

A Theory of Power Convergence: Epstein, Assange, and Ye as Cumulative Individuals

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This paper is the second in a series on power convergence and the cumulative individual:

- *Paper 1: A Theory of Power Convergence: The Cumulative Individual (Saviano 2026)*
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- *Paper 3: A Theory of Power Convergence: From Cumulative Individual to Recursive Sovereign (Saviano 2026)* <https://philpapers.org/rec/SAVATO-3>

Abstract

Recent years have witnessed the emergence of individuals whose influence appears to extend beyond the institutional positions they formally occupy. Actors operating outside traditional hierarchies have demonstrated the capacity to shape networks, narratives, and institutional responses across multiple domains of social power. Existing theories of power, however, typically explain influence through single institutional structures — states, markets, bureaucracies, or cultural systems — and therefore struggle to account for how individual actors can accumulate authority across these domains simultaneously.

This paper applies the concept of power convergence and the figure of the cumulative individual, introduced in *A Theory of Power Convergence: The Cumulative Individual* (Saviano 2026), to a comparative analysis of three contemporary cases: Jeffrey Epstein, Julian Assange, and Ye (Kanye West). The framework proposes that individuals can acquire system-level influence when distinct domains of power — structural, coercive, symbolic, psychological, and networked — converge within a single actor. When these domains reinforce one another, individuals may operate as nodal points capable of mobilizing influence across institutional boundaries.

The paper examines how each case represents a different pathway through which convergence can occur. Epstein's influence emerged through embedded elite networks and forms of infrastructural leverage within institutional systems. Assange's authority derived primarily from networked and symbolic power, while informational exposure also functioned as an indirect form of coercive leverage through the global dissemination of classified information. Ye's influence reflects the convergence of symbolic and psychological authority within global cultural media and digitally amplified communication networks. Taken together, these cases demonstrate how cumulative individuals can emerge through distinct configurations of convergent power domains.

By comparing these cases, the paper argues that the cumulative individual represents an increasingly significant form of agency in highly networked societies. As communication systems, elite networks, and cultural economies become more tightly interconnected, the capacity for individuals to integrate multiple domains of influence may expand. Understanding the dynamics of power convergence is therefore essential for explaining how individual actors can shape institutional behavior and public discourse in contemporary social systems. A third paper in this series — *A Theory of Power Convergence: From Cumulative Individual to Recursive Sovereign* (Saviano 2026, forthcoming) — extends the framework to sovereign-level convergence through comparative analysis of Nayib Bukele, Donald Trump, and Ibrahim Traoré.

Keywords

power convergence; cumulative individual; multi-domain power; networked power; symbolic power; political theory; social power; mediatization; recursive sovereignty; institutional inversion; sovereign convergence; Epstein; Assange; Ye; Bukele; Trump; Traoré; democratic backsliding; authoritarianism; legitimacy inversion; feedback closure

Author's note: This working paper applies the theoretical framework developed in *A Theory of Power Convergence: The Cumulative Individual* (Saviano 2026) to comparative empirical cases. It is the second paper in a three-part series: Paper 1 introduces the Power Pentagon framework and the concept of the cumulative individual; Paper 3 — *A Theory of Power Convergence: From Cumulative Individual to Recursive Sovereign* — extends the framework to sovereign-level convergence, introducing the concept of recursive sovereignty through comparative analysis of Nayib Bukele, Donald Trump, and Ibrahim Traoré. The series forms part of a broader book-length project, *The Cumulative Individual: Power, Collapse, and Sovereignty in the Networked Age*, which extends the model through additional case studies, collapse dynamics, and analysis of power convergence at the level of political authority and sovereignty.

I. Introduction

In recent years, a number of individuals have exercised forms of influence that appear disproportionate to their formal institutional position. Figures operating outside traditional state or corporate hierarchies have nonetheless demonstrated the capacity to shape networks, narratives, and institutional responses across multiple domains of social power. The ability of such actors to mobilize attention, influence institutional behavior, or destabilize established authority structures has become increasingly visible in the networked environment of the twenty-first century. Yet existing theories of power struggle to account for how such influence accumulates and operates across domains that were once institutionally separated.

Classical theories of power have tended to locate influence within specific structures—states, bureaucracies, markets, or cultural institutions. Even where individuals are acknowledged as important actors, their influence is typically interpreted through the lens of the institutional positions they occupy. However, the emergence of digitally mediated communication systems, highly interconnected elite networks, and globalized cultural economies—where symbolic meaning, identity, and attention generate power, not just economic value—has altered the conditions under which power can accumulate. In such environments, individuals may act as nodal points where distinct forms of power—structural, symbolic, psychological, networked, and coercive—intersect and reinforce one another.

In Saviano (2026), I introduced the concept of power convergence and the figure of the cumulative individual to describe this phenomenon. The cumulative individual emerges when multiple domains of social power become concentrated within a single actor, allowing that actor to exert influence across institutional boundaries. Rather than deriving authority solely from formal position or material resources, cumulative individuals operate through the integration of several distinct forms of influence that mutually amplify one another. The result is a form of agency that can operate at scales traditionally associated with organizations or institutions.

The purpose of the present paper is to demonstrate how the framework of power convergence can be applied to empirical cases. Rather than examining the personalities or motivations of particular individuals, the analysis focuses on the structural configurations of power domains that allow certain actors to become cumulative individuals. By examining how different domains of influence converge within specific actors, we can better understand how individual agency can expand beyond conventional institutional constraints.

To illustrate these dynamics, the paper analyzes three cases that represent distinct pathways through which power convergence can occur in contemporary societies: Jeffrey Epstein, Julian Assange, and Ye (Kanye West). Each case reflects a different environment in which domains of power intersect. Epstein's influence operated largely through embedded elite networks and forms of infrastructural leverage; Assange's power derived primarily from informational and networked systems that

challenged institutional secrecy; and Ye's influence emerged through symbolic and psychological authority within global cultural media. Taken together, these cases demonstrate how cumulative individuals can emerge through different configurations of convergent power domains.

The analysis proceeds in several stages. The first section briefly summarizes the theoretical framework of power convergence and introduces the Power Pentagon, a model identifying five domains of social power: structural, coercive, symbolic, psychological, and networked. The following three sections examine the cases of Epstein, Assange, and Ye respectively, identifying how each actor embodies a distinct pathway of convergence within the pentagon framework. The final section compares these cases to show how cumulative individuals arise through different combinations of power domains and discusses the implications of these patterns for understanding power in highly networked social systems.

By examining these cases through the lens of power convergence, the paper argues that the cumulative individual represents an increasingly significant form of agency in contemporary societies. As communication networks, cultural economies, and institutional structures become more tightly interconnected, the capacity for individuals to integrate multiple domains of influence may expand. Understanding this phenomenon is therefore essential for explaining how power operates in complex social systems where institutional boundaries are increasingly permeable.

II. Theoretical Framework: Power Convergence and the Cumulative Individual

This section provides a brief overview of the theoretical framework developed in *A Theory of Power Convergence: The Cumulative Individual* (Saviano 2026). Rather than reproducing the full argument, the aim here is to outline the key conceptual elements necessary for analyzing the empirical cases that follow.

1. Limits of Single-Domain Theories of Power

Classical theories of power have generally sought to explain influence within discrete institutional domains. Political theory has traditionally emphasized the state and formal authority (Weber 1978; Foucault 1980); sociology has focused on social structure and stratification (Giddens 1984); cultural theory has examined symbolic production and meaning (Bourdieu 1986); and critical traditions have highlighted coercion, domination, and material inequality. While these approaches provide important insights, they tend to isolate particular dimensions of power rather than account for how they interact (Castells 1996).

