Boring, Ezra Klein Show). It excludes mainstream-press entities that interface with the cohort but are not themselves cohort members.

Within the 197, the status distribution is heavily Active: approximately 176 entities are Active, 9 are coded Active but distressed, 5 are Restructured (recent ownership changes, mergers, or significant reorganizations), 3 are Closed, and 4 are Uncertain (paused publication, contested status, or ambiguous current state — Vanity Fair, The Counter, Slow Boring, and the Ezra Klein Show on cohort-affiliation grounds). The cohort is, in aggregate, healthier than the popular narrative of journalism-industry collapse suggests — though the distressed and uncertain tier is real and the four structural stress points identified in Phase 9c §2 anticipate further movement in that tier over the next five years.

— 2.2 The 12-section taxonomy

The 12 sections are built around dominant editorial-form, business-model, and audience-anchor patterns. They are not mutually exclusive; an entity can be primary in one section and cross-listed in others. The taxonomy reflects analytical clustering rather than self-identification by the entities themselves.

Section 1 — Legacy / Establishment Progressive Press. Nine entities. The Nation (1865, longest continuously published US progressive weekly), Mother Jones (1976, strengthened by 2024 CIR/Reveal merger), The American Prospect (1990), In These Times (1976), The New Republic (1914, repositioned leftward under McCormack ownership since 2016), Harper’s Magazine (1850), The Atlantic (1857, Emerson Collective majority since 2017 — a load-bearing bridging entity treated in §7), The New Yorker (1925, within Condé Nast), and Vanity Fair (1913, contested cohort placement).

Section 2 — Digital-Native For-Profit Outlets. Eleven entities. Vox.com (2014, multiple rounds of layoffs December 2024 through 2025), New York Magazine (1968, within Vox Media), The Verge (2011, tech-progressive),

Slate (1996, Graham Holdings), HuffPost (2005, within BuzzFeed Inc., distressed), Salon (1995), The Daily Beast (2008, sold to Boger/Sherwood 2024), Rolling Stone digital (1967, Penske Media), Jezebel (2007, relaunched under Paste Media December 2023 after G/O closure), BuzzFeed News (closed April 2023), and Vox Media as the corporate-network parent.

Section 3 — Nonprofit Investigative and Accountability Journalism. Twenty entities. ProPublica (2007, cohort hub, Public Service Pulitzer back-to-back 2024 “Friends of the Court” and 2025 “Life of the Mother”, Local Reporting Pulitzer 2026 with CT Mirror “On the Hook”), The Marshall Project (2014, 2021 National Reporting Pulitzer with AL.com, IndyStar, and the Invisible Institute for “Mauled: When Police Dogs Are Weapons”), Center for Public Integrity (1989), The Intercept (2014, contracted as Omidyar funding wound down 2024), First Look Media (2013, restructured), CIR/Reveal (merged into Mother Jones 2024), The 19th* (2020, gender-and-politics), Capital B (2022, Black-audience), Inside Climate News (2007, 2013 National Reporting Pulitzer “Dilbit Disaster”), Type Investigations (1977, formerly Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute), The Markup (2018, merged with CalMatters 2024), The Texas Tribune (2009, state-nonprofit anchor), Documented (2018, immigration), The Appeal (2018, criminal justice), Bolts Magazine (2020, local democracy), Floodlight (2020, climate accountability), Sludge (2018, money-in-politics), KFF Health News (2009), Tradeoffs (2020, health policy), and Drop Site News (2024, cross-listed to Section 4).

Section 4 — Centrist / Never-Trump / Pro-Democracy Substack. Eighteen entities. The substantial-subscriber anchors: Letters from an American (Heather Cox Richardson, 2019, approximately 3 million total subscribers — the largest paid Substack in the cohort), Zeteo (Mehdi Hasan, 2024, approximately 667,000 subscribers), Drop Site News (Scahill and Grim, 2024, approximately 250,000 subscribers, also cross-listed Section 3). Plus the aggregator-keystone tier: Public Notice (Aaron Rupar, 2022), Popular Information (Judd Legum, 2018), Robert Reich (2020), The Handbasket (Marisa Kabas, 2023), Message Box (Dan Pfeiffer, 2021), The Lever (David Sirota et al., 2020, hybrid foundation/reader), HEATED (Emily Atkin, 2019, climate), The Bulwark (Center Enterprises, 2018, spun from DDT 2024), Notes from the Circus (Mike Brock, 2024), Civil Discourse (Joyce Vance, 2022, legal), Persuasion (Yascha Mounk, 2020), Slow Boring (Matthew Yglesias, 2020, contested cohort), The Ink (Anand Giridharadas, 2020), The Contrarian (Jennifer Rubin et al., 2025, multi-author anti-authoritarian), and Liberal Patriot (closed 2026 — a right-coded-centrist Substack contraction marker treated further in §8).

Section 5 — Foundation-Funded explainer and republication. Nine entities. The Conversation US (2014, academic-author republication model, wide syndication footprint), Knowable Magazine (2017, Annual Reviews parent), Vox.com (cross-listed for explainer-form, primary placement Section 2), ProPublica explainer cross-list (primary Section 3), EdSource (1977, California education policy), Chalkbeat (2014, local education, post-2022 Votebeat merger into Civic News Co.), The Hechinger Report (2010, Teachers College Columbia), Canary Media (2021, spun from RMI, clean-energy), and Climate Home News (2007, UK-based international climate policy).

Section 6 — Creator-LLC and Cooperative. Thirty-five entities, split into four sub-cohorts that are structurally and editorially distinct enough to warrant separate treatment. Section 2.3 below covers the rationale for this split.

Section 7 — Socialist / Labor-Left Press. Twelve entities. Jacobin (2010, flagship socialist publication with Catalyst journal and The Dig podcast), Current Affairs (2015, reclassified primary to Section 7 in Phase 9a §3.2, reorganized 2021), Dissent (1954, oldest US democratic-socialist quarterly), Truthout (2001), Catalyst Journal

(2017, Jacobin sister publication), Hammer & Hope (2023, Black radical tradition), The Forge (2019, organizing-focused, within Convergence network), Convergence Magazine (2020), Spectre Journal (2020, Marxist), n+1 (2004, literary-political), Boston Review (1975, long-form symposium), and Labor Notes (1979, labor-movement anchor).

Section 8 — Foundation-Funded Specialty Investigative. Sixteen entities. Many here are primarily placed in Section 3 (nonprofit investigative) or Section 4 (Substack-native) and cross-listed to Section 8 for beat specialty. The genuinely Section 8-primary entries: Grist (1999, climate-progressive anchor), Yes! Magazine (1996, solutions journalism), Civil Eats (2009, food systems), Word in Black (2021, 10-paper Black-newspaper collaborative), Prism (2018, BIPOC-led), Borderless Magazine (2018, Chicago immigration), and Religion News Service (1934, religion specialty with wide syndication). The Counter, which paused publication in 2022, sits with uncertain status.

Section 9 — Local / Regional Progressive Nonprofit. Twenty-two entities. The state-nonprofit anchors: CalMatters (2015, merged with The Markup 2024), The Texas Tribune (2009, cross-listed primary Section 3), MinnPost (2007), VTDigger (2009), NJ Spotlight News (2010, under WHYY), Mississippi Today (2016, 2023 Local Reporting Pulitzer for Anna Wolfe’s “Backchannel” welfare-scandal investigation), CT Mirror (2010, 2026 Local Reporting Pulitzer with ProPublica for “On the Hook”), Bridge Michigan (2011), Wisconsin Watch (2009). The metro and hyperlocal entries: Voice of San Diego (2005), Honolulu Civil Beat (2010, Omidyar-founded), Block Club Chicago (2018), Chicago Reader (1971, alt-weekly transitioned 501c3 around 2022, distressed), Mountain State Spotlight (2020, West Virginia), Iowa Capital Dispatch (within States Newsroom umbrella), Outlier Media (2017, Detroit SMS-distribution service journalism), City Bureau (2015, Chicago Documenters network), Sahan Journal (2013, Minnesota immigrant communities), El Tímpano (2018, Oakland Latino-immigrant SMS), MLK50 (2017, Memphis poverty-and-race), and The 51st (2024, DC worker-cooperative launched after WAMU/DCist layoffs). Plus the States Newsroom umbrella entity (2017, approximately 40 state outlets, with editorial-independence questions documented in Phase 6b-partial).

Section 10 — Advocacy and Watchdog. Ten entities. Media Matters for America (2004, largest progressive media-watchdog, destabilized by Musk litigation 2023–25), FAIR (1986), Common Dreams (1997, reader-supported aggregator-plus-commentary), Truthdig (2005, restructured after 2020 staff walkout), Daily Kos (2002, activist-blog flagship), Crooks and Liars (2004), AlterNet (closed as standalone around 2018), CREW (2003, government watchdog with quasi-media output), plus Documented and Popular Information as cross-listed entries primary in other sections.

Section 11 — Beat-Specific Creators. Twenty-four entries. Many are cross-listed from Section 4 (Substack-native) or Section 6a (YouTube-podcast networks) and appear here as individual-creator entries to capture the beat dimension. The genuinely Section 11-primary entries: Casey Newton (Platformer, post-Substack to Ghost 2024, tech-beat anchor), Charlie Warzel (NYT Opinion 2021 → Substack Galaxy Brain April-November 2021 → The Atlantic November 2021, Contributing Writer/Staff Writer), Anne Helen Petersen (Culture Study, 2020), Talia Lavin (Flaming Hydra cooperative, far-right-monitoring), Jeff Sharlet (religion-and-far-right beat), Hamilton Nolan (How Things Work, 2024, labor beat), Roxane Gay newsletter, Edward Ongweso Jr. (tech-criticism), Cory Doctorow’s Pluralistic (tech-policy plus “enshittification” framing), HasanAbi (largest progressive Twitch creator), Adam Serwer (Atlantic political analysis), Jamelle Bouie (NYT). Plus cross-listed creator-anchor profiles for HCR, Rugar, Legum, Reich, Atkin, Giridharadas, Kabas, BTC, Pakman, Hasan, Hobbes, and Klein.

Section 12 — Adjacent Infrastructure (Academic, Policy, Think Tank). Eleven entities. These are not journalism entities per se but function as supply-layer infrastructure for cohort journalism — they produce research and analysis that cohort entities cite extensively. Economic Policy Institute (EPI, 1986, labor-economics anchor), Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR, 1999), Roosevelt Institute (2010), Demos (2000), People’s Policy Project (3P, 2017, Patreon-funded socialist policy shop), Jain Family Institute (2015, heterodox-economics including UBI research), Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP, 1981, federal budget anchor), Data for Progress (2018, progressive polling), Center for American Progress (CAP, 2003, liberal-establishment), Brennan Center for Justice (1995, voting rights and democracy law), and New America Foundation (1999, contested cohort, multi-issue policy).

— 2.3 The Section 6 sub-cohort split

Section 6 — Creator-LLC and Cooperative entities — is the largest section at 35 entities and the most internally heterogeneous. The atlas splits it into four sub-cohorts (6a, 6b, 6c, 6d) on structural grounds: each sub-cohort has a distinct business-model anchor and a distinct editorial-form profile.

Section 6a — YouTube-Podcast For-Profit Networks. Seven entities. The defining feature is multi-show network structure with primary monetization through subscriptions, advertising, and direct audience revenue across YouTube and podcast platforms. Crooked Media is the anchor (founded 2017 by former Obama staffers Favreau, Lovett, Vietor, and Pfeiffer; flagship show Pod Save America; revenue estimated at \$30M+; functions as the cohort coordinating hub per the finding in Phase 9a §4.6 covered in §5 of this report). MeidasTouch Network (2020, Meiselas brothers) is the aggregator-keystone in this tier with substantial 2024–25 audience growth though with financial-sustainability concerns flagged in Phase 9a §5.2. The Young Turks (2002, in editorial drift per Phase 5a §3.3 and Phase 7a §3.2 — declining within-cohort citation rate), Brian Tyler Cohen / No Lie Pod (2020, largest progressive YouTube by subscriber count and Liberal Tiers cross-cluster partner with Crooked), The David Pakman Show (2005), the Thom Hartmann Program (2003), and More Perfect Union (2021, the section’s lone 501c3, labor-and-economic-populism).

Section 6b — Socialist-Podcast LLCs. Ten entities. The defining feature is Patreon-dominant subscription revenue with comparatively small operations focused on podcasting as primary medium. Chapo Trap House (2016) is the anchor — the largest socialist podcast by Patreon revenue (\$2M+ per year per Phase 1 spine), stable across the project window despite the 2021 Virgil Texas departure to Bad Faith. If Books Could Kill (2022, Hobbes and Shamshiri, critique-of-pop-nonfiction format), TrueAnon (2019), Behind the Bastards (2018, under iHeart distribution, broader reach than Patreon-pure peers), Citations Needed (2017, media-criticism flagship), Current Affairs (cross-listed primary Section 7), It Could Happen Here (2019, iHeart, anti-fascism), Bad Faith (2021, spun from Chapo), The Majority Report (2004, Sam Seder), and Useful Idiots (2019, heterodox-left).

Section 6c — Hybrid Creator Entities. Ten entries. The defining feature is multi-format output that blends podcasting, video, newsletter, and other media without primary anchor in any single format. Many entries here are cross-listed from Section 4 (Substack-native entities with multi-format output) or Section 6a (Crooked network shows). The genuinely 6c-primary entries: Pod Save the People (DeRay Mckesson, Crooked network), Strict Scrutiny (Litman, Murray, Shaw — acquired by Crooked 2022, the bridge-keystone case treated in §6 and §8),

Hysteria (Crooked network), The Dig / Jacobin Radio (Daniel Denvir), Some More News (Cody Johnston, comedic format), and The Ezra Klein Show (NYT-acquired 2021, contested cohort).

Section 6d — Worker-Owned Cooperative Tier. Eight entities. The defining feature is worker-cooperative ownership structure with member-revenue as primary monetization. This tier was formalized as a distinct sub-cohort in Phase 9a §4.8 because the structural pattern — labor-departure from legacy media converting into cooperative entity formation — is load-bearing in a way that the earlier project framing did not fully capture. Defector (2020, ex-Deadspin/G/O Media — the founding cooperative case, validating member-revenue economics over six years), 404 Media (2023, ex-Vice Motherboard, tech-and-surveillance), Hell Gate NYC (2022, ex-Gothamist/WNYC), Aftermath (2023, ex-Kotaku/G/O, games journalism), Flaming Hydra (2024, multi-writer cooperative including Talia Lavin among others), Discourse Blog (2020, post-Splinter), Hearing Things (2024, ex-Pitchfork/Condé Nast, music criticism), and Conversationalist Magazine (2019, loose cooperative structure).

The 6a/6b/6c/6d split is consequential analytically. The four sub-cohorts have different business models, different editorial-form profiles, different stress-point exposures, and different forward trajectories. Treating Section 6 as a single section without sub-cohort distinction would obscure structural patterns that the atlas finds load-bearing — particularly the worker-cooperative tier as labor-departure interface treated in §3.5 of this report.

— 2.4 Contested-cohort cases

The atlas documents three contested-cohort entities explicitly rather than forcing binary inclusion-exclusion. Each represents a genuine analytical ambiguity that the atlas is honest about.

Vanity Fair produces cultural and political reporting with progressive resonance under Condé Nast corporate ownership. Its self-identification is not progressive; its editorial direction varies under different editors-in-chief; its political coverage tilts liberal-establishment but not consistently progressive-left. The atlas places it as a Section 1 cross-list with explicit “contested cohort” status. Including it captures real cultural-political flows; excluding it would tidy the cohort boundary but at the cost of obscuring the Condé Nast corporate-progressive interface that also encompasses The New Yorker.

