

Why do Revolutions Fail?: A Network Approach to Analyzing Counter-Revolutionary Movements in Western France, 1791-1799

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Research Question: Counter-revolutionary movements in western France threatened Republican forces throughout the French Revolution (1791-1799) despite the fact that they were decentralized, poorly supplied, and repeatedly defeated on the battlefield. What enabled these movements to remain a persistent threat to the French Revolutionaries?

INTRODUCTION

Counter-revolutionary movements in Western France are typically characterized as a series of disparate, ultimately ineffective efforts against the French Revolution (1789-1799). Historians typically treat the three groups -- the *Association Bretonne*, the *Chouannerie*, and the *Vendée* -- as distinct movements due to their different chronologies and class origins. The *Association Bretonne*, led primarily by Brittany's elite, functioned as a top-down secret society that officially disbanded after the death of its leader in 1793. The *Chouannerie*, in contrast, functioned mainly as a bottom-up insurgency that mobilized the Breton peasantry beginning in spring 1793 and continued until Napoleon's coup in 1799. Finally, the *Vendée* was primarily a rural movement south of the Loire River that combatted revolutionary forces in several major battles in 1793. Standard interpretations, however, fail to account for the fact that these counter-revolutionary insurgencies were collectively remarkably persistent, continuing to undermine Republican support throughout the first Republic. This project utilizes social network analysis and archival research in eight European archives to analyze relations among all three movements as well as their connections to French emigrants (Émigrés), the French Princes in exile, and the British Government. It focuses on the connections of one British officer, Philippe D'Auvergne, appointed naval admiral for the Island of Jersey in 1794. His extensive networks reveal multiple intersections among the movements. Their shared strategies, personnel and resources -- combined with ongoing British involvement -- explains the longevity of counter-revolutionary movements in Western France and why they remained a persistent threat which contributed to the failure of the French Revolution.