As a result, power is often conceptualized in fragmented terms. Structural accounts explain influence through institutional position or network embeddedness; symbolic approaches emphasize meaning, legitimacy, and cultural authority; coercive frameworks focus on force, constraint, or the capacity to

compel. Each of these perspectives captures a distinct dimension of influence, but none fully explains how individuals may operate simultaneously across multiple domains.

This fragmentation becomes increasingly problematic in contemporary social systems characterized by dense interconnectivity. Digitally mediated communication, transnational networks, and globalized cultural economies have weakened the boundaries that once separated domains of power. Under such conditions, influence is less easily confined to a single institutional sphere. Instead, actors may draw on multiple forms of power at once, combining them in ways that amplify their overall capacity to shape outcomes.

The limitation of single-domain theories, therefore, lies not in their individual insights, but in their inability to account for the **integration of power across domains**. Explaining how influence accumulates in contemporary contexts requires a framework that can capture the interaction and reinforcement of distinct forms of power within a single analytical model.

2. The Power Pentagon

To address this limitation, the framework of power convergence distinguishes five analytically distinct domains of social power: structural, coercive, symbolic, psychological, and networked. These domains are not rigid institutional categories, but conceptual dimensions that capture different mechanisms through which influence is exercised.

- **Structural power** refers to influence derived from positions within institutional or organizational systems, including access to resources, networks, and decision-making structures.
- **Coercive power** denotes the capacity to compel behavior through force, constraint, or the threat of sanction, whether formal or informal.
- **Symbolic power** involves the ability to shape meaning, legitimacy, and recognition, often through cultural authority, status, or control over narratives.
- **Psychological power** refers to influence operating at the level of identity, perception, and affect, including the capacity to generate loyalty, alignment, or belief.
- **Networked power** captures the ability to mobilize and control flows of information within interconnected systems, particularly through digital and communication infrastructures.

These domains are represented schematically in the Power Pentagon (Figure 1), which serves as a heuristic device for analyzing how different forms of power relate to one another. The pentagram emphasizes that these domains are not isolated; rather, they are interconnected dimensions that can overlap and reinforce each other within complex social systems.

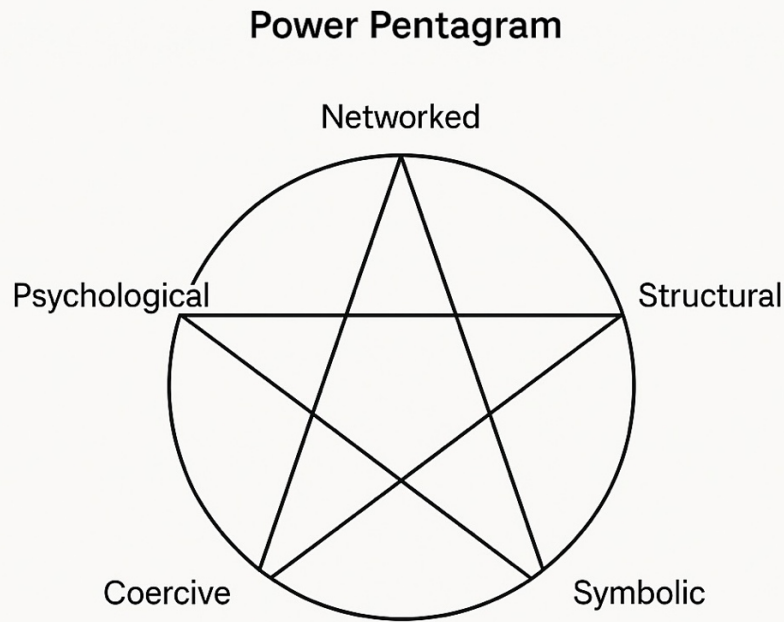


Figure 1. The Power Pentagram - A schematic representation of five analytically distinct domains of social power—structural, coercive, symbolic, psychological, and networked. The pentagram illustrates the potential for interaction and reinforcement across domains, while the enclosing circle represents the systemic integration of these domains within a unified field of power relations. Adapted from Saviano (2026).

Importantly, the pentagram is not intended as a static taxonomy of institutions, but as a dynamic analytical model. The same actor may operate across multiple domains, and the relative importance of each domain may vary depending on context. The value of the model lies in its ability to capture the multi-dimensional nature of power and to provide a structured way of analyzing how different forms of influence interact.

3. Convergence and the Emergence of the Cumulative Individual

The central claim of the framework is that, under certain conditions, these domains of power may converge within a single actor, producing what can be described as a cumulative individual. Power convergence occurs when distinct forms of influence—structural, coercive, symbolic, psychological, and networked—become integrated and mutually reinforcing.

This process is not simply additive. The interaction of domains produces amplification effects: symbolic authority may enhance networked reach; networked visibility may reinforce psychological influence; structural positioning may enable or shield other forms of power. As these domains converge, the actor's capacity for influence expands beyond what any single domain could produce independently.

The cumulative individual thus emerges as a nodal point within a broader system of power relations. Rather than operating within a single institutional context, such actors are able to mobilize influence across domains, shaping outcomes in multiple arenas simultaneously. This allows individuals to exercise forms of agency that approach, and in some cases rival, those of organizations or institutions.

Convergence also alters the relationship between individuals and institutions. In traditional models, institutions structure and constrain individual action. Under conditions of convergence, however, individuals may acquire the capacity to operate across and between institutional boundaries, influencing institutional behavior rather than merely being shaped by it.

The significance of the cumulative individual lies in this shift. As the boundaries between domains of power become more permeable, the potential for individuals to integrate multiple forms of influence increases. Understanding how such convergence occurs is therefore essential for explaining how power operates in contemporary social systems.

While the domains of power identified in the pentagram are historically persistent, the conditions under which they converge within individual actors have intensified in contemporary societies. In earlier periods, social systems were more loosely networked, with greater separation between institutional domains and slower circulation of information and influence. By contrast, modern societies are characterized by dense interconnectivity, digitally mediated communication, and increased permeability between institutional spheres. These conditions facilitate the integration of multiple domains of power within single actors, increasing the likelihood that cumulative individuals will emerge.

III. Pathways of Power Convergence

The framework of power convergence suggests that cumulative individuals do not emerge through a single, uniform process. Rather, they arise through distinct configurations of interacting power domains, depending on the structural conditions and environments in which actors operate. The convergence of domains is therefore not fixed but variable, producing different pathways through which individuals may accumulate cross-domain influence.

While all cumulative individuals exhibit some degree of multi-domain integration, the relative weight and interaction of specific domains can differ significantly. In some cases, convergence is anchored in institutional positioning and reinforced through mechanisms of constraint or leverage. In others, it emerges through control over information flows and the capacity to shape public narratives. In still others, influence is rooted in cultural authority and the ability to mobilize identity and attention within highly mediated environments.

To clarify these variations, the present analysis identifies three analytically distinct pathways of power convergence:

Pathway	Dominant Domains
<i>Infrastructural convergence</i>	structural + coercive
<i>Informational convergence</i>	networked + symbolic
<i>Cultural convergence</i>	symbolic + psychological

These pathways are not exhaustive categories, nor are they mutually exclusive. Rather, they represent ideal-typical configurations that highlight how different domains of power may combine to produce cumulative individuals under specific conditions. In each pathway, the domains listed represent the predominant axes of convergence. However, all five domains of the pentagram may be present to varying degrees, with non-dominant domains often reinforcing or stabilizing the configuration of power. These pathways are therefore best understood as analytical simplifications that capture recurring patterns in the interaction of power domains.