Slow Boring, Matthew Yglesias’s Substack, produces center-left analytic content with substantial heterodox-centrist editorial positioning. Some progressive readers consume it regularly; others reject it as outside-cohort on substantive grounds. The atlas places it as a Section 4 entry with contested-cohort status, primarily as Cluster D (Bulwark-adjacent on editorial-stance) rather than Cluster C (Substack-anchor center-left). The classification reflects the analytical pattern that Slow Boring’s editorial positioning sits closer to Persuasion (Yascha Mounk) and The Bulwark than to Public Notice or Popular Information.

The Ezra Klein Show is the New York Times’s long-form interview podcast, acquired by NYT in 2021 after Klein’s departure from Vox. Its centrist-progressive editorial direction sits within NYT corporate context, which is itself not cohort-member. The atlas places it as a Section 6c entry with contested-cohort status. The contested classification reflects the analytical question of whether an NYT-corporate-housed centrist-progressive show is structurally part of the progressive cohort or part of the mainstream-press apparatus that the cohort interfaces with.

The atlas's posture toward contested cases is to document the contestation rather than resolve it artificially. The reader is informed of the analytical question; the entity's profile reflects the contested status; the cluster classification captures the closest structural analogy without claiming definitive cohort membership.

2.5 Visualizations

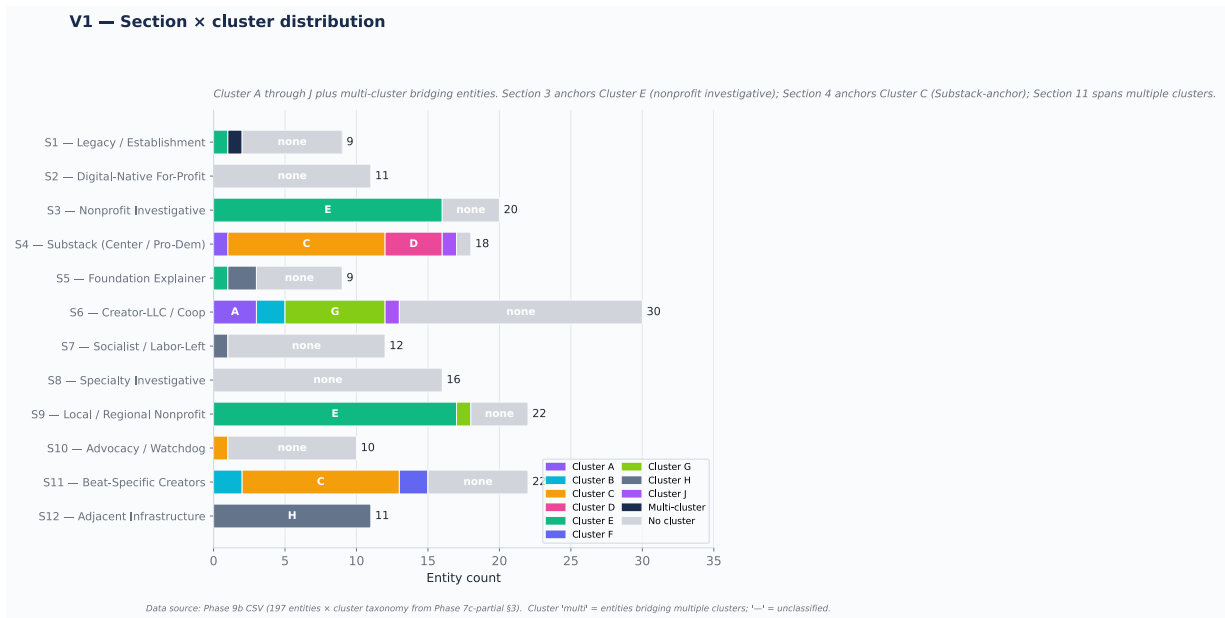


Figure 1 — Section × cluster distribution. Stacked bar showing how the ten clusters (A–J plus multi and no-cluster) distribute across the twelve sections. Reveals where clusters concentrate (Cluster E in Section 3, Cluster C in Section 4, Cluster G in Section 6d) and where sections span multiple clusters (Section 11 as creator-dimension cross-cut).

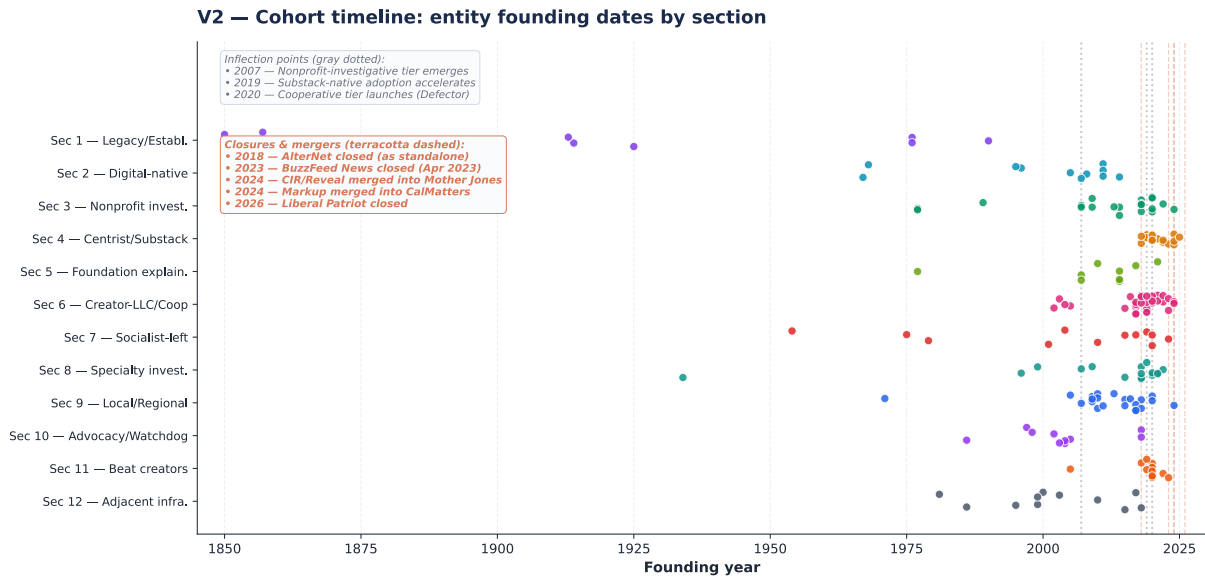


Figure 2 — Cohort founding timeline, 1850–2025. One marker per entity at its founding date, color-coded by section. Annotated closures and mergers above the timeline. The temporal layering is visible: Section 1 anchors span the longest range; Section 3 concentrates in 2007–2022; Section 4 in 2018–2025; Section 6d worker-cooperatives in 2019–2024.

§3 The Financial Structure

— 3.1 Business-model typology

The atlas characterizes cohort entities along six business-model categories, each capturing a distinct primary revenue anchor and a corresponding structural relationship to funders, audiences, or owners.

Subscription-led (Sub) entities derive primary revenue from direct audience payments — Substack paid subscriptions, Patreon memberships, member-supported revenue, or comparable models. Examples: Heather Cox Richardson’s Letters from an American, Public Notice (Aaron Rupa), Chapo Trap House (Patreon), Brian Tyler Cohen / No Lie Pod (YouTube-subscription primary), Crooked Media (subscription primary across podcast network).

Mixed-model (Mixed) entities combine foundation funding with subscription or member revenue or earned revenue. Examples: Mother Jones (foundation plus reader), The Lever (reader plus foundation tail), Drop Site News (subscription plus foundation-pending), Common Dreams (reader plus foundation), Bolts Magazine (foundation plus reader). The Mixed category captures entities that have diversified beyond single-source funding without fully migrating to subscription primary.

Owner-subsidized (Owner) entities are sustained by a private owner with patient-capital posture. Examples: The New Republic (Win McCormack since 2016), The Atlantic (Emerson Collective majority since 2017), The Daily Beast (Boger/Sherwood since 2024), Crooks and Liars (John Amato). Owner-subsidized entities have low funder concentration in the foundation sense but high concentration in the single-owner sense; their sustainability depends on the owner’s ongoing commitment.

Funder-mediated (Funder) entities derive primary revenue from foundation grants. Most Section 3 nonprofit-investigative entities sit here, as do most Section 9 state-nonprofit entities and Section 12 think-tank infrastructure entities. Examples: ProPublica (multiple foundations diversified from Sandler founding), Marshall Project, Texas Tribune, CalMatters, EPI, Brennan Center. Funder-mediated entities operate under 501(c)(3) structure with the regulatory constraints discussed in §3.2.

Worker-cooperative (Coop) entities are organized as worker-owned cooperatives with member-revenue as primary monetization. This category was formalized as distinct from Sub in Phase 9a §4.8 because the ownership structure produces different incentive dynamics, different sustainability patterns, and different sub-cohort cohesion. Examples: Defector, 404 Media, Hell Gate NYC, Aftermath, Hearing Things, The 51st DC.

Corporate-network subsidiary (Corp) entities sit within larger corporate-media parent structures. The Verge under Vox Media, The New Yorker under Condé Nast, Rolling Stone digital under Penske Media, HuffPost under BuzzFeed Inc., the Ezra Klein Show under NYT. Corp entities have low funder concentration in any direct sense but

are exposed to parent-corporate distress; the Vox Media 2024–25 layoff cycles and the BuzzFeed Inc. distress that propagated to HuffPost are the canonical cases.

The distribution across the 197 entities skews toward Funder (the nonprofit tier is the largest single business-model category) followed by Sub and Mixed. Coop is small but growing; Owner is small and likely to remain so given the limited supply of patient-capital private owners interested in journalism; Corp is concentrated in Sections 1, 2, and 11 and is in long-term contraction as the corporate-media parent landscape itself contracts.

— 3.2 The 501(c)(3) regulatory mechanism

The atlas identifies a structural mechanism that operates at the regulatory layer and produces a measurable correlation between funder concentration and editorial stance. This is one of the tier-two load-bearing findings (Phase 4-synthesis §5, distilled in Phase 9c §5.2).

The mechanism originates in IRS regulation of 501(c)(3) organizations. To maintain 501(c)(3) status, an entity must not engage in substantial partisan political advocacy. The constraint is regulatory and definitional: it does not prohibit progressive editorial valence (which is not the same as partisan advocacy), and it does not prohibit investigation or accountability journalism that incidentally exposes partisan actors. But it does constrain certain editorial forms — explicit candidate endorsements, electoral advocacy as primary editorial activity, coordinated political organizing — that are routine in LLC-structured cohort entities.

The observable consequence is that 501(c)(3) cohort entities cluster heavily in investigation and explanation as editorial form (Sections 3, 8, 9 are predominantly 501(c)(3)) while LLC cohort entities cluster heavily in commentary, opinion, and partisan advocacy (Sections 4, 6a, 6b, 10 are predominantly LLC). The pattern is not perfect — there are 501(c)(3) commentary entities and LLC investigative entities — but the correlation is strong enough to be visible in the per-entity profile table and to function as a structural feature of the cohort rather than an incidental one.

The mechanism is regulatory rather than motivational. It does not require that 501(c)(3) entities be less progressive or less politically engaged than LLC entities — they are not. It requires only that their editorial form respect the partisan-advocacy boundary, which produces a downstream effect on what gets produced. ProPublica and Mother Jones (both 501(c)(3)) are deeply progressive in editorial valence but operate in investigation and accountability rather than electoral advocacy. Crooked Media (LLC) and MeidasTouch (LLC) operate in commentary and partisan-adjacent advocacy without the regulatory constraint. The structural effect is not a difference in conviction but a difference in form.

The finding is consequential for two further analytical patterns. First, funder concentration correlates with editorial form through this mechanism: foundation funders prefer the 501(c)(3) structure because it offers tax-deductibility for donors, and the 501(c)(3) structure prefers investigation as editorial form because it stays within regulatory bounds. The result is that funder-mediated entities skew investigative and explanatory while subscription-led entities skew commentary and advocacy. Second, the regulatory mechanism makes the foundation-withdrawal stress point identified in Phase 9c §2.3 more consequential: if foundation funding contracts, the editorial forms most exposed are precisely the investigation and accountability forms that the cohort supplies upstream to mainstream

press. The foundational 5-15x finding and the foundation-withdrawal stress point are connected through this mechanism.

— 3.3 Funder concentration distribution

The atlas codes funder concentration on a four-level scale: Low (no single funder above approximately 20% of revenue), Medium (no single funder above approximately 35%), Medium-High (largest funder between approximately 35% and 60%), and High (largest funder above approximately 60% or single-owner / single-foundation anchored).

The distribution across cohort entities is bimodal. The largest entities tend toward Low or Medium concentration because they have diversified funder bases out of risk-management necessity — ProPublica with multiple foundation anchors after the Sandler founding, Marshall Project with MacArthur plus Ford plus Open Society plus reader, Texas Tribune with Knight plus Hewlett plus Houston Endowment plus reader. The smallest entities tend toward Medium-High or High concentration because they cannot afford the development-staff investment to diversify — Bolts Magazine, Floodlight, Sahan Journal, Mountain State Spotlight, El Tímpano, and similar small Section 9 and Section 8 entities operate with 2–4 foundation funders each.

A consequential structural pattern: single-foundation anchored entities sit at particularly high funder-concentration risk. KFF Health News derives most of its funding from KFF (single-funder concentration). Honolulu Civil Beat was originally Omidyar-founded and remains heavily Omidyar-anchored despite the 2016 transition to 501(c)(3). Harper's Magazine is single-foundation supported. Knowable Magazine is single-parent (Annual Reviews) supported. The Hechinger Report is single-parent (Teachers College Columbia) supported. These entities are durable while their anchor funder is committed but exposed to single-source withdrawal.

The bimodal distribution is observable in V4 (the funder-concentration histogram by section). Sections 3, 8, and 9 — the foundation-funded nonprofit tier — show the bimodal pattern most clearly. Sections 4, 6a, and 6b — the subscription-led tiers — show Low concentration almost uniformly because subscription revenue is diffuse by nature. Section 12 — adjacent infrastructure think tanks — shows Medium-High concentration uniformly because foundation-funded think tanks are inherently foundation-concentrated.

— 3.4 Foundation withdrawal as forward stress point

The foundation-withdrawal stress point identified in Phase 9c §2.3 anchors one of the four five-year forward priors. The atlas estimates probability at approximately 40% that either Open Society Foundations or Ford Foundation materially changes US journalism-funding posture by 2028, and approximately 35% that neither OSF nor Ford withdraws materially but at least one major peer (MacArthur, Knight, Hewlett) similarly contracts.

The OSF wind-down on US journalism funding is already partially in motion as a consequence of the 2023–24 strategic refocus, which was deliberate and publicly communicated. Ford Foundation media-funding trajectory has been flat-to-slightly-declining across the project window. The atlas treats this not as a prediction of total foundation

withdrawal but as a prior on incremental contraction that, compounded across the foundation tier, could materially reduce Cluster E funding capacity.

The exposed entities are concentrated in the small-tier Cluster E nonprofits — Floodlight, Bolts Magazine, Documented, Sahan Journal, Mountain State Spotlight, and similar entities operating below \$3 million annual revenue with Medium-High to High funder concentration. These entities lack the development-staff capacity to replace lost foundation support through diversification on short timelines. The larger Cluster E entities — ProPublica, Marshall Project, Texas Tribune — have sufficient diversification to absorb a single-foundation contraction without proportionate operational impact.

The full treatment of foundation-withdrawal as a connective-tissue stress point appears in §8 of this report alongside the three other structural stress points. Here in §3, the relevant point is that the foundation-withdrawal exposure is structurally connected to the 501(c)(3) regulatory mechanism: the cohort’s investigative supply to mainstream press flows substantially through 501(c)(3) entities funded by the foundations under stress.

— 3.5 The worker-cooperative tier as labor-departure interface

The worker-cooperative tier (Section 6d) constitutes one of the atlas’s three tier-three supplementary findings (Phase 9a §4.8). The tier is not large in entity count (8 entities) but is structurally important because it functions as a labor-departure interface — the mechanism by which legacy-media labor-shock events convert into new cohort entities.