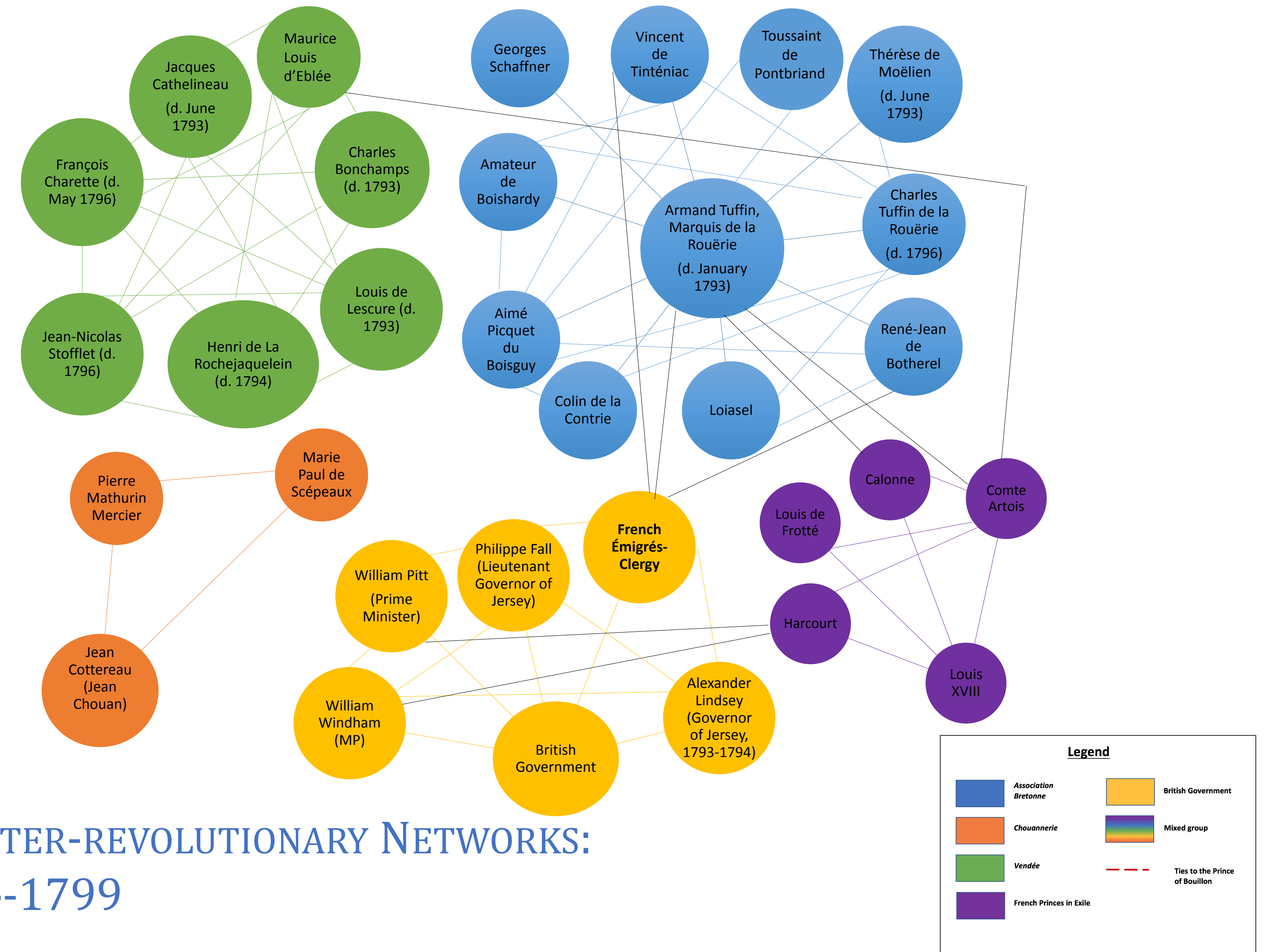
METHODOLOGY

- Conducted archival research in eight European archives in London, Paris, Brittany, and the Island of Jersey.
- Used archival material and social network analysis to reconstruct relations among the three counter-revolutionary movements in western France and their connections to French emigrants (émigrés), the French princes in exile, and the British government. Network ties -- in the form of communications, collective action and/or exchange of resources -- are represented in the charts by lines drawn among the various actors.
- Analyzed how these networks mobilized insurgents, attracted new recruits, promoted anti-revolutionary sentiment, and shared resources and intelligence.