Infrastructural Convergence - Infrastructural convergence occurs when power is rooted in embedded institutional networks and reinforced through forms of coercive or constraining leverage. Here, structural positioning provides access to resources, relationships, and institutional insulation, while coercive mechanisms—formal or informal—enhance the actor’s capacity to influence behavior and maintain control within those networks.

This pathway is typically less visible than others, as influence operates through dense and often opaque systems of elite connectivity. Power is exercised not primarily through public visibility or symbolic authority, but through control over relationships, access, and constraint within institutional infrastructures.

Informational Convergence - Informational convergence emerges through the interaction of networked and symbolic power, particularly within digitally mediated environments. Actors operating along this pathway derive influence from their capacity to control, disseminate, or disrupt flows of information, while simultaneously shaping the meaning and legitimacy associated with that information.

In this configuration, networked infrastructures amplify reach, while symbolic authority—such as claims to transparency, truth, or exposure—enhances the perceived significance of the information being circulated. The result is a form of power that operates across institutional boundaries by leveraging information asymmetries and narrative framing.

Cultural Convergence - Cultural convergence is characterized by the interaction of symbolic and psychological power within systems of cultural production and mediated communication. In this pathway, influence derives from the ability to shape meaning, identity, and perception, often within

what may be described as cultural economies—systems in which attention, recognition, and symbolic value function as key sources of influence.

Here, symbolic authority generates visibility and legitimacy, while psychological influence operates through identification, affect, and alignment among audiences. Networked media systems often amplify these dynamics, but the core of this pathway lies in the actor's capacity to shape cultural narratives and influence collective perception.

Analytical Significance

Taken together, these pathways demonstrate that cumulative individuals are not defined by a single domain of power, but by the configuration and interaction of multiple domains. The differences between pathways highlight how convergence can occur in varied environments—elite institutional networks, transnational information systems, and global cultural media—each producing distinct forms of influence.

Understanding these pathways allows for a more precise analysis of how individuals accumulate power in contemporary social systems. Rather than treating cases as isolated phenomena, the framework makes it possible to identify recurring patterns in the ways domains of power combine and reinforce one another.

Transition to Case Studies

The following sections examine three cases—Jeffrey Epstein, Julian Assange, and Ye (Kanye West)—each of which exemplifies one of these pathways. By analyzing how different domains of power converge within these actors, the cases illustrate how cumulative individuals emerge through distinct configurations of influence in contemporary networked societies.

IV. Case Study I: Epstein and Infrastructural Convergence

The case of Jeffrey Epstein illustrates a pathway of *infrastructural convergence*, in which power emerges through the interaction of structural positioning and coercive leverage within dense elite networks. Unlike forms of influence that rely on public visibility or symbolic authority, Epstein's power operated largely through embedded institutional relationships and forms of constraint that were not fully visible within formal organizational structures.

This case is analytically important for a second reason. The consolidation of Epstein's influence occurred largely before the rise of social media and contemporary digital platforms, and depended very little on networked visibility. As argued in the foundational paper of this series, mediatization and digital connectivity are accelerants of convergence rather than preconditions of it; Epstein is the

demonstration.¹ His convergence was assembled through elite institutional networks, financial systems, and interpersonal mechanisms of leverage, with digital amplification playing almost no role. The case therefore shows that the cumulative individual is not exclusively a product of networked communication environments, but can arise through the integration of structural and coercive domains in pre- or minimally-digital contexts.

A methodological note. The Epstein case is unusually well documented through court records, a Department of Justice inquiry, and congressional releases, but it is also saturated with allegation. The analysis below distinguishes throughout between facts established in the documentary and legal record and claims that remain alleged or unadjudicated, and rests its theoretical weight only on the former.

1. Elite Institutional Networks

Epstein's influence was tied to his position within interconnected elite networks spanning finance, politics, academia, and philanthropy. The pivotal relationship was with the retail billionaire Leslie Wexner, founder of the conglomerate that owned Victoria's Secret, Bath & Body Works, and other brands. Epstein met Wexner in the mid-1980s and by 1987 was managing his finances; Wexner became the primary client of Epstein's firm, J. Epstein & Company.² The relationship did more than generate fees. As one account puts it, the fact that a genuine billionaire had entrusted his fortune to Epstein conferred "an imprimatur of respectability" that opened the doors through which Epstein cultivated his subsequent elite relationships.³

This is the first observable instance of cross-domain activation in the case: a structural relationship (financial management) generated symbolic capital (legitimacy by association), which in turn widened access to further structural relationships. The network was not a static position Epstein occupied but a mechanism that compounded—each elite tie made the next one easier to form.⁴

2. Structural Positioning within Financial and Philanthropic Systems

The structural foundation of Epstein's power can be dated precisely. In July 1991, Wexner granted Epstein full power of attorney over his personal fortune—authority to sign checks, hire and fire, buy and sell property, and borrow money in Wexner's name.⁵ This is the single most consequential structural fact of the case: it converted a service relationship into direct control over a billionaire's capital and institutional apparatus. Epstein became a trustee of the Wexner Foundation and

¹ Saviano, Sebastian. *A Theory of Power Convergence: The Cumulative Individual*. APSA Preprints, 2026.

² Julie K. Brown, *Perversion of Justice: The Jeffrey Epstein Story* (New York: William Morrow/HarperCollins, 2021); Vicky Ward, "The Talented Mr. Epstein," *Vanity Fair*, March 2003.

³ Vicky Ward, "The Talented Mr. Epstein," *Vanity Fair*, March 2003.

⁴ Brown, *Perversion of Justice*; Ward, "The Talented Mr. Epstein."

⁵ Brown, *Perversion of Justice*; Landon Thomas Jr. et al., "Jeffrey Epstein and the Wexner Fortune," *The New York Times*, July 2019; *United States Virgin Islands v. JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A.*, No. 1:22-cv-10904 (S.D.N.Y. 2022).

president of Wexner-affiliated property companies, embedding himself simultaneously in financial, philanthropic, and corporate structures.⁶

Two features of this positioning illustrate the structural domain operating as the framework describes. First, it distributed Epstein's influence across interlocking systems rather than concentrating it in a single organizational role—he held no office that named his actual power. Second, it supplied opacity: control exercised through another's power of attorney, across foundations and property companies, is difficult to see from outside, and difficult to assign responsibility for.⁷ The durability of the model is visible in its persistence past Epstein's own legal disgrace: the financier Leon Black paid Epstein more than \$150 million for tax and estate-planning services between 2012 and 2017—after the 2008 conviction—indicating that the structural value Epstein offered survived events that would have ended a reputationally-based authority.⁸

3. Institutional Insulation and Coercive Leverage

The best-documented instance of Epstein's power converting structural position into protection from accountability is not blackmail but the legal record itself. In 2006, Palm Beach police investigated Epstein and, dissatisfied that the state charge failed to reflect "the totality of Epstein's conduct," referred the case federally; an assistant U.S. attorney drafted an indictment running to dozens of counts.⁹ That indictment was never pursued. Instead, in 2007–2008, under U.S. Attorney Alexander Acosta, the Southern District of Florida entered a non-prosecution agreement under which Epstein pleaded guilty on June 30, 2008 to state charges of solicitation and procurement of a minor for prostitution, served thirteen months with extensive daily work release, and—together with named co-conspirators—received immunity from federal prosecution.¹⁰ Epstein's victims were not consulted; a federal court ruled in 2019 that this violated the Crime Victims' Rights Act.¹¹ The Department of Justice's own later review concluded that Acosta had exercised "poor judgment."¹²

Analytically, the non-prosecution agreement is the clearest evidence in the case of structural and coercive domains reinforcing one another. Epstein's structural resources—elite legal representation, wealth, and proximity to decision-makers—produced an outcome (federal immunity, a county-jail sentence with work release) so far outside the normal range that it functioned as institutional insulation. Structural access did not merely coexist with protection from sanction; it generated it.