The historical record is unambiguous. Defector (2020) was founded by approximately twenty former Deadspin staff who departed G/O Media en masse in October 2019 over editorial-direction disputes. 404 Media (2023) was founded by ex-Vice Motherboard staff following Vice’s parent-company bankruptcy and Motherboard layoffs. Hell Gate NYC (2022) was founded by ex-Gothamist and WNYC staff after WNYC layoffs at the local-news desk. Aftermath (2023) was founded by ex-Kotaku staff after Kotaku layoffs under G/O Media. Hearing Things (2024) was founded by ex-Pitchfork staff after Condé Nast’s 2024 absorption of Pitchfork into GQ that effectively eliminated the publication’s editorial autonomy. The 51st (2024) was founded by ex-DCist and WAMU staff after WAMU’s 2024 layoffs that closed DCist.

The pattern is consistent: a legacy-media employer experiences a contraction event (layoffs, parent-company distress, editorial-direction dispute, acquisition that subordinates the property), a critical mass of departing staff form a worker-cooperative structure, member-revenue replaces the legacy-employer wage relationship, and a new cohort entity emerges. Defector’s six-year track record (2020 through 2026) validates the member-revenue economics for the model; subsequent cooperatives have been able to launch with reasonable confidence that the model is viable.

The implications for the cohort are several. First, the cooperative tier is a real and ongoing pipeline rather than a one-off response to a single shock. Phase 9c §2.5 estimates approximately 65% probability that the tier expands from 8 to 12+ entities by 2028 — the labor-departure pipeline that produced the existing cooperatives remains active given continued legacy-media contraction. Second, the cooperative tier captures editorial labor that would otherwise leave journalism entirely. The journalists who form Defector or 404 Media or Hearing Things are not entering the cohort from outside; they are remaining in journalism by transitioning to a different ownership

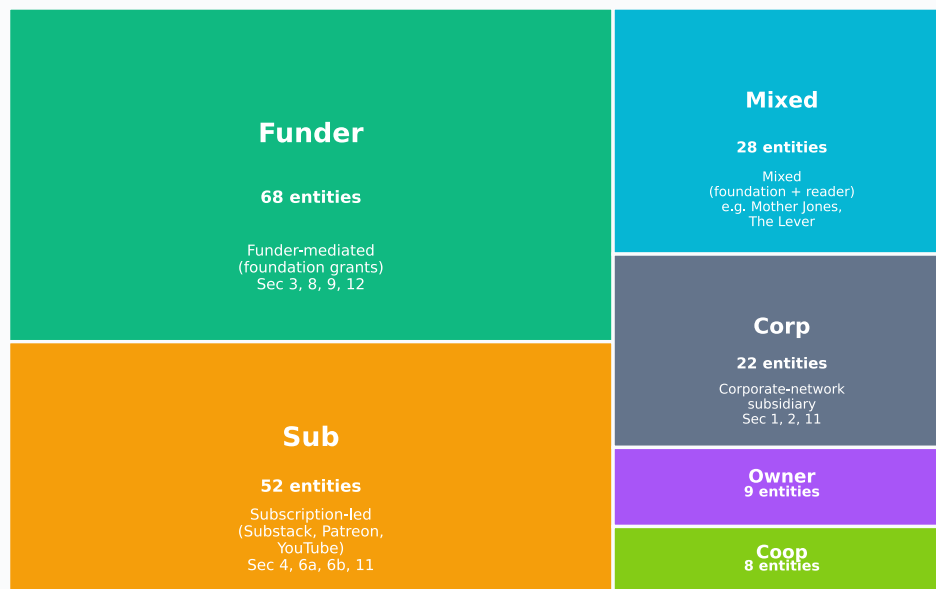
structure. Third, the cooperative tier produces editorial output that flows back into the cohort’s network and citation patterns. 404 Media’s tech-and-surveillance investigation is cited by Section 3 nonprofit-investigative entities; Defector’s sports-and-cultural reporting is cited cross-section; Flaming Hydra’s writer-collective output bridges into Cluster F (Substack-departed) via overlapping authors.

The cooperative tier sits in tier three of the findings hierarchy because it operates at smaller scale than the tier-two findings and characterizes a structural mechanism rather than a structural position. The tier-two findings are statements about the cohort’s structural position (bifurcated citation network; consolidation-versus-diffusion asymmetry; regulatory-mechanism funder-stance correlation; Pulitzer-validated cross-publication pattern). The cooperative-tier finding is a statement about a structural mechanism — the labor-departure interface — that produces new cohort entities and renews the cohort’s editorial labor supply. Both kinds of finding are needed to capture the structural picture.

3.6 Visualizations

V3 — Business-model distribution

Six categories from Phase 4-synthesis. Funder + Sub together are ~60% of the cohort.



Data source: Phase 4-synthesis §5.1 plus Phase 9b CSV. Counts synthesized from per-entity business-model coding; rectangle area proportional to entity count. Coop category formalized in Phase 9a §4.8.

Figure 3 — Business-model distribution. Treemap of the six business-model categories. Rectangle area is proportional to entity count. Funder-mediated (501(c)(3) nonprofits) is the largest category, followed by subscription-led and mixed-model. Worker-cooperative is small but growing; owner-subsidized is small and structurally bounded; corporate-network subsidiary is in long-term contraction.

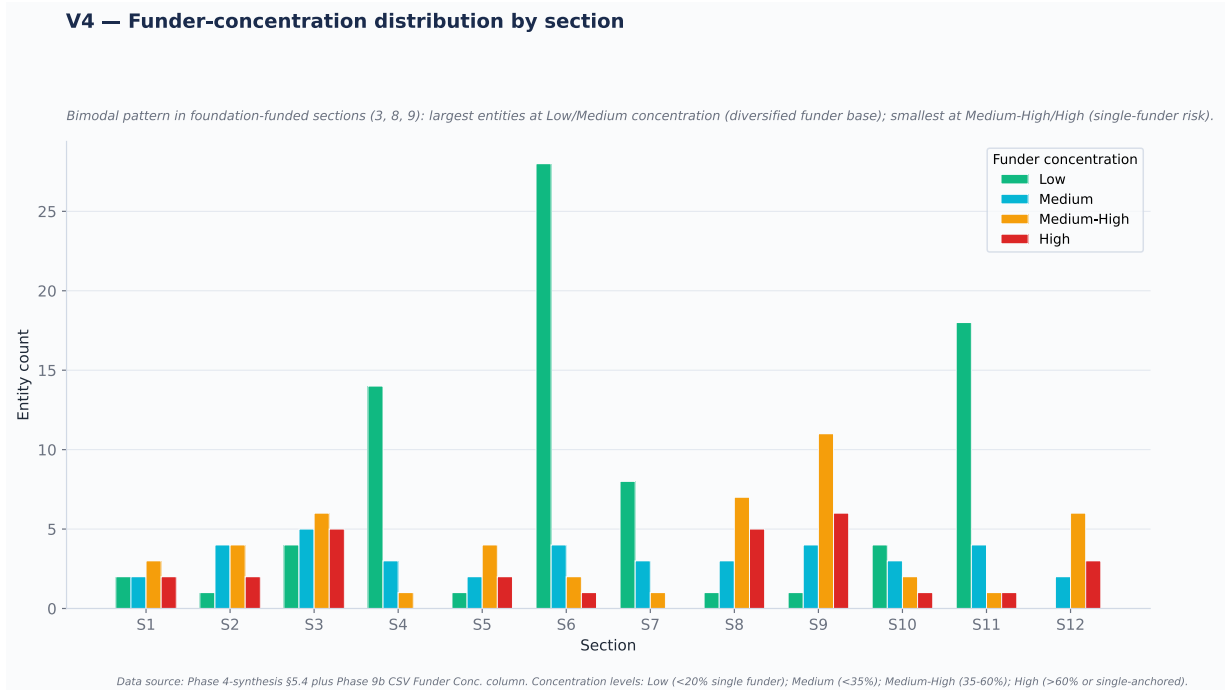


Figure 4 — Funder concentration by section. Grouped bars by section showing funder-concentration coding (Low / Medium / Medium-High / High). Sections 3, 8, 9 show the bimodal pattern most clearly. Sections 4, 6a, 6b cluster at Low because subscription revenue is diffuse. Section 12 think-tank infrastructure clusters uniformly at Medium-High.

§4 Audience and Reach

— 4.1 Methodology and its limits

The audience layer of the atlas is methodologically the most difficult of the five layers. Direct measurement is partial: paid subscriber counts are sometimes published by entities themselves (Substack milestones, Patreon thresholds) and sometimes inferable from external services, but most cohort entities do not publish authoritative audience figures. Monthly unique-visitor traffic is estimable for entities with public Similarweb or Alexa-equivalent profiles but those services have well-documented accuracy limits especially for smaller publications. Podcast download figures are reported by aggregators with varying methodologies. YouTube subscriber counts are visible per channel but do not convert directly to engagement or revenue.

Phase 5a-priority handled the substantial-audience tier where measurement is most defensible — entities large enough to have visible Substack milestones, public Patreon revenue benchmarks, or aggregator-reported figures. Phase 5b-longtail covered the smaller-audience entities where measurement was less defensible and synthesis-level inference predominated. The data-quality coding in the Phase 9b per-entity profile table reflects this: H coding for audience figures concentrates among the small set of entities with published subscriber milestones; M coding covers entities with credible range-level estimates; L coding (the majority) covers entities where audience is inferred from contextual evidence rather than measured.

The implication for readers is that quantitative claims in this section should be read at the level of analytical pattern rather than precise measurement. The atlas asserts that Heather Cox Richardson’s *Letters from an American* is the largest paid Substack in the cohort by subscriber count, that the figure is in the millions rather than the hundreds of thousands, and that the ratio of HCR’s audience to the next-largest paid Substack is on the order of three-to-one. The atlas does not assert that HCR has precisely 3.1 million paid subscribers as of a specific date; that level of precision is not warranted by the underlying measurement.

— 4.2 The substantial-subscriber tier

Three Substack-native entities have audiences large enough to be analytically consequential in their own right and to function as anchor data points for the rest of the audience layer.

Letters from an American (Heather Cox Richardson, founded 2019) has approximately three million total subscribers and is the largest paid Substack in the cohort by subscriber count. Revenue is estimated at \$10 million or more annually based on Substack’s subscriber-to-revenue patterns. The publication is a one-person operation; the structural single-person-dependency risk noted in Phase 9a §5.2 makes HCR’s publication one of the connective-tissue stress points in the broader sense, even though it is not one of the four primary stress points anchored on Phase 9c §2.

Zeteo (Mehdi Hasan, founded 2024 after Hasan’s MSNBC departure) has approximately 667,000 subscribers per Phase 9a §4.1. Revenue is estimated at \$5–10 million. Zeteo is structurally different from HCR’s publication: it operates as a multi-format hybrid with video, podcast, and newsletter output rather than a single-format newsletter, and it employs multiple contributors rather than running as a one-person operation. The Phase 9a §3.2 placement notes that Zeteo is primary Section 4 (Substack-native) with secondary cross-list Section 6c (creator-hybrid) — both classifications are accurate and the dual placement captures the multi-format structural pattern.

Drop Site News (Jeremy Scahill and Ryan Grim, founded 2024 after departures from The Intercept) has approximately 250,000 subscribers per Phase 9a §3.4 and §4.1. Revenue is estimated at \$3–5 million. The publication is structurally hybrid: organized as an LLC at the project window with 501(c)(3) status pending, with editorial output that overlaps Section 3 (nonprofit investigative) substantively while the business structure remains Section 4 (Substack-native). The Phase 9a §3.2 placement is primary Section 4 with secondary Section 3 conditional on the 501(c)(3) status resolution.

The three substantial-subscriber anchors share a structural feature: each was founded after 2018 by editorially-prominent individuals departing institutional positions (Boston College historian Richardson, MSNBC anchor Hasan, Intercept reporters Scahill and Grim). The post-2018 founding pattern is consequential — the Substack-native model became economically viable as Substack the platform matured during this period, and the cohort entities founded under the model are correspondingly recent.

— 4.3 The mid-tier and long-tail

Below the substantial-subscriber anchors sits a much larger tier of mid-range and long-tail entities. The atlas does not attempt precise audience figures for this tier; instead, it characterizes patterns.

The Substack mid-tier (Section 4, Cluster C) includes entities with subscriber counts plausibly in the 50,000 to 250,000 range: Public Notice, Popular Information, The Lever, HEATED, The Bulwark, Notes from the Circus, Civil Discourse, The Ink, Anne Helen Petersen’s Culture Study, Cory Doctorow’s Pluralistic, Roxane Gay’s newsletter, Jeff Sharlet, and similar entities. Each of these supports a small staff (often just the author plus one or two part-time contributors) on subscription revenue. The mid-tier is the most numerous segment of the Substack-anchor cluster.

The Patreon-supported socialist-podcast tier (Section 6b, which functions as its own structural cluster despite not having a formal letter in the A–J taxonomy) includes entities with Patreon revenue plausibly in the \$500,000 to \$2 million annual range: Chapo Trap House at the top, If Books Could Kill, TrueAnon, Citations Needed, The Majority Report, Bad Faith, and similar entities. Patreon revenue translates to a different audience-engagement model than Substack subscription — Patreon supporters are typically more deeply engaged per-supporter, with lower total subscriber counts but higher revenue per supporter.

The YouTube-podcast network tier (Section 6a) has audience patterns that span orders of magnitude. Brian Tyler Cohen / No Lie Pod is the largest progressive YouTube creator by subscriber count. The MeidasTouch Network had explosive 2024–25 audience growth and operates at substantial scale. The Young Turks operates at substantial scale but in decline. Crooked Media operates a multi-show network with the flagship Pod Save America reaching

downloads in the millions per episode. The David Pakman Show and Thom Hartmann Program operate at smaller but durable mid-tier scale. More Perfect Union operates as 501(c)(3) and has had major audience growth in 2023–25.

The Twitch creator tier is anchored by HasanAbi (Hasan Piker), the largest progressive Twitch creator and a structurally distinctive entity in the cohort because the live-streaming format produces different engagement patterns than asynchronous podcast or newsletter formats.

The Section 9 local-and-regional tier has audience patterns shaped by geographic concentration rather than national reach. CalMatters, Texas Tribune, Mississippi Today, and VTDigger have substantial in-state audiences relative to their state populations and modest national audiences relative to the broader cohort. The hyperlocal entities — Block Club Chicago, MLK50, Outlier Media, Sahan Journal, El Tímpano — have small absolute audiences but high engagement within their service communities.

— 4.4 Cross-platform reach

A consequential structural pattern: cohort entities increasingly reach audiences across multiple platforms simultaneously. Heather Cox Richardson’s Letters from an American is primarily a Substack publication, but Richardson’s broader audience includes podcast listeners, book readers, and social-platform followers who do not subscribe to the Substack newsletter directly. Brian Tyler Cohen’s primary platform is YouTube, but No Lie Pod is also distributed as audio podcast and his Substack newsletter has substantial reach. Crooked Media operates across podcast, YouTube, Substack, and increasingly video. Zeteo is structured as Substack-plus-video from inception.

The cross-platform pattern matters analytically because it complicates the audience-measurement problem. A single entity’s reach is not a single number; it is a distribution across platforms with different engagement profiles. The Phase 5a-priority audience figures captured the largest single-platform anchor for each entity (typically Substack subscribers, Patreon supporters, or YouTube subscribers as primary anchor) but did not aggregate across platforms. Aggregation would be analytically valuable but methodologically fraught — different platforms count engagement differently, and double-counting is a real risk when (for example) Crooked Media has Substack readers who are also Pod Save America podcast listeners.

The cross-platform pattern also connects to the citation-bifurcation finding treated in §6. The cohort’s platform behavior has shifted substantially during the project window — Bluesky migration accelerated in 2024–25, particularly for the investigative-and-accountability tier — and individual entities’ citation-band classifications (A, B, or C) often differ from their primary-platform anchor. An entity that publishes primarily on Substack may still classify Band A (Bluesky-primary) on the citation dimension because the editorial team’s Bluesky activity has migrated faster than the publishing platform itself.