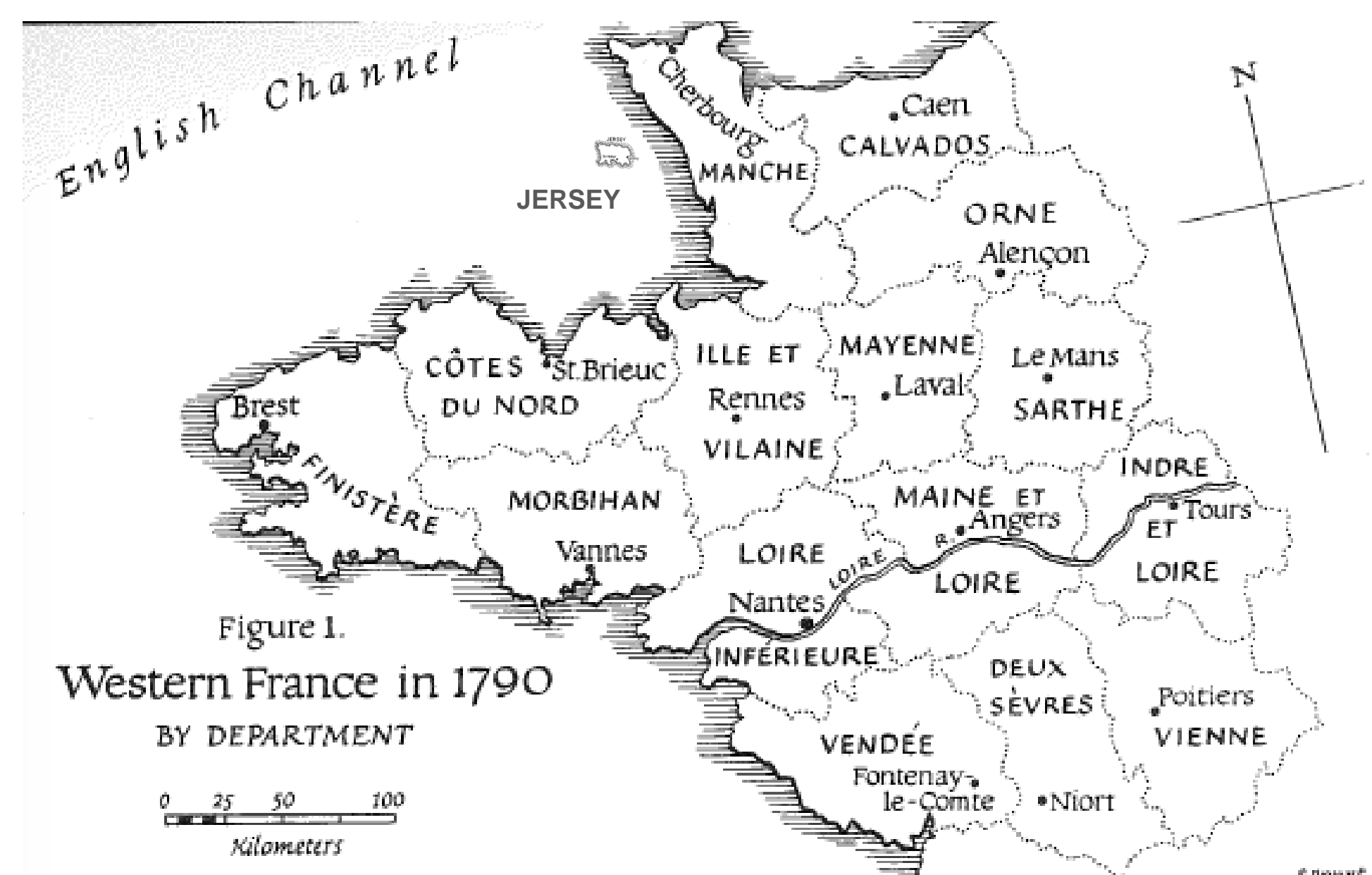
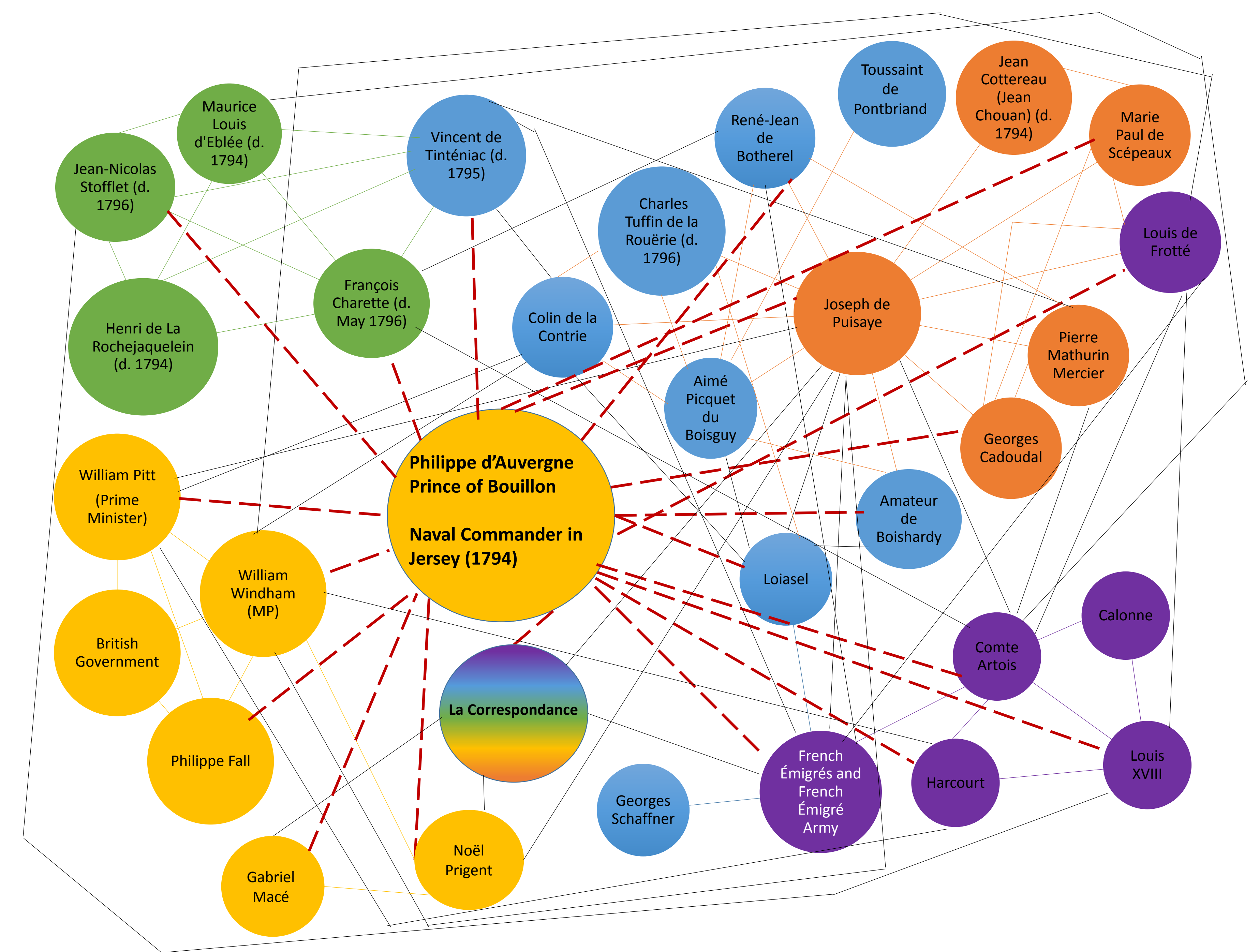
CONCLUSIONS