⁶ Brown, *Perversion of Justice: The Jeffrey Epstein Story* (New York: William Morrow, 2021).

⁷ Brown, *Perversion of Justice*; Ward, "The Talented Mr. Epstein."

⁸ Apollo Global Management, Report of Dechert LLP to the Conflicts Committee of the Board of Directors (January 25, 2021); Matthew Goldstein and Katherine Rosman, "Apollo C.E.O. to Step Down After Firm Finds More Payments to Jeffrey Epstein," *The New York Times*, January 25, 2021.

⁹ Town of Palm Beach Police Department records; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Professional Responsibility, Investigation into the U.S. Attorney's Office's Resolution of Its 2006–2008 Federal Criminal Investigation of Jeffrey Epstein (2020).

¹⁰ Non-Prosecution Agreement, *In re Epstein* (S.D. Fla. 2007); U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Professional Responsibility, Report (2020).

¹¹ *Doe 1 v. United States*, 359 F. Supp. 3d 1201 (S.D. Fla. 2019).

¹² U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Professional Responsibility, Report (2020).

A second, more frequently cited mechanism—coercive leverage through compromising information, i.e. blackmail—must be treated with more caution. Allegations that Epstein gathered compromising material on powerful associates are widespread but remain, in the main, unadjudicated; they should be marked as allegation, not fact.¹³ The analytical point does not depend on them. Whether or not blackmail occurred, the documented record already shows coercive insulation operating through legal and institutional channels rather than through the threat of exposure. The framework's claim—that coercive and structural power reinforced one another in Epstein's case—rests on the evidenced non-prosecution outcome, not on the contested blackmail thesis.

4. Network Density, Institutional Capture, and Insulation

The convergence is most visible where Epstein's domains operated simultaneously on a single institution. The clearest documented instance is the MIT Media Lab. Between roughly 1999 and 2019, Epstein channeled and solicited donations to the Lab; internal communications later showed that he acted as an intermediary directing major gifts—including a \$2 million donation that Lab director Joi Ito described internally as "directed by Jeffrey Epstein," and millions more solicited from other wealthy donors—while Lab staff systematically concealed his name, recording his gifts as anonymous and referring to him by his initials or as "Voldemort," "he who must not be named."¹⁴ When the arrangement was exposed in 2019, Ito resigned.¹⁵

This episode is a compressed image of infrastructural convergence. Networked power (Epstein as intermediary routing flows of capital between donors and institution), structural power (control over significant philanthropic resources), and symbolic power (the legitimacy of association with an elite research institution) activated one another within a single set of transactions—and the institution itself supplied the insulation, actively scrubbing his name to protect the relationship from scrutiny. The accountability failure here is not the diffuseness of an abstract network but a documented decision by institutional actors to conceal.

This pattern of insulation extended to Epstein's exposure to formal sanction more generally. After his 2008 conviction he remained a registered sex offender, yet retained access to wealth, property, and elite clients until his second arrest. On July 6, 2019, the Southern District of New York arrested him on federal charges of sex trafficking of minors and conspiracy, alleging conduct between 2002 and 2005.¹⁶ He died in federal custody on August 10, 2019, a death the New York City medical

¹³ Brown, *Perversion of Justice*; Ward, "The Talented Mr. Epstein" (allegations only).

¹⁴ Ronan Farrow, "How an Élite University Research Center Concealed Its Relationship with Jeffrey Epstein," *The New Yorker*, September 6, 2019.

¹⁵ Farrow, "How an Élite University Research Center Concealed Its Relationship with Jeffrey Epstein"; Goodwin Procter, *Report to MIT Concerning Jeffrey Epstein* (2020).

¹⁶ U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of New York, "Jeffrey Epstein Charged in Manhattan Federal Court with Sex Trafficking of Minors," press release, July 8, 2019.

examiner ruled a suicide; the indictment was dismissed.¹⁷ His associate Ghislaine Maxwell was later convicted of sex-trafficking offenses and sentenced to twenty years, the one element of the network to be fully adjudicated.¹⁸

5. Interpretation: Epstein as Infrastructural Convergence

The Epstein case demonstrates how a cumulative individual can emerge through infrastructural convergence, in which structural positioning and coercive insulation form the primary axes of power and operate largely outside public visibility. The dominant configuration is the documented sequence traced above: a financial relationship that generated legitimacy, legitimacy that widened access, access that became structural control via power of attorney, structural control that distributed influence opaquely across institutions, and institutional embeddedness that produced—through the non-prosecution agreement and through episodes like the MIT concealment—insulation from accountability.

Other domains are present in supporting roles. Symbolic legitimacy (philanthropic and academic association), psychological influence (reputation and elite social alignment), and limited networked circulation (the movement of money and reputation within closed circles) all appear, but the load-bearing axes are structural and coercive. Crucially, the case confirms the framework's claim that convergence is general rather than digital-specific: Epstein assembled a convergent configuration with almost no reliance on networked visibility, in a register the later cases in this paper—Assange and Ye—show operating very differently under conditions of intense mediation. Epstein marks one end of that range: cumulative individuality that is relational, embedded, infrastructural, and largely invisible by design.

V. Case Study II: Assange and Informational Convergence

The case of Julian Assange illustrates a pathway of *informational convergence*, in which power emerges through the interaction of networked and symbolic domains. Unlike infrastructural convergence, which is embedded within elite institutional networks, informational convergence operates through the control and dissemination of information across digitally mediated systems. Influence here derives not from institutional position or coercive leverage but from the capacity to shape the flow, meaning, and visibility of information at scale. Where Epstein marks the pre-digital end of the framework's range, Assange marks the digitally native end: a cumulative individual unintelligible apart from the networked environment.¹⁹

1. WikiLeaks as a Networked Information Platform

¹⁷ Autopsy and cause-of-death determination (suicide by hanging) by the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner, August 2019, in the death of Jeffrey Epstein; *United States v. Epstein*, No. 1:19-cr-00490 (S.D.N.Y.) (indictment dismissed following defendant's death).

¹⁸ *United States v. Maxwell*, No. 1:20-cr-00330 (S.D.N.Y.); U.S. Department of Justice, sentencing press release, June 2022.

¹⁹ Saviano, *A Theory of Power Convergence: The Cumulative Individual* (2026).

Founded in 2006, WikiLeaks was built as a platform for the anonymous submission and mass publication of classified or restricted material.²⁰ Its significance became global in 2010, when a single source—the U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning—supplied it with a series of classified datasets of unprecedented scale.²¹ The releases that followed map the networked domain in operation, and their magnitude is a matter of record: the gunsight video Assange titled "Collateral Murder," published April 5, 2010, showing a 2007 Apache airstrike in Baghdad that killed roughly eighteen people, including two Reuters journalists;²² the Afghan War Diary of some 91,000 military logs, July 25, 2010;²³ the Iraq War Logs of roughly 391,832 reports, October 22, 2010;²⁴ and "Cablegate," 251,287 U.S. diplomatic cables, released in stages from November 28, 2010.²⁵

Two features distinguish this from traditional publication and locate it in the domain of networked power. First, scale and speed: material previously contained within state boundaries could be disseminated globally and near-instantaneously. Second, and critical to what follows, irreversibility: once distributed across the network and mirrored, the releases could not be recalled. WikiLeaks functioned as an infrastructural node oriented toward exposure rather than institutional integration—Assange's influence depended not on embedded elite relationships but on the capacity to operate across networks that transcend national and institutional boundaries.²⁶

2. Symbolic Authority of Transparency and Whistleblowing

Networked dissemination alone does not account for the releases' impact. Their force was amplified by a symbolic framework centered on transparency, accountability, and whistleblowing, which presented the disclosures as public-interest journalism rather than mere unauthorized exposure.²⁷ The framing did analytical work: a leaked document acquires influence only when embedded in a narrative that renders it significant, and the transparency frame positioned WikiLeaks as a corrective to state secrecy.