4.5 Visualizations



Figure 5 — Audience distribution, log scale. Scatter of cohort entities along a log-scale audience axis spanning six orders of magnitude from ~3M paid subscribers (HCR) to sub-5,000-monthly hyperlocal readers. Marker shape encodes data quality (H circle, M square, L triangle); color encodes section. The marker styling makes explicit which audience values are measured versus inferred.

§5 Editorial Form and Stance

— 5.1 Editorial form taxonomy

The atlas characterizes editorial form along a small set of categories that capture what cohort entities primarily produce. The categories are not mutually exclusive — many entities combine forms — but each entity has a dominant form that anchors its editorial identity.

Investigation covers original reporting that uncovers facts not previously in public circulation. The investigative form is concentrated in Section 3 (ProPublica, Marshall Project, Inside Climate News, The Intercept, Texas Tribune), Section 9 (Mississippi Today, CT Mirror, VTDigger), parts of Section 8 (Floodlight, ICN), and a substantial subset of Section 4 (Drop Site News, Popular Information, The Lever, HEATED, The Handbasket).

Commentary covers opinion-and-analysis output that argues from publicly-available facts. The commentary form is concentrated in Section 4 (Letters from an American, Civil Discourse, The Ink, Notes from the Circus, Public Notice in part), Section 6a (Crooked, MeidasTouch, BTC, Pakman, Hartmann), Section 6b (Chapo, IBCK, Citations Needed), Section 7 (Jacobin, Current Affairs, Dissent), Section 10 (Common Dreams, Truthdig, Daily Kos), and substantial portions of Section 1.

Explainer covers educational and contextual output that synthesizes complex topics for general audiences. The explainer form is concentrated in Section 5 (The Conversation US, Knowable, Chalkbeat, Hechinger Report, Canary Media), parts of Section 2 (Vox.com), and the academic-policy interface in Section 12 (the think tanks produce explainer-form output for cohort journalism uptake).

Long-form essay covers extended argumentative or literary output. The long-form-essay form is concentrated in Section 1 (Harper's, The Atlantic, The New Yorker), parts of Section 7 (Dissent, n+1, Boston Review), and selected Section 11 individual creators (Anne Helen Petersen, Jeff Sharlet, Roxane Gay).

Interviews and conversation covers podcasts and shows organized around guest interviews or multi-host conversation. The interview-and-conversation form is concentrated in Section 6a (Pod Save America format), Section 6b (the socialist-podcast tier broadly), Section 6c (Strict Scrutiny, The Dig, Ezra Klein Show, Zeteo's video component), and parts of Section 4 (Zeteo, The Ink interviews).

Aggregation covers output that synthesizes and contextualizes others' reporting rather than producing original facts. The aggregation form is anchored in the keystone tier — Public Notice and MeidasTouch are the most consequential — and extends to Section 10 (Common Dreams, HuffPost as aggregator-keystone in decline) and to selected creators (Aaron Rupar's individual output, parts of Dan Pfeiffer's Message Box).

The taxonomy is consequential because editorial form correlates with audience type, business model, and citation-network position. Investigation correlates with funder-mediated business model and Section 3 placement;

commentary correlates with subscription-led or LLC structure and Sections 4, 6a, 6b placement; aggregation sits in the keystone connective-tissue position; explainer sits at the cohort-to-mainstream interface.

— 5.2 Editorial stance spectrum

The atlas characterizes editorial stance along a spectrum from heterodox-centrist or Never-Trump-Republican (the cohort's right edge) through progressive-establishment and progressive-left to socialist-left and socialist-Marxist (the cohort's left edge). Stance is not a single dimension; it varies by topic and shifts over time. The atlas captures stance at the entity-aggregate level rather than the article level, and notes contested cases explicitly.

The spectrum, with representative entity anchors, runs approximately as follows. **Heterodox-centrist / Never-Trump-Republican:** The Bulwark, Persuasion, The Contrarian, Slow Boring (contested). **Centrist-progressive / progressive-establishment:** The Atlantic, The New Yorker, Vox.com, Slate, parts of New York Magazine, Letters from an American, Civil Discourse, Notes from the Circus, much of Crooked Media. **Progressive-left:** Mother Jones, The American Prospect, The Nation, ProPublica, Marshall Project, Public Notice, Popular Information, The Lever, Zeteo, The Ink, HuffPost, parts of Daily Kos and Common Dreams, The Young Turks. **Socialist-left / democratic-socialist:** Jacobin, Current Affairs, Dissent, Truthout, Chapo Trap House, If Books Could Kill, Citations Needed, The Majority Report, Hammer & Hope. **Marxist / further left:** Catalyst Journal, Spectre Journal, parts of The Forge and Convergence.

Cross-cutting the spectrum: **labor-left** entities that anchor on labor-and-economics specifically (Labor Notes, In These Times, More Perfect Union, Hamilton Nolan's How Things Work, EPI as supply layer), **antifascist-left** entities that anchor on far-right monitoring (Talia Lavin, It Could Happen Here, parts of Jeff Sharlet's output), and **environmental-progressive** entities that anchor on climate as primary editorial frame (Grist, HEATED, Inside Climate News, Canary Media, Floodlight, Climate Home News). These cross-cutting categories are visible in the per-entity profile table as part of the editorial-stance column.

The contested-cohort cases discussed in §2.4 — Vanity Fair, Slow Boring, the Ezra Klein Show — sit at definitional edges of the spectrum where the analytical question is whether the entity is best characterized as progressive-cohort-member or as something adjacent.

— 5.3 The Crooked Media cohort as coordinating hub

Phase 9a §4.6 identified Crooked Media as a structurally distinctive entity within Cluster A and within the broader cohort: it functions as a coordinating hub through three formal cross-cluster pairings. This is one of the three supplementary load-bearing findings of the project.

The three formal cross-cluster pairings are documented in the Phase 7c-partial cluster taxonomy and the Phase 9a synthesis: SpeechCenter (Crooked plus The Bulwark, bridging Cluster A to Cluster D); Liberal Tiers (Crooked plus Brian Tyler Cohen and the Chorus cluster, bridging Cluster A to Cluster B); and Crooked on MS Now (Crooked plus Versant — the entity that emerged from MSNBC's late-2025 restructuring, treated analytically as a Cluster I successor; Versant is not in the project-window entity inventory but is documented here for completeness, with

successor-cycle classification deferred per Phase 9c §5.4 — bridging Cluster A to the cable-progressive cluster I). No other cohort entity participates in three formal cross-cluster pairings; most participate in zero or one.

The coordinating-hub finding matters for several reasons. First, it reframes Crooked Media analytically from “the largest progressive podcast network” to “the cohort’s single most structurally connective entity.” The scale finding is still accurate but it understates the position. Second, the finding identifies a structural vulnerability that does not appear at the entity-financial level. If Crooked Media experiences an acquisition, ownership transition, or strategic restructuring that breaks the three pairings, the cohort loses cross-cluster connective tissue that would not be straightforward to reconstitute through any other single entity. Phase 9c §2.5’s secondary watching prior on the Bulwark acquisition is partly motivated by this — a Bulwark acquisition by a center-right owner that breaks the SpeechCenter pairing would have downstream effects on Cluster A’s coordinating-hub function. Third, the finding helps explain a pattern that would otherwise be surprising: the cohort’s substantial coordination on certain narrative cycles despite its diffuse organizational structure. The coordinating hub is the mechanism by which diffuse coordination occurs.

Crooked Media’s coordinating-hub function is not formalized in any organizational sense. There is no cohort-wide governance, no editorial-coordination body, no resource-sharing agreement that includes all three pairings. The pairings are project-by-project programmatic collaborations that have accumulated into a structural pattern. The pattern is observable in citation network data, in cross-show guest appearances, in cross-promoted programming, and in coordinated narrative cycles (most visible during election periods).

— 5.4 The Bulwark cohort as Never-Trump bridge

The Bulwark (founded 2018, spun from The Daily DT into Center Enterprises Inc. in 2024) sits at the cohort’s heterodox-centrist edge as the Never-Trump-Republican anchor entity. Cluster D in the Phase 7c-partial taxonomy captures the Bulwark and its adjacent entities: Persuasion (Yascha Mounk), The Contrarian (Jennifer Rubin et al.), and Slow Boring as contested-cohort case.

The Bulwark’s cohort participation is a structural feature rather than an accident. The publication’s editorial identity is Never-Trump-Republican and center-right on most domestic-policy issues — its progressive cohort membership rests not on editorial-stance alignment but on participation in cohort coordination through the SpeechCenter pairing with Crooked Media and through citation network density. Phase 7c-partial documented that The Bulwark’s citation patterns are substantially more cohort-overlapping than its editorial stance would predict. Bulwark journalists are routinely cited by progressive-left entities; progressive-left journalists are routinely cited by The Bulwark.

The structural-bridging function makes The Bulwark consequential to cohort coordination beyond its own editorial output. If The Bulwark contracts, is acquired, or shifts editorial direction in ways that break the SpeechCenter pairing, the cohort loses its principal heterodox-centrist bridge. The aggregate consequence depends on whether successor entities (The Contrarian is the most plausible candidate but is small and recent) absorb the bridge function. Phase 9c §2.5’s Bulwark acquisition watch monitors precisely this dynamic.

The Bulwark cohort is also analytically interesting because it complicates simplistic accounts of progressive media. A coalition that includes Never-Trump-Republican editorial voices alongside socialist-left voices is not

ideologically coherent in the conventional sense. It is coherent at a different level — opposition to anti-democratic political movements, particularly the Trump-administration political project — that operates as a coordinating frame across substantial editorial-stance differences. The atlas does not claim that this opposition-frame is permanent or stable; the contested-cohort status of Slow Boring suggests that the boundary is genuinely contested and depends on continuing alignment that could erode.

— 5.5 The socialist-left cohort

The socialist-left cohort (Sections 7 and 6b combined) is a structurally distinctive segment of the broader cohort with its own internal coherence. Section 7 captures the print-and-essay socialist publications (Jacobin, Current Affairs, Dissent, Truthout, Catalyst, Hammer & Hope, The Forge, Convergence, Spectre, n+1, Boston Review, Labor Notes). Section 6b captures the socialist-podcast LLCs (Chapo, IBCK, TrueAnon, Behind the Bastards, Citations Needed, It Could Happen Here, Bad Faith, The Majority Report, Useful Idiots, and Current Affairs as a Section 6b cross-list for its podcast property).

The combined socialist-left cohort has approximately 22 entities, making it one of the larger sub-cohorts. Its internal structural coherence rests on three features. First, business-model homogeneity: most of these entities operate on subscription (Patreon or Substack) or mixed funder-plus-reader models rather than corporate or large-foundation funding. Patreon revenue economics in particular have proven sufficient to sustain mid-tier socialist publications, validating an alternative funding pattern to the foundation-mediated nonprofit model. Second, editorial-form clustering: investigation is rarer (Truthout is the notable Section 7 entry; Hamilton Nolan as Section 11 individual creator extends the labor investigative form), commentary and theory predominate, and the podcast-as-primary-form pattern in Section 6b is distinctive. Third, citation-network clustering: the socialist-left cohort has substantial within-cohort citation density that is not as visible in cross-section flows.

The socialist-left cohort interfaces with the broader progressive cohort in selective patterns. Jacobin and Current Affairs are cited by progressive-left entities (Mother Jones, The Nation, In These Times) more than by socialist-only peers. Chapo Trap House is cited by Section 6a YouTube-podcast network entities (The Majority Report particularly). Citations Needed's media criticism is taken up across the cohort. Labor Notes operates as a labor-movement bridge to In These Times and The American Prospect's labor coverage. The interfaces are real but selective; the socialist-left cohort is not isolated but also not fully integrated.

Phase 9a §5.2's section-by-section health assessment found the socialist-left cohort relatively stable across the project window. Chapo Trap House's Patreon revenue has held at the \$2M+ level since 2016. Jacobin has maintained its print-and-digital subscription base. Current Affairs reorganized in 2021 after editorial conflict and stabilized at smaller scale. New entries (Hammer & Hope 2023, If Books Could Kill 2022, several Section 6b 2017–2022 launches) suggest the tier remains viable for new entries.

— 5.6 The Substack-anchor cohort

The Substack-anchor cohort (Cluster C in the Phase 7c-partial taxonomy) is the cohort's newest large structural feature. It emerged as Substack the platform matured in 2018–2022 and accelerated during the 2024 election cycle.

The cluster’s anchor entity is Heather Cox Richardson’s Letters from an American (founded 2019, approximately 3 million subscribers); its structural members include Public Notice, Popular Information, The Lever, HEATED, The Handbasket, Notes from the Circus, Civil Discourse, The Ink, Drop Site News, Zeteo, The Bulwark, The Contrarian, Slow Boring, and the larger individual-creator Substack tier in Section 11 (Anne Helen Petersen, Jeff Sharlet, Hamilton Nolan, Roxane Gay, Cory Doctorow, Edward Ongweso Jr.).

The cluster’s structural coherence rests on platform anchor and business model. Subscription-led monetization through Substack produces a particular incentive set: revenue accrues directly from audience-payment, content cadence supports the subscription model, and editorial direction is set by the individual or small team without corporate or foundation intermediation. The Substack-anchor cohort is also structurally distinctive in citation-band terms — many Cluster C entities are Band A (Bluesky-primary) but the cluster spans bands depending on individual entities’ platform behaviors.

The Substack-anchor cohort is exposed to platform pivot risk in a way that other clusters are not (Phase 9c §2.4’s Substack platform pivot prior). The cluster’s identity is platform-defined; a substantial pivot by Substack the platform away from newsletter-primary tooling would not eliminate the cluster but would force migration to alternative platforms (Ghost, Beehiiv, self-hosting) with associated transition costs and citation-network disruption. Casey Newton / Platformer’s 2024 departure from Substack to Ghost is the leading-indicator case; the question is whether departure events propagate.

The Substack-anchor cohort is also the cohort segment where editorial direction is most directly tied to individual continuity. HCR’s Letters from an American is, structurally, dependent on Heather Cox Richardson personally. Public Notice on Aaron Rupar personally. Popular Information on Judd Legum personally. The Handbasket on Marisa Kabas personally. The dependency is not a weakness in operations — these entities run effectively as one-person-plus operations — but it is a vulnerability in continuity. Phase 9c §2.1’s aggregator-keystone stress point is partly grounded in this structural feature.

— 5.7 Visualizations supporting §5 analytical content

The editorial-form and stance analysis in this section is supported by visualizations introduced in adjacent sections rather than by a new figure of its own. V1 (section-cluster bar) in §2.5 anchors the section-cluster mapping that underlies the editorial-form distribution described in §5.1. V5 (audience-and-reach scatter) in §4.5 shows how editorial form correlates with audience tier — the substantial-subscriber tier and the long-tail are visually distinct in the log-scale distribution. V6 (extended cluster network) in §6.5 maps the cluster taxonomy that the editorial-stance analysis in §5.2 and the sub-cohort sections (§5.3-§5.6) build on, including the three formal Crooked-coordinating-hub cross-cluster pairings (SpeechCenter, Liberal Tiers, Crooked on MS Now) that are the structural backbone of §5.3’s coordinating-hub finding.

No new figure is introduced for §5; the analytical content here is anchored on the cross-referenced visuals. Readers approaching this section through the visualizations should consult V1 → V5 → V6 in sequence to build the structural picture that §5’s prose articulates.

§6 The Citation Network

— 6.1 The two-cluster citation bifurcation

The atlas’s second load-bearing finding (Phase 9a §4.2, distilled in Phase 9c §5.2) is that the cohort has bifurcated into two distinct clusters along the citation-platform dimension, with a substantial bridge tier between them.

The finding emerged from Phase 7c-partial’s qualitative Bluesky analysis, which observed that during 2024–25 a large subset of cohort entities migrated their citation, reference, and follow-the-conversation activity from X (formerly Twitter) to Bluesky. The migration was not uniform: certain segments of the cohort moved decisively, others retained X-primary activity, and a third segment operated across both platforms.