This symbolic claim was, from the outset, contested—and the contest is itself part of the case rather than something the present analysis needs to resolve. Press-freedom and human-rights organizations, including Amnesty International and the Committee to Protect Journalists, characterized Assange as a publisher exposing state wrongdoing; the U.S. government characterized him as having recklessly endangered named sources and as a participant in what it called one of the

²⁰ WikiLeaks, "What Is WikiLeaks," WikiLeaks, accessed July 2026.

²¹ United States v. Manning, General Court-Martial, U.S. Army Military District of Washington, verdict July 30, 2013 (Pfc. Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning convicted under the Espionage Act and related charges for disclosures to WikiLeaks).

²² WikiLeaks, "Collateral Murder," April 5, 2010; David Leigh, "Iraq War Logs: An Introduction," The Guardian, October 22, 2010.

²³ WikiLeaks, Afghan War Diary (2004–2010), released July 25, 2010 (approx. 91,000 records).

²⁴ WikiLeaks, Iraq War Logs, released October 22, 2010 (391,832 field reports).

²⁵ WikiLeaks, "Cablegate" (251,287 U.S. diplomatic cables), released from November 28, 2010.

²⁶ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

²⁷ Julian Assange et al., *When Google Met WikiLeaks* (New York: OR Books, 2014).

largest compromises of classified information in American history.²⁸ The framework's interest is not in adjudicating this dispute but in observing its structure: the same act of disclosure was claimed simultaneously as legitimate journalism and as criminal endangerment, and the durability of Assange's authority depended on which framing prevailed in which audience. Symbolic power, here, is the contested terrain on which networked power's meaning was fought out.

The interaction is the first observable feedback loop in the case: networked dissemination generated symbolic claims (transparency, accountability), and symbolic legitimacy in turn drew the attention and partnerships—*The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Der Spiegel*—that extended the networked reach of the material further than WikiLeaks could alone.²⁹

3. Institutional Responses from States

A defining feature of informational convergence is the scale of institutional response it can provoke from an individual operating with no formal institutional standing. In Assange's case that response is fully documented and escalating. In November 2010, the U.S. Attorney General confirmed an active criminal investigation.³⁰ Separately, sexual-assault allegations were made against Assange in Sweden in 2010; he denied them, and they were ultimately dropped in 2019.³¹ Facing extradition, Assange entered the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in 2012 and remained there for seven years.³² On April 11, 2019, Ecuador revoked his asylum and he was arrested by the Metropolitan Police; he was convicted of breaching the Bail Act and, while imprisoned, the United States unsealed an indictment that, by a superseding indictment of May 23, 2019, comprised eighteen federal counts—seventeen under the Espionage Act of 1917—the first use of that statute against a publisher for obtaining and disclosing information.³³

The response then shifted from prosecution to incapacitation. Assange was held in HM Prison Belmarsh from April 2019 to June 2024 while the extradition was litigated.³⁴ The legal contest ran for years: extradition was blocked in January 2021 on health grounds, the decision was appealed by the United States, and in May 2024 the UK High Court granted Assange permission to bring a full

²⁸ Amnesty International, “Julian Assange Must Not Be Extradited to the USA” (April 11, 2019); Committee to Protect Journalists, “US Charges Julian Assange with 17 Counts under Espionage Act” (May 23, 2019); U.S. Department of Justice, “WikiLeaks Founder Charged in Superseding Indictment,” press release, June 24, 2020.

²⁹ David Leigh and Luke Harding, *WikiLeaks: Inside Julian Assange's War on Secrecy* (London: Guardian Books, 2011); *Guardian / New York Times / Der Spiegel* collaboration (2010).

³⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, remarks of Attorney General Eric Holder confirming an active criminal investigation into the WikiLeaks disclosures, November 2010.

³¹ Swedish Prosecution Authority, case record concerning Julian Assange (preliminary investigation opened 2010; discontinued November 19, 2019).

³² Government of the Republic of Ecuador, grant of diplomatic asylum to Julian Assange, August 16, 2012 (asylum revoked April 11, 2019).

³³ *United States v. Assange*, Superseding Indictment, No. 1:18-cr-111 (E.D. Va., May 23, 2019) (18 counts, 17 under the Espionage Act).

³⁴ HM Prison Belmarsh, detention of Julian Assange, April 2019–June 2024; see *United States v. Assange*, Plea Agreement, U.S. District Court for the District of the Northern Mariana Islands (June 26, 2024) (marking the end of custody).

appeal.³⁵ These responses illustrate how an individual operating through networked and symbolic domains can elicit the sustained mobilization of legal, diplomatic, and coercive state machinery normally reserved for institutional adversaries.

4. The Interaction Between Digital Networks and Symbolic Legitimacy—and Its Limit

The power of informational convergence lies in the mutual reinforcement of the networked and symbolic domains: digital networks supply reach, symbolic framing supplies meaning, and each amplifies the other. Information releases triggered media coverage, public debate, and political response, generating feedback loops that amplified both visibility and perceived significance.³⁶ This is convergence in the sense developed in the foundational paper—domains activating one another recursively around a single actor.

But the Assange case also marks the *limit* of informational convergence with unusual clarity, and the limit is theoretically instructive. The institutional response could not undo the networked act: the documents, once disseminated and mirrored, remained public, and in this sense the convergence proved resilient exactly where the foundational framework predicts—the disseminated information metabolized opposition, with each attempt at suppression amplifying attention. What the response *could* reach was not the network but the body. The same state machinery that could not un-publish the cables could incapacitate the individual who published them: through fourteen years of legal pressure, seven years of de facto confinement in an embassy, five years in Belmarsh, and finally a 2024 plea agreement under which Assange pleaded guilty to a single Espionage Act count, was sentenced to the sixty-two months he had already served, and was released on the condition that remaining classified material be destroyed.³⁷

This is the structural-fragility thesis of the framework demonstrated on a live case. Informational convergence is durable at the level of the disseminated information and fragile at the level of the cumulative individual, who remains a coercible body even when the network does not. The pathway's strength and its vulnerability are the same feature seen from two sides: power that resides in irreversible information flows cannot be recalled, but the person who serves as its node can be isolated, detained, and ultimately induced to settle.

5. Interpretation: Assange as Informational Convergence

The Assange case exemplifies informational convergence, in which networked and symbolic domains form the primary axes of power. It also shows how informational exposure can itself function coercively: the strategic release of sensitive information does not merely inform but compels

³⁵ USA v. Julian Paul Assange, judgment of the Westminster Magistrates' Court, January 4, 2021; United States v. Assange [2021] EWHC 3313 (Admin) (December 10, 2021); United States v. Assange [2024] EWHC 1150 (Admin), High Court of Justice (King's Bench Division, Divisional Court), order granting permission to appeal, May 20, 2024.

³⁶ Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*; Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³⁷ Plea Agreement, United States v. Assange, U.S. District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands (June 26, 2024).

response, constrains actors, and reshapes institutional behavior, extending influence beyond communication into indirect forms of coercion.³⁸ Influence in this pathway is mediated through digital systems and shaped by narratives that confer legitimacy and meaning on information.