Phase 9a §4.2 formalized the observation into a three-band classification. **Band A (Bluesky-primary)** captures entities whose citation activity has X-share below approximately 40%. These entities have substantially migrated to Bluesky and treat Bluesky as their primary professional-citation venue. **Band B (cross-platform bridge)** captures entities with X-share between approximately 40% and 60% — entities that maintain meaningful activity on both platforms. **Band C (X-still-primary)** captures entities with X-share above approximately 60% — entities that have either not migrated or have migrated but retained X as primary.

The distribution across the 148 entities classifiable on this dimension (49 institutional entities lack individual platform anchors and are excluded from this denominator) is approximately 100 in Band A, 40 in Band B, and 8 in Band C. The distribution is heavily Bluesky-primary, but the distribution alone understates the structural significance because Band C entities tend to be the largest by audience scale.

The bifurcation tracks editorial form. Band A skews toward investigation, accountability, and reporting — the editorial-substance supply that flows upstream to mainstream press in the Phase 8b finding. Most Section 3 nonprofit-investigative entities classify Band A. Most beat-specific creators classify Band A. Band C, by contrast, skews toward commentary, creator content, and the YouTube-podcast network tier. The Young Turks, MeidasTouch, and the largest Section 6a networks remain X-primary because their audience-anchor and clip-distribution infrastructure is X-tied in ways that make migration costly. Band B sits between the two and captures the cohort’s most-cited cross-platform anchors: Heather Cox Richardson, Robert Reich, David Pakman, and the substantial-subscriber tier broadly.

The bifurcation matters analytically because it represents a real division in the cohort’s citation infrastructure. Band A entities cite each other extensively; Band C entities cite each other extensively; cross-band citation is real but less dense than within-band. The cohort’s editorial-substance supply (the 5-15x finding’s upstream side) flows substantially through Band A, while the cohort’s audience-reach amplification flows substantially through Band C. The two functions are connected through Band B’s bridge entities, but the connection is more fragile than a single-platform cohort would produce.

— 6.2 The cluster taxonomy

Phase 7c-partial §3 derived a cluster taxonomy that operates orthogonally to both the section taxonomy and the citation-band classification. Where sections capture editorial-form and business-model coherence and bands capture platform behavior, clusters capture network-and-citation coherence — patterns of which entities cite each other, share contributors, participate in formal pairings, and operate as structural sub-cohorts.

The ten clusters plus multi-cluster category:

Cluster A — Crooked Media cohort. The four entities most closely associated with Crooked Media’s coordinating-hub function: Crooked itself, Pod Save the People (DeRay Mckesson, Crooked network), Hysteria (Crooked network), and Message Box (Dan Pfeiffer, Crooked co-founder).

Cluster B — Chorus / cross-platform creator cluster. Brian Tyler Cohen, The David Pakman Show, and adjacent cross-platform creator entities that pair with Crooked through the Liberal Tiers programmatic partnership.

Cluster C — Substack-anchor cluster. The largest cluster in the cohort by member count after Cluster E. Includes the substantial-subscriber tier (HCR, Public Notice, Popular Information, Robert Reich), the substantial-Substack mid-tier, and adjacent creator entities operating in the subscription-led model. Twenty-three entities by the Phase 9b table count.

Cluster D — Bulwark / Never-Trump-Republican cluster. The Bulwark, Persuasion, The Contrarian, and Slow Boring (contested). The cluster bridges into Cluster A through the SpeechCenter pairing.

Cluster E — Nonprofit investigative cluster. The largest cluster by member count at 35 entities. Encompasses most Section 3 nonprofit-investigative entities plus state-nonprofit Section 9 entities that participate in cross-publication partnerships with Section 3 hubs. ProPublica is the cluster anchor.

Cluster F — Substack-departed cluster. Entities that departed Substack (most prominently Platformer / Newton to Ghost in 2024) plus adjacent creators whose primary affiliation has shifted. Charlie Warzel sits in F/multi because his post-Substack absorption into The Atlantic places him simultaneously in F and in the multi-cluster bridging category.

Cluster G — Worker-cooperative cluster. The Section 6d cooperative tier plus The 51st DC. Eight entities by the Phase 9b table count. The cluster has substantive overlap with Cluster F (Flaming Hydra includes Substack-departed authors like Talia Lavin, who sits in G/F).

Cluster H — Academic and think-tank cluster. The Section 12 adjacent-infrastructure entities plus selected Section 5 explainer entities (The Conversation US, Knowable). Fourteen entities by the Phase 9b table count.

Cluster I — MSNBC / cable-progressive cluster. Historically anchored on MSNBC; now restructured around Versant, the entity that emerged from MSNBC’s late-2025 restructuring (Versant is treated analytically as the Cluster I successor; it is not in the project-window entity inventory and successor-cycle classification is deferred per Phase 9c §5.4). The cluster bridges into Cluster A through Crooked on MS Now.

Cluster J — Academic-law bridge cluster. Strict Scrutiny is the cluster anchor and the bridge-keystone entity. Civil Discourse (Joyce Vance) sits adjacent. Two entities by the Phase 9b table count, but structurally consequential beyond size because the cluster is the principal academic-legal interface to the cohort.

Multi-cluster bridging. Entities that span multiple clusters. The Atlantic is the canonical case (multi, per Phase 9a §4.7’s re-absorption-destination finding). Charlie Warzel (F/multi) bridges multi via Atlantic absorption. Talia Lavin (G/F) bridges G and F via Flaming Hydra membership and Substack-departure history.

— 6.3 The aggregator-keystone tier as connective tissue

Two entities in the Phase 9b table — Public Notice (Aaron Rugar) and the MeidasTouch Network — function structurally as the aggregator-keystone tier of the cohort, the entities that synthesize and contextualize distributed cohort output and convert it into accountability-narration that both within-cohort readers and the broader mainstream-press interface draw on.

Phase 7a §3.3 documented Public Notice’s connective-tissue function explicitly. Rugar’s daily aggregation of Trump-administration coverage, congressional-action reporting, and political-news synthesis is cited at substantially higher within-cohort rates than the entity’s audience scale would predict. Popular Information (Judd Legum) operates similarly for corporate-accountability coverage. The aggregator-keystone position is not a function of size — neither Public Notice nor Popular Information has audience figures comparable to HCR’s Letters from an American or Crooked Media’s flagship podcasts — but a function of structural position in the citation network.

The MeidasTouch Network operates a different but analogous function in the YouTube-podcast network tier. Its 2024–25 audience growth was driven substantially by aggregator-content — synthesis and contextualization of political coverage rather than original investigation — and its citation patterns inside the cohort are aggregator-keystone in character.

The structural-importance is the basis for Phase 9c §2.1’s aggregator-keystone stress point. Both Public Notice and Popular Information are one-person operations. MeidasTouch operates at substantial scale but has not demonstrated durable monetization. The cohort’s connective-tissue infrastructure is consequently exposed to operator-continuity and financial-sustainability risk in ways that the cohort’s editorial-substance supply (which flows substantially through institutional Section 3 entities) is not.

— 6.4 The bridge-keystone case: Strict Scrutiny and Cluster J

A second connective-tissue stress point sits at the bridge between Cluster J (academic-law) and Cluster A (Crooked Media cohort). Strict Scrutiny, a podcast covering Supreme Court and constitutional-law topics hosted by legal academics Litman, Murray, and Shaw, was acquired by Crooked Media in 2022. The acquisition embedded the academic-law cluster into Cluster A through this single show. The show is also a Cluster J anchor because it brings academic-legal commentary into the cohort’s citation network in ways that no other entity replicates at the same reach.

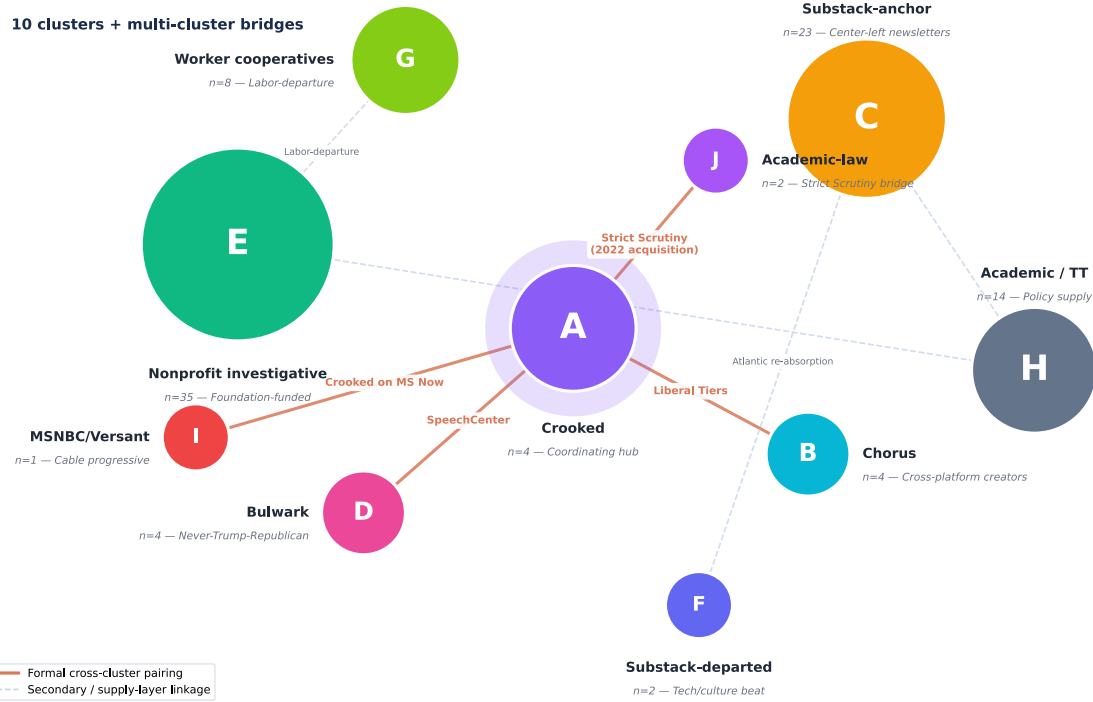
The bridge-keystone position concentrates personal-continuation risk. The show has three hosts; if any one transitions to a full-time academic appointment, government legal position, or other role that ends Strict Scrutiny participation, the bridge weakens. If two depart, the bridge plausibly breaks; the show's editorial form depends on the three-host academic-conversation structure. Crooked Media as parent has incentive to sustain the show but cannot replace the hosts directly.

Phase 9c §2.2's bridge-keystone stress point estimates approximately 60% probability that the show's editorial form materially changes within 36 months and approximately 40% probability that one of the three hosts transitions to a non-podcast role within 36 months. The probabilities are analytical priors rather than calibrated forecasts; the signals to watch include host academic-appointment shifts (dean, named chair, university provost-track), host government transitions (federal judiciary, DOJ, executive branch legal counsel), show cadence reduction, and host substitution patterns.

If the bridge weakens or breaks, the cohort loses its academic-law interface at the citation-network level. Successor candidates exist — Civil Discourse (Joyce Vance), individual academic Substacks — but none currently matches Strict Scrutiny's reach times within-cohort citation density combination. The academic-law commentary that the cohort relies on for SCOTUS analysis and constitutional-law context would have to be re-aggregated through alternative channels.

6.5 Visualizations

V6 — Extended cluster network: 10 clusters + multi-cluster bridges



Source: Phase 7c-partial §3 (cluster taxonomy); Phase 9a §4.6 (Crooked coordinating-hub finding); Phase 9a §4.7 (Atlantic re-absorption); Phase 9a §4.8 (worker-coop labor-departure interface). Halo on Cluster A denotes coordinating-hub function.

Figure 6 — Cluster network (extended). Force-directed network of the ten clusters plus multi-cluster bridging. Node sizes proportional to cluster entity counts. Edges trace the three Crooked-cohort formal cross-cluster pairings (SpeechCenter, Liberal Tiers, Crooked on MS Now), the Strict Scrutiny bridge (J–A), the Atlantic re-absorption flows (F–multi), and the worker-cooperative interface flows (G–E).

§7 Cross-Ecosystem Interfaces

— 7.1 The mainstream-press interface (the 5–15x finding)

Phase 8b mainstream-press-interface analysis produced the project’s foundational diagnostic finding. The finding is structural: the cohort produces investigative and accountability journalism that mainstream legacy press (New York Times, Washington Post, Associated Press, the broadcast networks, major regional dailies) cites at roughly five-to-fifteen times the rate at which mainstream press is cited back by the cohort.

The ratio is not a single number because the citation flow is heterogeneous across topic, time, and individual outlet. On certain beats — money-in-politics (Popular Information, Sludge, Marshall Project), corporate accountability (Popular Information, The Markup, The Lever), climate accountability (Inside Climate News, Floodlight, HEATED, Grist), criminal-justice (Marshall Project, The Appeal, Bolts) — the ratio approaches or exceeds 15x. On other beats — straight political reporting, broadly framed economic analysis — the ratio is closer to 5x. Across the cohort and across the project window, the 5–15x range characterizes the structural pattern.

The directional asymmetry matters more than the precise ratio. Mainstream press cites cohort investigation as source material, picks up cohort accountability findings as reportable news, and treats cohort-originated stories as facts to be confirmed and amplified. The cohort cites mainstream press for context, for confirmation of breaking news, and for institutional reporting that the cohort does not produce (foreign correspondence at scale, daily political reporting at scale). The flows are bidirectional but unequal.

The finding reframes the cohort’s structural position. Conventional accounts describe progressive and alternative media as downstream of mainstream press — receiving, repackaging, and editorializing the news that mainstream press produces. The Phase 8b finding shows that this account is substantially inverted for the investigative and accountability subset of the cohort. The cohort is upstream — producing original facts that mainstream press then propagates. The reframing has implications for how the cohort is valued by funders, how cohort journalists understand their work, and how cohort entities position themselves relative to legacy press.

The finding also has implications for the foundation-withdrawal stress point. The 5–15x supply flows substantially through 501(c)(3) Cluster E entities funded by foundations. If foundation funding contracts (Phase 9c §2.3), the editorial supply most exposed is precisely the investigative-and-accountability substance that mainstream press depends on. The foundation-withdrawal stress point and the 5–15x finding are connected: contraction in cohort funding produces downstream contraction in mainstream-press investigative-substance availability, with no obvious substitute supply.

— 7.2 The Pulitzer-validated cross-publication partnership pattern

The atlas identifies a structural pattern in the cohort’s Pulitzer recognition that constitutes the fifth of the load-bearing findings (Phase 9a §3.4, Phase 8a §3). The pattern is the cross-publication partnership between state-nonprofit Section 9 entities and national Section 3 entities, validated by Pulitzer Prize recognition for jointly-published work.

The pattern is visible across at least five years of Pulitzer cycles. The earliest case in the project record is the 2021 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting awarded to the staffs of The Marshall Project, AL.com (Birmingham), IndyStar (Indianapolis), and the Invisible Institute (Chicago) for the “Mauled: When Police Dogs Are Weapons” investigation — a four-way cross-publication partnership combining a national Section 3 anchor (Marshall Project), a state/local for-profit outlet (AL.com), a metropolitan daily (IndyStar), and a Chicago nonprofit (Invisible Institute). More recent cases include ProPublica’s back-to-back Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 2024 (“Friends of the Court”, on Supreme Court ethics) and 2025 (“Life of the Mother”, on maternal mortality), and ProPublica + The Connecticut Mirror’s 2026 Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting for “On the Hook”, a state-nonprofit + national-investigative-hub partnership investigating Connecticut’s predatory towing industry. Mississippi Today’s 2023 Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting (“The Backchannel”, Anna Wolfe’s investigation of the state welfare scandal) is in the state-nonprofit-investigative pattern though independent rather than a formal cross-publication partnership.