As in other pathways, additional domains are present but not dominant. Structural resources and coercive capacity appear primarily on the institutional side, mobilized in *reaction* to the informational challenge rather than as foundations of Assange's own influence—an asymmetry that itself marks the boundary, examined more fully in the sovereign cases of the next paper, between reactive institutions and integrated ones.³⁹ Psychological dynamics—identification with the figure of the whistleblower—reinforce the configuration but remain secondary to the networked-symbolic interaction. The case demonstrates how cumulative individuals can emerge within digitally mediated environments, and, in its conclusion, how the pathway's distinctive resilience and distinctive fragility derive from the same source: the location of power in information flows that outlast the actor who released them.

VI. Case Study III: Ye and Cultural Convergence

The case of Ye (formerly Kanye West) illustrates a pathway of *cultural convergence*, in which power emerges through the interaction of symbolic and psychological domains within highly mediated cultural systems. Unlike infrastructural convergence, which operates through embedded institutional networks, or informational convergence, which depends on control of information flows, cultural convergence is rooted in the capacity to shape meaning, identity, and perception within cultural economies. Influence here derives not from formal authority or informational asymmetry but from the ability to generate and sustain symbolic visibility while shaping the psychological orientation of audiences.

This case is analytically important for a third reason. Where Epstein demonstrates convergence's insulation and Assange its network-durability-with-bodily-fragility, Ye demonstrates its *volatility*: the case shows, on a compressed and well-documented timeline, both how rapidly tightly coupled domains transmit collapse and how a residual symbolic-psychological core can survive the severing of the others.⁴⁰

1. Cultural Authority and Celebrity Capital

Ye's influence is grounded in an unusually deep reserve of symbolic, or cultural, capital. The scale is a matter of record: more than twenty Grammy Awards, among the most of any rapper; eleven studio albums, several debuting at number one on the Billboard 200, including *The Life of Pablo* (2016),

³⁸ Saviano, *A Theory of Power Convergence: The Cumulative Individual* (2026).

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980); Castells, *Communication Power*.

⁴⁰ Saviano, *A Theory of Power Convergence: The Cumulative Individual* (2026).

Jesus Is King (2019), and *Donda* (2021).⁴¹ This authority extended across domains. In 2009 he became the first non-athlete to receive a signature Nike sneaker, and in 2013 moved the line to Adidas, where the Yeezy brand became one of the most commercially successful celebrity collaborations in history—generating roughly two billion dollars in annual revenue, on the order of a tenth of Adidas's total, and briefly elevating Ye to billionaire status by Forbes's accounting.⁴²

The analytically relevant point is that this symbolic capital was *convertible*. Recognition in music translated into authority in fashion, fashion into commercial structure, commercial structure into the wealth and visibility that sustained further cultural production. Cultural authority of this kind operates by defining what is salient, legitimate, or controversial within a symbolic environment, and it can be mobilized across institutional boundaries—shaping discourse and consumption without formal organizational control.⁴³

2. Identity Formation and Psychological Influence over Audiences

Symbolic authority alone does not account for cultural convergence; its effects are amplified through psychological power—the capacity to shape identity, affect, and alignment among audiences. In highly mediated cultural systems, audiences do not merely consume content but form attachments, identifications, and oppositional stances toward public figures. Ye's influence operates substantially through this dynamic: his persona and statements generate strong identification, polarization, and emotional engagement, making him a durable focal point for the organization of attention and affect rather than the object of discrete, passing interest.⁴⁴

This psychological dimension is what gives the symbolic domain its persistence, and—as the collapse below shows—it is also the domain least susceptible to institutional severance. Corporations could terminate contracts; they could not directly dissolve the identification between Ye and his audiences.

3. Digital Media Amplification and Networked Visibility

Although cultural convergence is defined primarily by the symbolic and psychological domains, it is significantly reinforced by networked power through digital media. Social platforms and streaming systems amplify visibility, enabling rapid dissemination and continuous feedback. In Ye's case the networked domain functions as an *amplifier* rather than the primary source of power: it extends the

⁴¹ Recording Academy, Grammy Awards records (grammy.com artist page); Billboard 200 chart archives. The Recording Academy artist page lists twenty-one career Grammy wins; the body text's "more than twenty" reflects this figure.

⁴² Adidas AG, Annual Report 2022 (Herzogenaurach: Adidas AG, 2023); Zack O'Malley Greenburg, "Kanye West Is Now Officially a Billionaire—and He Really Wants the World to Know," *Forbes*, April 24, 2020; Lisette Voytko, "Billionaire No More: Kanye West's Antisemitism Obliterates His Net Worth as Adidas Cuts Ties," *Forbes*, October 25, 2022.

⁴³ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" (1986); Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

⁴⁴ Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion, 2001); P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

reach and speed of symbolic communication and intensifies psychological engagement through continuous exposure, with controversies and productions circulated and reinterpreted across platforms in self-sustaining cycles.⁴⁵ This differs from informational convergence, where networked power is the central domain; here it serves to extend symbolic and psychological effects rather than constituting the locus of power itself. As the next section shows, this same amplification operated in reverse during the 2022 collapse, propagating rupture as efficiently as it had propagated influence.

4. Institutional Response and the Mechanics of Collapse

The defining episode of the case is the rapid, multi-domain collapse of October 2022, which the documented record allows to be traced step by step. The precipitating events were symbolic. On October 3, 2022, Ye presented a "White Lives Matter" slogan—language associated with white-supremacist groups—at his Paris fashion show.⁴⁶ On October 8, he posted a statement on Twitter declaring he would go "death con 3" on Jewish people; the post was widely condemned as antisemitic, and Twitter and Instagram suspended his accounts.⁴⁷ He amplified the rhetoric in subsequent interviews and podcasts, later including explicit praise of Hitler.⁴⁸

The institutional cascade that followed was both swift and cross-domain. Within roughly two weeks: Balenciaga severed ties; the talent agency CAA dropped him; the production company MRC shelved a completed documentary; and on October 25, 2022, Adidas terminated the Yeezy partnership, which the company stated it expected to have a short-term negative impact of up to €250 million on its 2022 net income given the high seasonality of the fourth quarter.⁴⁹ Gap removed Yeezy Gap merchandise and shut its dedicated site; Foot Locker and other retailers pulled the product.⁵⁰ The financial consequence was immediate and severe: Forbes recalculated Ye's net worth from roughly two billion dollars to about four hundred million, a collapse widely described as among the largest in the history of celebrity commerce.⁵¹

This sequence is the clearest demonstration in the paper of the framework's volatility thesis. Ye's domains were tightly coupled, and that coupling—which had transmitted accumulation, recognition

⁴⁵ Manuel Castells, *Communication Power*; José van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁴⁶ Matthew Strauss, "Kanye West Plays James Blake Collaboration, Wears 'White Lives Matter' Shirt at Paris Fashion Week Show," Pitchfork, October 3, 2022; Anti-Defamation League, "White Lives Matter," ADL Hate Symbols Database.

⁴⁷ Sam Levine, "Kanye West's Instagram and Twitter Accounts Locked over Antisemitic Posts," The Guardian, October 9, 2022.

⁴⁸ Anti-Defamation League, "Unpacking Kanye West's Antisemitic Remarks," October 14, 2022, updated October 19, 2022; Andrew Lapin, "'I Like Hitler,' Kanye West Repeatedly Tells Alex Jones during 3-Hour Infowars Appearance," Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 1, 2022.

⁴⁹ Adidas AG, "adidas terminates partnership with Ye immediately," press release, October 25, 2022.

⁵⁰ Gap Inc., statement on the Yeezy Gap partnership, October 25, 2022; Parija Kavilanz, "Gap and Foot Locker Remove All Yeezy Merchandise from Stores," CNN Business, October 25, 2022.