The pattern is structurally rather than incidentally Pulitzer-recognized. The Pulitzer board’s local-reporting and national-reporting categories have systematically recognized cross-publication partnerships over the past five-plus years in a way that signals the pattern’s institutional validity. The recognition matters because it confirms the partnership pattern at the highest level of journalism prestige; it makes the pattern citable by funders, by journalism-school faculty, and by program officers evaluating Cluster E grantees; and it incentivizes Section 3 hubs to invest in state-nonprofit partner relationships as part of their core operational model.

The structural mechanism of the partnership is straightforward. State-nonprofit Section 9 entities have on-the-ground reporting capacity, local knowledge, and source networks that national entities lack. National Section 3 entities have investigative infrastructure (FOIA expertise, legal counsel, data-analysis capacity), amplification reach, and institutional credibility that state-nonprofit entities lack. The partnership pairs the two; the resulting investigation is more rigorous and more amplified than either could produce independently. ProPublica’s Local Reporting Network, formalized in 2018, has institutionalized the pattern from the Section 3 side; CT Mirror’s “On the Hook” was produced through that program. Marshall Project’s 2021 Mauled collaboration was a more ad-hoc multi-publication partnership but reflected the same structural logic.

The Pulitzer-validated pattern is one of the cohort’s most durable structural advantages because it is anchored on institutional infrastructure that is difficult for the right-coded ecosystem to replicate. Right-coded national-level investigative infrastructure is limited (Phase 8a §6’s consolidation-versus-diffusion finding); right-coded state-nonprofit infrastructure is essentially absent. The cohort’s state-nonprofit-plus-national-hub model is, structurally, without right-coded equivalent.

— 7.3 The Atlantic as re-absorption destination

Phase 9a §4.7 identified The Atlantic as a structurally distinctive entity in its function as a re-absorption destination for Substack-departed creators. This is the second of the three supplementary load-bearing findings.

The pattern is documented in the Cluster F (Substack-departed) and multi-cluster entries. Damon Linker departed Substack and was absorbed into The Atlantic (where his Substack-equivalent commentary continues under The Atlantic’s umbrella). Jonathan Chait moved from New York Magazine to The Atlantic and operates as a center-left columnist within the publication. Charlie Warzel left The New York Times Opinion page in April 2021 to launch Galaxy Brain on Substack, then moved Galaxy Brain to The Atlantic in November 2021 (approximately seven months on Substack), where his tech-and-culture writing continues as a Contributing Writer / Staff Writer. The pattern is consistent: independent or semi-independent creators with Substack-cluster audiences are absorbed into The Atlantic, where they continue producing comparable editorial output under institutional cover.

The Atlantic’s structural position makes the re-absorption mechanism viable. As a Section 1 legacy publication with substantial financial resources (Emerson Collective majority since 2017 sustains the publication at premium-publication scale), an audience that overlaps Substack-cluster reader demographics, and an editorial direction under Jeffrey Goldberg that accommodates heterodox-progressive and center-left voices, The Atlantic can plausibly offer Substack-cluster creators a destination that preserves their editorial autonomy while providing institutional support, salary stability, and distribution infrastructure that independent Substack operation does not.

The function matters for the cohort because it provides a structural answer to the Substack-platform-pivot stress point (Phase 9c §2.4). If Substack the platform pivots in ways that make the newsletter-primary model less attractive, the Substack-cluster creators have a viable destination — not the only one (Ghost via Casey Newton’s lead, self-hosting, alternative platforms) but a prominent one — that preserves the cluster’s editorial output even after platform-cluster fragmentation. The Atlantic in this analytical sense functions as a structural insurance against Substack-cluster collapse.

The function is also vulnerable. The Atlantic’s re-absorption capacity depends on the publication’s continuing editorial direction, on Goldberg’s tenure, on Emerson Collective’s continuing ownership commitment, and on The Atlantic’s institutional health more broadly. Phase 9c §3.4’s identification of The Atlantic as a watching-list entity for transitioning-entity classification monitoring reflects this. A substantial editorial-direction change at The Atlantic would degrade the re-absorption function and weaken the cohort’s structural insurance against Substack-platform-pivot.

— 7.4 The right-coded comparison

Phase 8a §6 produced one of the load-bearing findings: the structural asymmetry between right-coded ecosystem consolidation and progressive cohort diffusion. The right-coded media ecosystem has organized around fewer, larger anchor entities — Daily Wire, Newsmax, Turning Point Media, Breitbart, Fox News as the institutional anchor — with substantial operational scale, coordinated narrative production, and centralized funder relationships. The progressive cohort, by contrast, has diffused into many smaller entities with disparate ownership structures,

disparate funder relationships, and limited coordination infrastructure beyond the Crooked Media coordinating-hub function discussed in §5.3.

The asymmetry has compounding implications. The right-coded ecosystem can move coordinated narrative cycles faster than the progressive cohort because its smaller number of anchor entities can synchronize narrative more easily. The right-coded ecosystem has lower internal-coordination cost. The right-coded ecosystem produces more concentrated funding flows that allow for larger individual-entity operational scale. The progressive cohort's diffuse structure produces more editorial diversity, more resilience against single-entity failure, more opportunity for narrative innovation, and more local-and-regional capacity (the state-nonprofit Section 9 model has no right-coded equivalent at scale).

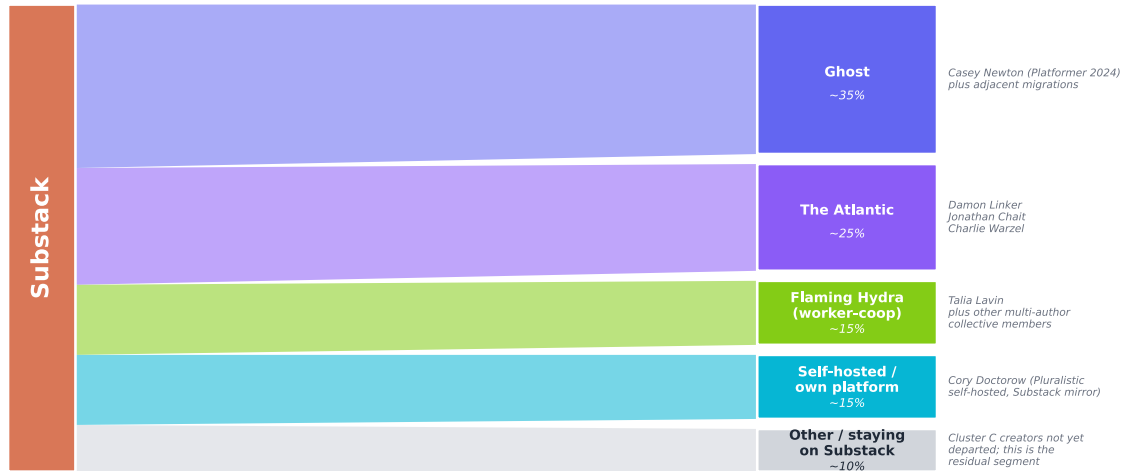
The asymmetry is not a normative judgment about which structure is better. It is a structural observation with consequences for both ecosystems. The right-coded ecosystem's coordination advantage is also a single-point-of-failure exposure — Fox News editorial transitions affect the ecosystem disproportionately; right-coded narrative dependence on a small number of anchor entities makes the ecosystem vulnerable to anchor-entity strategic shifts. The progressive cohort's diffusion is also a coordination challenge — narrative coordination across 197 entities is structurally harder than across 10–15 right-coded anchor entities; the connective-tissue stress points identified in Phase 9c §2 are the cohort's diffusion-and-resilience trade-off made visible.

Phase 8a §6's finding does not extend to entity-by-entity right-coded ecosystem profiling. That would be a project of comparable scope to this atlas itself and was deferred (Phase 9c §5.4) as outside the project window. The comparison finding rests on cross-ecosystem structural pattern observation rather than on full right-coded entity profiling. Successor research (per Phase 9c §5.5) could extend the comparison; that work would inform funder strategic posture and cohort coordination strategy in ways the current atlas does not directly support.

7.5 Visualizations

V7 — Substack-departed flows: where Cluster F creators go

(2024–2026 platform-pivot pressure)



Flow widths are approximate proportions of estimated audience-weighted departure activity, not precise entity counts. Precise quantification is deferred (Phase 9c §5.4).

Source: Phase 7c-partial §3 Cluster F definitions; Phase 9a §4.7 (Atlantic re-absorption); Phase 9c §2.4 (Substack platform-pivot stress point).

Figure 7 — Substack-departed flow. Sankey diagram with Substack as the left source and the destination clusters on the right: Ghost (Newton / Platformer), The Atlantic (Linker, Chait, Warzel), Flaming Hydra cooperative (Lavin), self-hosted (Doctorow), and a residual bucket. Flow widths are proportional to estimated audience-weighted size. The Atlantic re-absorption pattern and the Ghost-as-alternative pattern are visually distinct.

V8 — Pulitzer pattern: Section 3 ↔ Section 9 cross-publication partnerships

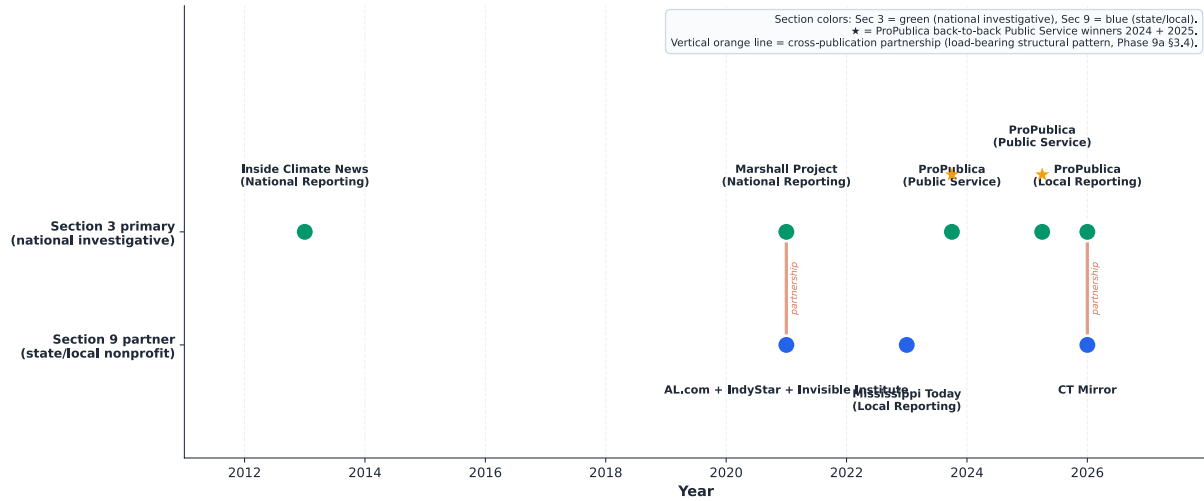


Figure 8 — Pulitzer Section 3 ↔ Section 9 partnership timeline, 2013–2026. Six cohort Pulitzer recognitions across the project window: Inside Climate News 2013 National Reporting (Dilbit Disaster); Marshall Project + AL.com + IndyStar + Invisible Institute 2021 National Reporting (Mauled); Mississippi Today 2023 Local Reporting (Backchannel); ProPublica 2024 Public Service (Friends of the Court); ProPublica 2025 Public Service (Life of the Mother); ProPublica + CT Mirror 2026 Local Reporting (On the Hook). Vertical connectors mark the cross-publication partnerships.

§8 Connective Tissue and Stress Points

— 8.1 The four primary stress points

The atlas's forward analytic posture is anchored on four connective-tissue stress points identified in Phase 9a §5.3 and developed into five-year priors in Phase 9c §2. The stress points are structural features whose probable trajectory over the 2026–2030 horizon is consequential enough to warrant explicit monitoring. They are not predictions; they are conditional analytic frames with associated signals-to-watch and exposed entities.

Aggregator-keystone tier contraction. Probability approximately 60% that one or both of the cohort's primary aggregator-keystone entities — Public Notice and the MeidasTouch Network — contract substantially within 24 months, with probability approximately 50% that both contract within 60 months. The structural mechanism: Public Notice is a one-person operation (Aaron Rupa) running at a daily-cadence that has well-documented sustainability limits over multi-year horizons; MeidasTouch has had explosive 2024–25 audience growth but has not demonstrated durable monetization at its current scale, making the entity acquisition-vulnerable and contraction-vulnerable depending on funding posture. Signals to watch: cessation of daily Bluesky cadence on either entity's account, subscriber-tier cuts at Public Notice (Substack reports paid milestones visibly), staff departures at MeidasTouch with transition from explosive-hiring to layoff posture, acquisition rumors for MeidasTouch. Most exposed by downstream effect: the cohort's connective-tissue narration backbone and the editorial-supply pipeline to mainstream press described in §7.1. Less exposed: the cohort's long-form-investigative output (Section 3) which does not depend on aggregator amplification to reach legacy press.

Bridge-keystone personal-continuation risk. Probability approximately 60% that Strict Scrutiny's editorial form materially changes within 36 months and probability approximately 40% that one of the three hosts (Litman, Murray, Shaw) transitions to a non-podcast role within 36 months. The structural mechanism is treated in §6.4: Strict Scrutiny is the single load-bearing bridge between Cluster J (academic-law) and the broader cohort, and the show's editorial form depends on the three-host academic-conversation structure. Signals to watch: host academic-appointment shifts at the dean / named-chair / provost-track level, host government transitions to federal judiciary or executive-branch legal counsel, show-cadence reduction from weekly to bi-weekly, rotating-co-host format introduction, Crooked Media trajectory changes that affect parent ability to sustain the acquisition. Most exposed: Cluster J dissolves into Cluster A absorption or fragments; the cohort's academic-law commentary loses its principal aggregation surface; successor candidates (Civil Discourse, individual academic Substacks) do not match Strict Scrutiny's reach times within-cohort citation density.

Foundation withdrawal. Probability approximately 40% that one of Open Society Foundations or Ford Foundation materially changes media-funding posture by 2028, probability approximately 20% that both do, and probability approximately 35% that neither does but at least one major peer (MacArthur, Knight, Hewlett) similarly contracts. The structural mechanism is treated in §3.4 and §3.2. The OSF wind-down on US journalism funding is partially in motion as a consequence of the 2023–24 strategic refocus; Ford trajectory has been flat-to-slightly-declining across

the project window; foundation funder behavior tends to coordinate to some degree, so one major retrenchment increases the probability of others. Signals to watch: foundation strategic-plan updates and 990 filings showing program-level reallocation, specific grant-program closures or sunset announcements, senior staff departures at program-officer level (often a leading indicator of strategic refocus), multi-foundation joint-announcement patterns. Most exposed: small-tier Cluster E entities (Floodlight, Bolts, Documented, Sahan Journal, Mountain State Spotlight, similar entities operating below \$3M annual revenue with Medium-High to High funder concentration). Larger Cluster E entities (ProPublica, Marshall Project, Texas Tribune) have diversified-enough funding to absorb single-foundation contraction without proportionate operational impact.

Substack platform pivot. Probability approximately 50% that Cluster C experiences a Newton-style departure event affecting three or more major Substack publications by 2028, probability approximately 15% of an exodus affecting more than half of Cluster C, and probability approximately 55% that a major Cluster C creator publicly criticizes Substack platform direction in the next 18 months. The structural mechanism: Substack’s 2024–25 product changes (Notes, paid app subscriptions, video, the broader push toward “Substack as platform” rather than “Substack as newsletter tooling”) signal strategic drift away from the newsletter-primary model that made Substack the hosting layer for Cluster C. Casey Newton / Platformer’s 2024 departure to Ghost is the leading-indicator case. Signals to watch: HCR, Rupal, Legum, Atkin, Petersen, Giridharadas, Kabas, or similar moving platforms; explicit platform-criticism posts in newsletters (a recognized pre-departure pattern); improvements in competing platform tooling (Ghost enterprise features, Beehiiv growth tools, Substack-alternative platforms gaining feature parity); Substack’s own statements about platform direction. Most exposed: Cluster C as a platform-defined cluster. Mass departure would not dissolve the cluster (the editorial-form coherence persists) but would fragment the hosting infrastructure and degrade citation-graph cohesion temporarily.

— 8.2 The compound-stress scenario

The four stress points are not independent. The most consequential analytical observation about them is that two are structurally connected: the foundation-withdrawal stress point and the Substack-platform-pivot stress point would, if both resolved materially, compound rather than aggregate.

The mechanism is straightforward. A Cluster C creator facing Substack-platform-pivot pressure has several available responses. Migration to a competitor platform (Ghost, Beehiiv, self-hosting) is one. Absorption into an institutional publication (The Atlantic, per §7.3) is another. Conversion to a 501(c)(3) nonprofit structure with foundation support is a third — Drop Site News is the explicit case in point, having launched as LLC with 501(c)(3) status pending. The conversion-to-nonprofit response depends on the availability of foundation funding to absorb a new entity. If foundation funding contracts at the same time that platform pressure intensifies, that response is foreclosed.

The compound scenario is therefore: Substack platform pivots in 2026–27 producing Cluster C departure pressure; foundation contraction in the same window forecloses the nonprofit-conversion response; some Cluster C creators absorb into The Atlantic and similar institutional publications (capacity-limited); some migrate to Ghost and similar platforms (transition-cost limited); some exit journalism entirely. The aggregate effect would be cohort contraction in the Substack-anchor cluster without proportionate replacement in the nonprofit-investigative cluster — a net

reduction in the cohort’s editorial-substance supply at exactly the moment the cohort’s connective-tissue infrastructure (aggregator-keystone tier, bridge-keystone tier) is also under stress.

The compound scenario is not a prediction; the four stress points might resolve at different times or with different intensities, and several plausible paths involve none of them resolving materially in the 2026–2028 window. The analytical point is that the project’s forward priors are not independent random variables to be assessed individually. The cohort’s structural exposure is highest under the compound scenario, and the cohort’s resilience strategy should account for it.

— 8.3 The CBS News transitioning-entity case

CBS News under Bari Weiss as Editor-in-Chief (appointed October 2025 when Paramount, a Skydance Corporation, acquired The Free Press and named Weiss to the role, reporting directly to Paramount Chairman and CEO David Ellison) is the project’s one explicitly-monitored transitioning-entity case. The classification reflects that CBS News’s cohort-adjacent status — historically attached through investigative-journalism collaborations, beat overlaps (climate, immigration, gender, criminal justice, labor), and citation-network position — is in active flux as the post-Weiss editorial direction develops.

The atlas establishes structured 6-month, 12-month, and 24-month observation windows for the case (Phase 9c §3, detailed in the executive deck’s Slide 8 framework).

The 6-month window (through November 2026) asks whether Weiss’s editorial direction reshapes news-division coverage of the cohort’s editorial-substance beats. Observable signals: hiring/firing pattern in news division; assignment patterns for major investigations; specific story-selection patterns on the five beats; on-air talent changes and their editorial implications; any public Weiss statements about news-division direction distinct from opinion-side direction. Decision rule: if signals show clear editorial-pattern shift on three or more of the five beats, flag CBS News as “transitioning out of cohort-adjacency” in the next refresh; if signals show no clear shift or shift on only one or two beats, hold the current “transitioning entity — monitoring” classification.

The 12-month window (through May 2027) asks whether the mainstream-press citation network treats CBS News as continuing-cohort-adjacent or as having shifted. Observable signals: whether NYT, WaPo, and AP cite CBS News reporting on cohort-overlap beats at rates consistent with the 2024–25 baseline; whether the cohort itself (Section 3, Section 4 entities) cites CBS News reporting in the volume Phase 8b documented; whether the Pulitzer Prize cycle produces nominations or wins for CBS News in cohort-overlap categories. Decision rule: citation-rate analysis is the load-bearing signal at this window. If CBS News drops below half its 2024–25 cohort-citation rate, treat as having shifted. If it sustains 75% or more of baseline, treat as continuing-cohort-adjacent. Between 50% and 75% requires qualitative review.

The 24-month window (through May 2028) asks whether CBS News should be fully reclassified out of progressive-cohort-adjacent in the next major atlas refresh. Observable signals: cumulative editorial-pattern data; sustained citation-network position; any institutional restructuring of news division relative to opinion side; any management changes at the news-division level. Decision rule: full reclassification requires sustained evidence on

both editorial-pattern and citation-network dimensions over the full 24-month window. The reclassification is a meaningful taxonomic event and should not be made on volatile or short-window signals alone.

The case is structurally important not because CBS News is itself a load-bearing cohort entity (it is cohort-adjacent rather than cohort-member, and its loss to the adjacency category would not collapse the cohort) but because the case operationalizes the atlas's transitioning-entity monitoring methodology. The framework developed for CBS News is reusable for other entities that may require transitioning-entity classification in future refresh cycles.

— 8.4 Secondary watching priors

In addition to the four primary stress points and the CBS News case, three secondary priors warrant the atlas's continuing attention without rising to the structural-stress-point tier.

Cooperative tier expansion. Probability approximately 65% that Section 6d expands from 8 entities to 12 or more by 2028. The labor-departure pipeline that produced Defector, 404 Media, Hell Gate, Aftermath, Hearing Things, The 51st remains active given continued legacy-media contraction. The prior is consequential for forward cohort composition: an expanding cooperative tier offsets some of the entity-loss pressure from other stress points and renews the cohort's editorial labor supply through the labor-departure interface described in §3.5.

TYT trajectory. Probability approximately 75% of further contraction within 24 months. The within-cohort citation rate for The Young Turks is already declining per Phase 5a §3.3 and Phase 7a §3.2. The editorial-drift dynamic that has produced this contraction is sustained. The prior is consequential because TYT remains substantial in audience-scale even as its within-cohort structural position weakens; further contraction would represent a meaningful reorganization of the Section 6a YouTube-podcast network tier.

Bulwark acquisition or restructuring. Probability approximately 45% by 2027. The Bulwark's structural-bridging function via the SpeechCenter pairing with Crooked Media makes acquisition-by-center-right-owner the consequential scenario; an acquisition that breaks the pairing would have downstream effects on Cluster A's coordinating-hub function per §5.3 and §5.4. The prior is also consequential because The Contrarian (the 2025-launched multi-author anti-authoritarian Substack including Jennifer Rubin) is the most plausible bridge-successor candidate but is small and recent; if it grew substantially by 2027, the cohort's heterodox-centrist bridge infrastructure would be more resilient.

§9 What the Atlas Cannot Do

THE ATLAS’S STRUCTURAL LIMITS ARE PART OF ITS ANALYTICAL HONESTY RATHER THAN WEAKNESSES TO APOLOGIZE for. This section makes the limits explicit.

— 9.1 The atlas cannot predict editorial-stance shifts of individual entities

The atlas can identify transitioning entities (CBS News under Weiss) and contested-cohort entities (Vanity Fair, Slow Boring, Ezra Klein Show) but the resolution of contested cases is editorial-judgment-driven rather than algorithmic. The contested-cohort entries in the per-entity profile table reflect this — they are documented as contested rather than resolved by an analytical rule that would resolve them.

The implication is that future refresh cycles may need to reclassify entities whose editorial direction shifts beyond what the 2024–2026 project window captured. The atlas’s classification of an entity as Cluster A (Crooked cohort), Cluster D (Bulwark / Never-Trump), Cluster H (academic / think-tank), or any other cluster is a structural-position observation at the project window, not a permanent assignment. The refresh cadence in §11 provides the operational mechanism for updating these classifications.

— 9.2 The atlas cannot predict ownership-change outcomes pre-event

The Bulwark acquisition watch (§8.4) flags monitoring rather than prediction. The atlas can identify that an acquisition would have consequential downstream effects on the SpeechCenter pairing and the Cluster A coordinating-hub function. The atlas cannot predict whether the acquisition will occur, who the acquirer would be, or what the acquirer’s editorial intent would be. These are entity-specific contingencies that depend on factors outside the atlas’s analytical scope (private capital markets, individual decisions by The Bulwark’s principals, regulatory environment for media acquisitions, and so on).

The same limit applies to other potential ownership transitions: Vox Media’s continuing restructuring under Penske minority ownership; Condé Nast’s strategic posture toward its Vox Media, New Yorker, and Vanity Fair properties; potential changes at Emerson Collective’s relationship to The Atlantic; the trajectory of post-restructure CBS News under Paramount Skydance ownership and the Weiss editor-in-chief tenure. The atlas identifies these as watching items where consequential; it does not predict outcomes.

— 9.3 The atlas cannot quantify true reach beyond observable platform metrics

Subscriber counts, traffic floors, and citation rates capture a real signal but substantially understate “lurker” / non-paid / non-citing readership, especially for the Substack-anchor cluster. A free Substack reader who reads HCR’s Letters from an American but does not subscribe paid is not visible to the audience-measurement infrastructure that

produced the Phase 5a-priority anchor figures. A Bluesky reader who follows a Section 3 reporter but does not interact with posts is not visible in the citation-network analysis.

The implication is that the atlas's audience-and-reach claims should be treated as lower-bound rather than full measurement. The cohort's actual social influence and political consequence likely exceeds what the per-entity profile table audience-columns suggest. The 5–15x finding's lower bound is therefore conservative; the actual ratio of cohort-to-mainstream-press editorial substance flow may be higher than the atlas can directly demonstrate.

— 9.4 The atlas cannot distinguish progressive resonance from progressive identity in contested cases

The contested-cohort cases discussed in §2.4 — Vanity Fair, Slow Boring, the Ezra Klein Show — represent definitional ambiguities that the atlas does not resolve. Vanity Fair produces progressive-resonance cultural output without progressive-identity self-conception. Slow Boring produces center-left analytic output that some progressive readers consume and others reject as outside-cohort. The Ezra Klein Show produces centrist-progressive output under NYT corporate housing.

The atlas documents the contestation rather than imposing a resolution. The implication for readers is that the cohort's boundary at these definitional edges depends on analytical judgments that reasonable observers may make differently. A version of the atlas that excluded these contested cases would have a tidier cohort boundary but at the cost of obscuring real cultural-political flows. A version that included them as full cohort members would obscure the contestation. The atlas's posture — include with explicit contested-status — is one defensible choice; others exist.

— 9.5 The atlas cannot measure the right-coded ecosystem with the same depth

Phase 8a §6 produced the consolidation-versus-diffusion finding at structural-pattern resolution but did not extend to entity-by-entity right-coded ecosystem profiling. The cross-ecosystem comparison rests on observable structural patterns rather than full right-coded entity inventory.

The implication is that conclusions drawn from the comparison should be treated as observation rather than full demonstration. The atlas asserts that the right-coded ecosystem is more consolidated and the progressive cohort more diffuse; the atlas does not claim to have profiled the right-coded ecosystem at the resolution that would fully validate that claim across all relevant dimensions. Successor research could extend the comparison; Phase 9c §5.5 recommends this as one of the most consequential extensions to the project.

§10 Explicit Deferrals

SEVERAL SCOPE DECISIONS ACROSS THE PROJECT WINDOW RESULTED IN DEFERRED WORK THAT THE ATLAS documents rather than obscures. These deferrals are not failures; they are bounded-scope decisions made within finite project resources. Readers and successor researchers should understand them as visible boundaries of what the atlas covers.

— 10.1 Phase 6 starter-kit-rev gaps

Phase 6 was partial-with-documented-gaps per the original status note in Phase 9a §3.2 and the project record. The Section 6 entities were covered through 6a, 6b, and 6c anchor-profile work in Phase 6a, plus the 6d worker-cooperative tier formalization in Phase 9a §4.8. But the original Phase 6 scope intended deeper editorial-form analysis (cross-section editorial-form trend mapping, longitudinal stance-shift analysis at the entity level, deeper editorial-form-by-business-model interaction) that was bounded by data availability during the project window.

The gap is most visible in the editorial-form section of the per-entity profile table: the dominant-form coding is defensible at the entity level, but the atlas does not produce the cohort-wide editorial-form distribution patterns that the original Phase 6 scope envisioned. Successor refresh cycles could extend the work, particularly if longitudinal editorial-form data becomes more available through cohort-entity self-reporting or third-party analysis.

— 10.2 Phase 7b not run as targeted

Per Phase 8b §10.1, Phase 7b (targeted within-cohort follow-up) was deferred and effectively substituted by Phase 8b mainstream-press-interface analysis. The substitution is defensible — Phase 8b produced the project’s foundational diagnostic finding — but means the original 7b scope (within-cohort small-entity citation patterns) was not directly executed.

The implication is that the atlas’s small-entity citation-network analysis is less developed than the project’s mainstream-press-interface analysis. Small entities are present in the per-entity profile table and are characterized at the entity level, but the citation-network dynamics among them — which small Section 9 entities cite each other most heavily, how Section 11 individual-creator citation patterns differ from Section 4 entity citation patterns, how the Section 7 socialist-left cohort’s internal citation density compares to other clusters — are documented at synthesis-level rather than measurement-level. Successor research could extend this; Phase 9c §5.5 identifies it as a successor-research priority alongside Bluesky engagement quantification.

— 10.3 Bluesky engagement metrics qualitative-only

Phase 7c-partial covered the Bluesky qualitative shift but did not quantify Bluesky engagement metrics directly. The Bluesky API stability available during the 2024–25 project window did not support the kind of quantitative analysis

that the X-platform analysis from earlier phases enabled.

The implication is that the citation-band classification (A, B, C) rests on observable platform-behavior patterns and selective-evidence sampling rather than on quantitative citation-density measurement equivalent to what X-data supported. The classifications are defensible — the Band A / B / C distinctions are visible to anyone reading the cohort’s Bluesky activity — but they are qualitative rather than quantitative. Successor research could extend to quantitative measurement when Bluesky API stability supports it; this is the first item Phase 9c §5.5 identifies in its successor-research recommendations.

— 10.4 Phase 5b longtail data-availability bounded

Phase 5b documented the longer tail of smaller cohort entities but acknowledged inherent data-availability limits for entities with monthly traffic below 100,000 and subscriber counts below 25,000. Many smaller entities have estimated rather than measured audience figures, reflected in the per-entity profile table’s heavy L data-quality coding for audience columns.

The implication for readers is that the atlas’s small-entity audience-and-reach claims should be treated as range-level rather than precise. The atlas asserts that Section 9 hyperlocal entities have audiences in the low-tens-of-thousands monthly traffic range; the atlas does not claim that Block Club Chicago has precisely some specific monthly unique visitor count. The L-coding is the visible record of this limit.

— 10.5 Right-coded comparison depth

Phase 8a §6 produced the consolidation-versus-diffusion structural finding but did not extend to entity-by-entity right-coded ecosystem profiling. The full comparison would be a project of comparable scope to this atlas itself.

The implication is that the cross-ecosystem comparison rests on structural-pattern observation rather than full demonstration at the resolution the within-cohort profiling supports. The finding is consequential and defensible at the resolution it claims; readers should understand that a deeper comparison would require dedicated project investment beyond this atlas’s scope. Phase 9c §5.5 identifies this as the second-priority successor-research item.

§11 Forward Trajectory and Refresh

— 11.1 The refresh cadence framework

The atlas operates on a layer-specific refresh cadence rather than uniform full-refresh cycles. The recommendation reflects the different rates of change at different layers and is detailed in Phase 9c §4.

The entity universe (Layer 1) and financial structure (Layer 2) refresh annually, anchored on year-end status with Q4-to-Q1 refresh cycles. Quarterly distress-event interrupts handle the entities flagged “active but distressed” — currently 9 entities — where intra-cycle financial or operational events warrant off-cycle updates. The audience layer (Layer 3) refreshes semi-annually, tied to platform reporting cycles where available. The editorial layer (Layer 4) operates event-driven plus annual review, capturing stance shifts, ownership changes, and major editorial-leadership transitions as they occur. The network and citation layer (Layer 5) refreshes annually for citation-band classifications and cluster memberships, with platform-pivot-event interrupts for the citation-band rebalancing that significant platform-behavior shifts would produce.