⁵¹ Lisette Voytko, "Billionaire No More: Kanye West's Antisemitism Obliterates His Net Worth as Adidas Cuts Ties," Forbes, October 25, 2022; Jacob Knutson, "Ye Not a Billionaire after Adidas Ends Yeezy Deal," Axios, October 25, 2022.

compounding into wealth—transmitted shock with equal efficiency in the reverse direction: a symbolic rupture cascaded through networked platforms into structural and commercial collapse within days. The institutions here were unambiguously *reactive*: they responded to a shift in the symbolic and psychological dynamics surrounding Ye rather than initiating or controlling it, and their response took the form of withdrawal—the severing of partnerships, not the governance of his conduct.⁵²

5. Interpretation: Ye as Cultural Convergence and the Limits of Volatility

The Ye case exemplifies cultural convergence, in which symbolic and psychological domains form the primary axes of power, networked systems serve as amplification, and structural relationships within cultural industries supply enabling infrastructure. But its principal contribution to the framework is its demonstration of *volatility and residual durability together*.

The volatility is established by the 2022 collapse: tightly coupled domains propagate disruption as rapidly as they propagate growth, and convergent configurations that lack institutional buffering are therefore prone to sudden, system-wide contraction. This is the structural-fragility claim of the foundational paper, observed on a compressed timeline.⁵³

The residual durability is established by what followed. The collapse severed Ye's *structural* domain—corporate manufacturing, distribution, and the wealth attached to it—but did not dissolve the symbolic and psychological core. Retaining ownership of the Yeezy trademark, he continued direct-to-consumer sales, and in 2024 the self-distributed albums *Vultures 1* and *Vultures 2* debuted at numbers one and two on the Billboard 200—commercial and cultural relevance persisting after the corporate severance.⁵⁴ This is precisely what the framework predicts: because convergent power is not reducible to any single domain, amputating one does not neutralize the actor, whose authority re-coheres around the domains that remain.

Two cautions qualify any reading of the case as recovery. First, the post-collapse trajectory is erratic and substantially downward rather than a clean restoration: Ye's subsequent conduct, including a 2025 release explicitly invoking Hitler, indicates continued rupture rather than rehabilitation, and independent valuations of his wealth remain a fraction of the peak, with his own far higher self-assessment unsupported by verifiable assets.⁵⁵ Second, the case does not represent the fuller integration of all five domains so much as the fragile coupling of the dominant two with the others; what it demonstrates is not convergence intensifying toward completeness but convergence

⁵² Jacob Knutson, “The Organizations That Have Dropped Ye after Antisemitic Remarks,” Axios, October 24, 2022, updated October 26, 2022; Adidas AG, “adidas Terminates Partnership with Ye Immediately,” press release, October 25, 2022; Gap Inc., “Statement on Yeezy Partnership,” October 25, 2022.

⁵³ Saviano, *A Theory of Power Convergence: The Cumulative Individual* (2026).

⁵⁴ Keith Caulfield, “Kanye West & Ty Dolla \$ign’s *Vultures 1* Debuts at No. 1 on Billboard 200 Chart,” Billboard, February 18, 2024; “Taylor Swift’s Tortured Poets Department Clocks 14th Week at No. 1 on Billboard 200” (reporting *Vultures 2* debut at No. 2), Billboard, August 11, 2024.

⁵⁵ Mary Whitfill Roeloffs, “Kanye West’s Most Recent Nazi-Praising Song Just Got His Australian Visa Revoked,” Forbes, July 2, 2025; Forbes, “Kanye West,” Forbes Profile, accessed July 2026.

revealing, under stress, both its characteristic instability and the stubborn persistence of its symbolic-psychological foundation. Cultural convergence, on this evidence, is the most visible and the most volatile of the three sub-sovereign pathways—and the one in which the gap between accumulated influence and durable control is widest.⁵⁶

VII. Comparative Analysis: Configurations of the Cumulative Individual

The preceding cases illustrate distinct pathways through which cumulative individuals emerge, each defined by different configurations of interacting power domains. Taken together, they demonstrate that the cumulative individual is not a singular type of actor, but a structural possibility that manifests differently depending on the environment in which convergence occurs. This section compares the three cases to identify common patterns and key differences in the formation and operation of cumulative individuals.

1. Different Pathways to Convergence

The cases of Epstein, Assange, and Ye highlight three analytically distinct pathways—infrastructural, informational, and cultural convergence—each defined by the predominance of particular domains of power.

In the Epstein case, convergence is anchored in the interaction of structural and coercive domains, producing a form of influence embedded within elite institutional networks. Power operates through relational positioning, access, and mechanisms of constraint, with limited reliance on public visibility.

In contrast, Assange represents convergence through networked and symbolic domains, where influence is derived from the capacity to control and disseminate information while shaping its meaning. Here, power operates across institutional boundaries through digitally mediated systems, transforming information asymmetries into political and social effects.

The Ye case illustrates convergence through symbolic and psychological domains, in which influence is rooted in cultural authority, identity formation, and mediated visibility. Power in this pathway is highly visible and dynamic, operating through cycles of attention and engagement within cultural systems.

These pathways demonstrate that cumulative individuals emerge not from a single domain of power, but from the interaction and reinforcement of multiple domains, with different configurations producing distinct forms of influence. While each case is defined by the predominance of particular

⁵⁶ Saviano, *A Theory of Power Convergence: The Cumulative Individual* (2026).

domains, the presence of the others remains essential to the stability and operation of the configuration. Structural, coercive, networked, symbolic, and psychological forces are never absent; rather, they vary in relative weight, function, and mode of expression across contexts. The variation across cases therefore underscores the importance of treating convergence as a configurational process—one in which dominance structures the pathway, but cross-domain interaction sustains it—rather than as a fixed or isolated category.

2. Institutional Reactions to Cumulative Individuals

A common feature across all three cases is the manner in which institutions respond to individuals whose influence operates outside traditional organizational hierarchies. In each instance, cumulative individuals generate forms of power that challenge established mechanisms of control, prompting institutional reactions that span multiple domains.

In the Epstein case, institutional responses were often fragmented and delayed, reflecting the difficulty of addressing influence embedded within dense and opaque networks. The diffusion of responsibility across institutions contributed to a form of systemic inertia, allowing influence to persist despite growing scrutiny. At the same time, the maturation of networked platforms introduced a countervailing dynamic, as distributed forms of visibility enabled journalists, critics, and decentralized publics to reintroduce pressure into otherwise insulated systems. In this sense, networked power—though not dominant in the configuration—played a critical role in disrupting the very inertia that structural and coercive entanglements had sustained.

In the Assange case, responses were more direct and coordinated, involving legal, diplomatic, and intelligence mechanisms. Here, institutions recognized the disruptive potential of networked informational power and mobilized across domains to contain it. However, the decentralized nature of digital networks limited the effectiveness of these efforts.

In the Ye case, institutional reactions were concentrated within corporate and cultural organizations, including the termination of partnerships and public distancing. These responses reflect the sensitivity of cultural institutions to symbolic and reputational dynamics, as well as their reliance on audience perception and market positioning. At the same time, Ye's trajectory suggests that symbolic and psychological dominance may intensify into a broader and more unstable convergence of all five domains.

Across all three cases, institutional responses are largely reactive rather than anticipatory, highlighting a structural asymmetry between cumulative individuals and the organizations that seek to regulate them. Institutions are often designed to operate within specific domains, whereas cumulative individuals derive influence precisely from their ability to operate across domains.