Cross-cutting the layer-specific cadences, the atlas recommends a 6-month stress-point scan that operates independently of layer refreshes. The scan is focused exclusively on the four primary stress points (§8.1) plus the CBS News transitioning-entity case (§8.3) plus the secondary watching priors (§8.4). The output is a 1–2-page memo that either confirms status-quo or triggers off-cycle layer updates. The template for the scan is documented in the master index §8.

— 11.2 The scheduled action calendar

The first scheduled action is the November 2026 6-month stress-point scan. Calendar-anchoring the first scan at November 2026 places it six months after this report’s publication (May 2026 calendar anchor) and provides the first refresh test of the four stress-point priors against six months of observable evidence.

The first annual atlas refresh is scheduled for Q1 2027. The refresh will produce a Version 2.0 of the atlas covering: any entity-universe changes (closures, mergers, new entries) over the 2026–Q4 period; updated financial-structure data anchored on 990 filings released through 2026; updated audience-and-reach figures where measurable; editorial classifications updated for any documented stance shifts; network-and-citation rebalancing if the November 2026 scan triggers it; updated forward priors anchored on Phase 9c’s existing framework adjusted for one year of observed evidence.

The CBS News case has its own embedded schedule: November 2026 6-month window; May 2027 12-month window; May 2028 24-month window. Each window produces a decision-point at the relevant decision rule (§8.3). The May 2027 12-month window is the most consequential for the atlas’s transitioning-entity classification because citation-network position is the load-bearing signal at that window.

— 11.3 When a Phase 10 refresh becomes warranted

The annual refresh cadence handles routine updates. A more substantial Phase 10 refresh — a full structural revision of the atlas rather than an updated current-state account — becomes warranted under specific triggering conditions.

The triggering conditions per Phase 9c §5.5: a major cohort-restructuring event (MeidasTouch closure, Crooked Media acquisition, an OSF wind-down on the scale anticipated by §8.1’s foundation-withdrawal stress point at its more severe resolution, or any of the four §8.1 priors resolving materially); a substantial shift in the cohort’s bifurcation (Substack mass-exodus per §8.1’s fourth stress point at more-than-half-of-Cluster-C resolution); a major Pulitzer-pattern disruption (the Section 3 + Section 9 partnership pattern weakening for two-plus consecutive cycles); or a successor-research project producing structural findings that warrant taxonomic revision (right-coded comparison at full depth, Bluesky quantification revealing previously-invisible patterns).

In the absence of triggering events, the annual refresh cadence handles cohort evolution within the existing structural framework. The atlas’s forward applicability is documented through 2028 in Phase 9c §6; structural revision becomes warranted as the project window’s classifications increasingly require update against accumulated evidence.

— 11.4 Successor research recommendations

Phase 9c §5.5 identified three specific successor-research items as the most consequential extensions of the project. The atlas reiterates them here.

Bluesky engagement quantification. When Bluesky API stability allows, replicate the Phase 7a citation-and-anchor analysis on Bluesky-native data to convert the Band A / B / C qualitative bifurcation into quantitative measurement. This is the first-priority successor item because the citation bifurcation is one of the load-bearing findings and its quantitative validation would substantially strengthen the atlas’s empirical foundations.

Right-coded ecosystem entity-profile pass. A parallel atlas of the right-coded ecosystem at this project’s resolution would enable comparative analysis that Phase 8a §6 could only sketch. The successor project would be of comparable scope to this atlas itself — a multi-quarter or multi-year project rather than a refresh-cycle extension — but would produce comparative findings of substantial consequence for understanding US media-ecosystem structure overall.

Local / Regional Section 9 deep-dive. Section 9 grew to 22 entities in this atlas but is the highest-noise section because state-nonprofit reporting is the area of greatest structural change in US journalism over the 2020–2026 period. A dedicated deep-dive on the Section 9 ecosystem would have high marginal value, particularly given the Pulitzer-validated partnership pattern’s centrality to the cohort’s structural advantages.

These successor items are not committed work; they are recommendations for the atlas’s continued development. Funder interest, researcher availability, and the trajectory of the cohort over 2026–2028 will shape which items are pursued and on what schedule.

Glossary

THE FOLLOWING TERMS ARE USED ANALYTICALLY THROUGHOUT THE ATLAS WITH THE FOLLOWING PROJECT-SPECIFIC meanings.

501(c)(3) regulatory mechanism. The structural mechanism by which IRS tax-exempt-organization regulations constrain editorial form for nonprofit cohort entities, producing the funder × editorial-stance correlation documented in Phase 4-synthesis §5.

Aggregator-keystone tier. The cohort entities — primarily Public Notice and MeidasTouch Network — that function as connective tissue for the cohort by aggregating and contextualizing distributed cohort output into accountability narration.

Band A / B / C. The citation-platform classification capturing X-share. Band A is Bluesky-primary (X-share under 40%), Band C is X-still-primary (X-share above 60%), Band B is cross-platform bridge (X-share 40–60%).

Bridge-keystone. A cohort entity whose structural function is to bridge a distinct cluster into the broader cohort. Strict Scrutiny is the canonical case, bridging Cluster J (academic-law) into Cluster A and the broader cohort.

Cluster A through J, plus multi. The structural cluster taxonomy from Phase 7c-partial §3. See §6.2 of this report for definitions.

Cohort coordinating hub. Crooked Media’s structural position as the cohort entity participating in three formal cross-cluster pairings (Phase 9a §4.6). See §5.3 of this report.

Connective-tissue stress point. A structural feature of the cohort whose probable trajectory over the 2026–2030 horizon is consequential enough to warrant monitoring. The four primary stress points and the secondary watching priors are detailed in §8.

Contested-cohort entity. An entity whose cohort membership is contested or ambiguous and which the atlas documents as contested rather than resolving artificially. Vanity Fair, Slow Boring, and the Ezra Klein Show are the principal cases.

Cross-publication partnership. The structural collaboration pattern between Section 9 state-nonprofit entities and Section 3 national investigative entities, Pulitzer-validated and treated as one of the cohort’s most durable structural advantages.

Data quality (H / M / L). The coding in the per-entity profile table. H is high confidence (specific value anchored on prior phase deliverable); M is medium confidence (qualitative or range-level value); L is low confidence (synthesis-level inference).

Diagnostic layer. One of two epistemic layers across which the atlas operates (per §1.7 of this report). The diagnostic layer covers what is — the entity universe, financial typology, audience-and-reach data, editorial-form

and stance characterization, cluster taxonomy, citation-band classification, citation-flow analysis, structural mechanisms, and named stress points. Diagnostic claims are descriptive.

Editorial-form taxonomy. The set of categories — investigation, commentary, explainer, long-form essay, interviews and conversation, aggregation — used to characterize what cohort entities primarily produce.

Editorial-stance spectrum. The spectrum from heterodox-centrist / Never-Trump-Republican through progressive-establishment, progressive-left, socialist-left, to Marxist used to characterize cohort entities' editorial positioning.

Expanded cohort entity. An adjacent entity whose editorial valence is heterodox-centrist or Never-Trump-Republican but which participates substantially in cohort citation, collaboration, or editorial-substance flows. The canonical case is The Bulwark via the formal Crooked SpeechCenter pairing per Phase 9a §4.6. The atlas treats expanded-cohort entities as cohort members for analytical purposes while documenting their distinct editorial-stance positioning.

Five-layer architecture. The atlas's analytical scaffolding: entity universe (L1), financial structure (L2), audience and reach (L3), editorial form and stance (L4), network and citation (L5).

Foundational diagnostic finding. The single tier-one finding in the atlas's three-tier hierarchy (per §1.7 and Executive Summary): the cohort's net editorial-substance supplier position at approximately 5–15× citation ratio relative to mainstream legacy press, per Phase 8b §3. Foundational in the specific sense that it reframes the cohort's structural position; the other findings extend, qualify, or operationalize this reframing.

Labor-departure interface. The structural mechanism by which legacy-media labor-shock events convert into new worker-cooperative cohort entities. Section 6d is the canonical tier. See §3.5 of this report.

Load-bearing finding (tier two). A structural finding the atlas treats as load-bearing within the foundational diagnostic reframing. Four tier-two findings (Phase 9a §4 and §1.7 of this report): the two-cluster citation bifurcation; the right-coded consolidation vs progressive diffusion asymmetry; the 501(c)(3) regulatory mechanism; the Pulitzer-validated cross-publication partnership pattern. Tier-two findings are structurally consequential and well-substantiated; each operates inside the upstream-supplier reframing rather than producing it independently.

Multi-cluster bridging entity. A primary cohort entity whose structural function spans multiple clusters. The canonical case is The Atlantic, treated in Phase 9a §4.7 and §7.3 of this report as a Section 1 anchor that simultaneously functions as the Substack-departed re-absorption destination, placing it in the multi-cluster bridging category as well as in its Section 1 cluster home.

Net editorial-substance supplier. The cohort's structural position relative to mainstream legacy press, captured by the 5–15x citation ratio finding from Phase 8b. The atlas's foundational diagnostic finding.

Prescriptive layer. The second of two epistemic layers across which the atlas operates (per §1.7 of this report). The prescriptive layer covers what to do with the diagnosis — the four forward priors with signals, the CBS News monitoring framework with decision rules, the layer-specific refresh cadence, and the 6-month stress-point scan template. Prescriptive claims are action-oriented.

Project window. The 2024–2026 calendar period during which the project’s data was collected and the atlas was produced. Forward applicability documented through 2028 before structural revision becomes warranted.

Re-absorption destination. A cohort entity whose structural function is to absorb creators or contributors from other cohort segments. The Atlantic operates this function for Substack-departed creators (Phase 9a §4.7).

Refresh cadence. The layer-specific schedule for updating atlas content. Annual for L1, L2, L5; semi-annual for L3; event-driven plus annual for L4; cross-cutting 6-month stress-point scan.

Stress-point scan. The 6-month focused review of the four primary stress points, CBS News transitioning-entity case, and secondary watching priors. Template documented in master index §8.

Sub-cohort (Section 6 split). The 6a / 6b / 6c / 6d division within Section 6 that captures structural distinctions in business model and editorial form across the creator-LLC and cooperative tier.

Substack-anchor cluster. Cluster C in the structural taxonomy. The cohort segment whose identity is platform-defined around Substack-native subscription-led publishing.

Substack-departed cluster. Cluster F in the structural taxonomy. The cohort segment of creators whose primary platform affiliation has shifted away from Substack to alternatives (Ghost, self-hosting, institutional absorption).

Supplementary finding (tier three). A structural finding the atlas documents at smaller scale than the tier-two findings. Three tier-three findings (Phase 9a §4.6–§4.8 and §1.7 of this report): Crooked Media as cohort coordinating hub; The Atlantic as re-absorption destination; the worker-cooperative tier as labor-departure interface. Tier-three findings are real structural features visible in the project window; the tier designation reflects analytical weight and scale, not data quality.

Transitioning entity. A formerly cohort-adjacent entity whose continued cohort relationship is in active flux and under explicit project monitoring. The canonical case is CBS News under Bari Weiss as Editor-in-Chief (appointed October 2025), monitored across 6/12/24-month observation windows per Phase 9c §3. The atlas’s transitioning-entity framework is reusable for other entities that may require the classification in future refresh cycles.

Worker-cooperative tier. Section 6d. The structurally distinctive cohort segment organized around worker-owned cooperative ownership and member-revenue monetization. See §3.5 of this report.

Phase Deliverable Inventory

THE ATLAS COMPRISES 21 PHASE MARKDOWN FILES PLUS THE MASTER INDEX, ALL IN THE PROJECT DRIVE FOLDER. The inventory mirrors the master index §3 and is reproduced here for citation convenience.

Layer 1 — Entity universe. Phase 1 master entity spine; Phase 1 spine updates; Phase 2.5 Section 3 cleanup; Phase 3b Section 7 and Section 8 completion; Phase 3c Section 1, Section 9, and Section 10 nonprofit; Phase 4c Substack-native and Twitch creator tier.

Layer 2 — Financial structure. Phase 4 synthesis; Phase 4c (cross-referenced from Layer 1).

Layer 3 — Audience reach. Phase 5 starter kit; Phase 5a audience reach priority; Phase 5b audience reach longtail; Phase 5b starter kit.

Layer 4 — Editorial form and stance. Phase 6 starter kit; Phase 6 starter kit revision; Phase 6a editorial content layer anchor profiles; Phase 6b partial chorus divergence and anchor reclassification.

Layer 5 — Network, citation, cross-ecosystem. Phases 7-8-9 starter kit; Phase 7a network citation anchor cohort; Phase 7c partial contributor overlap and Bluesky qualitative; Phase 8a cross-ecosystem interfaces; Phase 8b mainstream press interface.

Synthesis layer. Phase 9a synthesis core; Phase 9b per-entity profile table Part 1 (Sections 1–6); Phase 9b per-entity profile table Part 2 (Sections 7–12); Phase 9c forward priors, cadence, and capstone (Version 1.2, May 2026); Phase atlas master index (Version 1.2, May 2026).

Publication layer. Option C executive deck (PowerPoint + PDF, built and delivered); Option B long-form report (this document, Version 1.1, May 2026); Option A interactive web atlas (scoped, currently shelved per fast-and-light publication plan — substrate intact in Drive folder for future reactivation if convening outcomes warrant). Plus the Phase 9b full entity table as CSV / Google Sheet for visualization-tool ingestion.

Citation Notes

THIS REPORT CITES PHASE DELIVERABLES BY PHASE NUMBER AND SECTION ANCHOR (FOR EXAMPLE, “PHASE 9C §2.3” refers to Phase 9c’s section 2.3). The master index in the project Drive folder provides Drive fileIds for direct access to each phase file. The Phase 9b CSV / Google Sheet is the canonical source for entity-level data; the file is in the project Drive folder.

To cite this report: *Progressive Media Ecosystem Atlas (US): A Five-Layer Structural Analysis of the US Progressive-Media Cohort, 2024–2026. Long-form report, Version 1.1, May 2026.* Project window 2024–2026; first annual refresh scheduled Q1 2027.

The report has documented forward applicability through 2028 before structural revision becomes warranted. Readers citing the report after 2028 should consult the master index for the most-current refresh status and any successor versions.

Acknowledgments and Provenance

THE PROGRESSIVE MEDIA ECOSYSTEM ATLAS (US) PROJECT RAN FROM 2024 TO 2026 AS A SUSTAINED analytical research engagement spanning 21 phase deliverables across the five-layer architecture, the synthesis layer, and the publication layer. The project's analytical work was developed iteratively across multiple working sessions; the master index and Phase 9c capstone document the project's production sequence and methodological choices.

This report is the long-form publication-layer deliverable. The executive deck (Option C) is the short-form companion, currently in re-cut for cohort-principal audience optimization. The interactive web atlas (Option A) was scoped but is currently shelved per the fast-and-light publication plan; the atlas substrate remains intact in the project Drive folder and Option A reactivation is available if convening outcomes warrant. The publication-layer artifacts together cover the audience spectrum from cohort principals and funder boards (deck) through considered reader (this report) — with open-exploration (web atlas) available as a future addition.

The project's analytical findings rest on observation of cohort-entity behavior, citation patterns, financial structure, and editorial-form evolution across the 2024–2026 project window. The findings are not predictions; they are structural characterizations with associated forward analytic priors. Readers should treat the forward priors as conditional analytic frames rather than calibrated forecasts.

The project's deferrals and what-the-atlas-cannot-do sections are part of the analytical honesty rather than weaknesses to apologize for. The atlas is bounded in deliberate ways; those bounds are visible in the project record. The version 1.1 update (May 2026) integrates the three-tier findings hierarchy, the diagnostic/prescriptive frame, and several factual corrections from a comprehensive editorial review pass; no analytical content was revised in the v1.1 update, only framing language and citation precision.

End of report.