A boundary must be drawn precisely here, because it defines the limit of what these three cases establish and marks where the next stage of the analysis begins. In each case—Epstein, Assange, and Ye—institutions responded to the cumulative individual: prosecutors, courts, corporations,

platforms, and agencies adjusted their conduct in reaction to an actor whose power they could neither ignore nor fully contain. But in every case the institutions remained *structurally distinct* from the actor they were reacting to. Courts retained jurisdiction, corporations retained the capacity to sever ties, and state agencies retained independent chains of command; they accommodated, resisted, or withdrew from the convergent individual, but they did so as agents with their own footing, not as components of his system. This is the signature of sub-sovereign convergence: the cumulative individual bends institutional behavior without absorbing institutional structure. The further condition—in which institutions cease to function as independent constraints and begin to operate as integrated components of the convergent system itself—is a change in kind rather than degree, and it is the threshold at which convergence scales into sovereignty. None of the three cases examined here crosses it. Specifying that threshold, and the cases in which it is crossed, is the task of the third paper in this series.

3. Structural Conditions of Convergence in Networked Societies

The variation across cases also points to broader structural conditions that facilitate the emergence of cumulative individuals in contemporary societies. While the domains of power identified in the pentagram are historically persistent, the conditions for their convergence have intensified in modern contexts characterized by dense interconnectivity and institutional permeability.

Digital networks play a central role in this transformation, particularly in enabling informational and cultural convergence. In the Assange and Ye cases, networked systems amplify visibility, accelerate information flows, and create feedback loops that reinforce influence. These systems allow actors to operate at a scale and speed that would have been difficult to achieve in earlier periods.

At the same time, the Epstein case demonstrates that convergence is not dependent on digital networks alone. The existence of dense elite connectivity and overlapping institutional relationships can produce forms of convergence even in less digitally mediated environments. This suggests that networked technologies act as amplifiers of convergence, rather than its sole cause.

More broadly, contemporary societies are characterized by increasing permeability between institutional domains, including finance, politics, media, and culture. This permeability reduces the barriers that historically separated domains of power, making it easier for individuals to integrate multiple forms of influence within a single position.

The combined effect of these conditions is to increase both the likelihood and the visibility of cumulative individuals. As domains of power become more densely interconnected—and as the speed of interaction across them accelerates—the potential for convergence expands, enabling actors to operate as nodal points within complex systems of influence.

4. Synthesis

The comparative analysis reveals that cumulative individuals are best understood not as anomalies, but as emergent configurations of power within evolving social systems. The differences between

Epstein, Assange, and Ye reflect variation in pathways and environments, while the similarities across cases highlight the underlying logic of convergence.

By examining how multiple domains of power interact within individual actors, the framework provides a basis for analyzing forms of influence that do not fit neatly within traditional institutional or disciplinary categories. The cumulative individual thus represents a conceptual tool for understanding how power operates in increasingly interconnected and mediated social systems.

These configurations should not be understood as stable end-states, but as dynamic and potentially volatile formations, whose persistence depends on the continued alignment of multiple domains of power.

VIII. Implications for Theories of Power

The framework of power convergence developed in this paper has broader implications for how power is conceptualized in social and political theory. Traditional approaches often analyze power within discrete domains—structural, coercive, symbolic, or psychological—treating these as analytically separable and institutionally bounded. The concept of the cumulative individual challenges this segmentation by demonstrating how multiple domains may converge within single actors under specific systemic conditions.

First, the analysis suggests that individuals can function as nodal points within complex systems of power, integrating forms of influence that are typically distributed across institutions. This does not imply that institutions are diminished in importance, but rather that their boundaries are increasingly permeable, allowing influence to circulate across domains in ways that are not easily captured by domain-specific theories.

Second, the increasing permeability of institutional boundaries—driven by globalization, elite interconnectivity, and digitally mediated communication—creates conditions under which cross-domain convergence becomes more likely. As these boundaries weaken, the separation between structural, informational, and cultural forms of power becomes less stable, enabling new configurations of influence.

Third, the emergence of cumulative individuals highlights the importance of analyzing power as a configurational and relational phenomenon, rather than as a property of isolated actors or institutions. The cases examined in this paper demonstrate that influence is not reducible to personal attributes alone, but is produced through the interaction between individual actors and the broader systems in which they are embedded.

Cumulative individuals should therefore be understood as products of systemic conditions, rather than exceptional figures defined solely by personal traits. Their emergence reflects underlying transformations in the organization of power within contemporary societies, where the integration of multiple domains within single actors has become increasingly feasible.

While this paper has focused on pathways through which power converges, the broader framework suggests that such configurations are inherently unstable. As convergence intensifies, the integration of multiple domains within a single actor may generate internal tensions and systemic pressures that are difficult to sustain over time. Different configurations of convergence may therefore produce distinct modes of breakdown, where failures in one domain propagate across others.

IX. Conclusion

This paper has introduced a framework for understanding power as a convergent, multi-domain phenomenon, rather than a set of discrete and isolated forms of influence. By conceptualizing power through the interaction of structural, coercive, symbolic, psychological, and networked domains, it has argued that influence in contemporary societies increasingly emerges from the integration of these domains within individual actors.

The analysis of Epstein, Assange, and Ye demonstrates that power convergence can occur through distinct pathways—infrastructural, informational, and cultural—each defined by different configurations of dominant domains. Despite these differences, the cases reveal a common pattern: individuals can accumulate influence not by operating within a single institutional sphere, but by functioning as points of convergence across multiple domains of power. They also reveal a second, less obvious commonality. In each case the convergent configuration proved not only powerful but volatile—Ye's near-instant collapse when the symbolic domain ruptured, the asymmetry by which Assange's disseminated information outlasted his own capacity to act, and the insulation that protected Epstein until it abruptly failed all illustrate that tightly coupled domains transmit instability as readily as they transmit influence. Convergence concentrates power and, by the same structure, concentrates fragility.

In this sense, the cumulative individual represents a new configuration of agency in modern social systems. This form of agency is not reducible to traditional categories such as institutional authority, economic capital, or symbolic influence alone. Instead, it reflects the capacity to integrate and mobilize multiple forms of power within increasingly interconnected and permeable environments.

At the same time, the emergence of cumulative individuals is not simply a product of personal traits or exceptional capacities. It is rooted in broader structural conditions, including overlapping institutional domains and the growing permeability of boundaries between spheres of influence. Dense networked communication systems intensify and accelerate these dynamics, but, as the Epstein case makes clear, they are not their precondition: convergence can consolidate

substantially outside digital environments, even as mediation dramatically increases its speed and scale. These conditions make it increasingly possible for individuals to operate across domains, transforming the relationship between actors and institutions.

The concept of power convergence thus provides a framework for analyzing forms of influence that are not easily captured by existing theories. It highlights the need to move beyond domain-specific approaches and toward a more integrated understanding of how power operates within complex, networked societies. Crucially, in each of the cases examined here, institutions reacted to the cumulative individual while remaining structurally distinct from him—accommodating or resisting convergent power without being absorbed into it. This marks the limit of sub-sovereign convergence and the threshold at which the analysis must turn to the sovereign level.

Beyond that threshold, as the conditions that enable convergence continue to intensify, the emergence of cumulative individuals may extend beyond the cultural and informational domains to encompass political authority and sovereignty proper—the condition in which institutions cease merely to react to convergent actors and begin to operate as integrated components of their systems. Contemporary political figures operating at the intersection of leadership, media visibility, and networked communication—including, for example, Donald Trump, Nayib Bukele, and emerging leaders in rapidly transforming regions such as West Africa—suggest that such configurations are not merely theoretical possibilities but developing features of modern power systems. While this paper has focused on three distinct pathways of sub-sovereign convergence, a subsequent study will examine how these dynamics manifest at the level of political leadership and sovereignty.

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