- Standard interpretations of counter-revolutionary movements in western France (see Chart 1) characterize the three movements as hierarchical, geographically and chronologically distinct, disconnected from each other, and operating in relative independence from foreign involvement.
- The first network model (Chart 2) represents networks within and among the movements and foreign agents from 1791-1793. In these early years, the movements were relatively distinct (the *Chouannerie* movement had barely begun). A rapidly growing émigré population on the Island of Jersey (a British territory) had become a refuge and support system for the insurgencies. Connections between the movements and foreign actors (French princes and British government) were increasing, but there was no direct communication between the movements and British officials on Jersey.
- The second network model (Chart 3), representing networks within and among the movements and foreign agents from 1794-1799, reveals a dramatic shift both in terms of network ties among the movements and the importance of the Island of Jersey and its naval admiral Philippe D'Auvergne. Many counter-revolutionary insurgents (*chefs*) who had been initially involved in the *Association Bretonne* or the *Vendée* movements maintained connections with each other, the British government, and/or were involved in the ongoing *Chouannerie*. D'Auvergne was given oversight in 1794 over the more than 4,000 French émigrés living on the Island and created an émigré spy network known as *La Correspondance*. His communications with current and former leaders of all three movements enabled him to serve as a critical gatekeeper for recruiting émigrés and for the delivery of arms and munitions from Britain to insurgents in France. D'Auvergne thus served as a central "node" which sustained a collective counter-revolutionary network through the 1790s and into the early years of Napoleon's reign. This network -- and with it the counter-revolutionary insurgency -- would dissipate after 1802 when the Peace of Amiens established a truce between Britain and France, enabling Napoleon to declare an amnesty that persuaded most of the émigrés in Jersey to return to France.

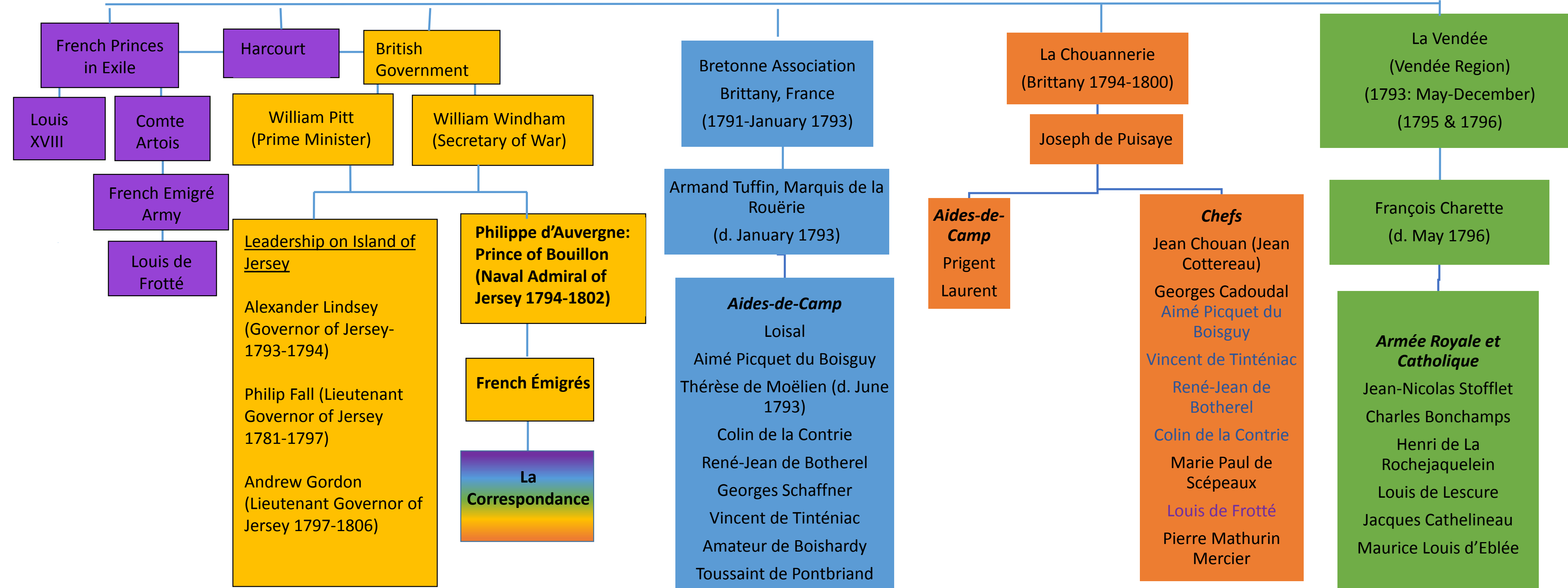
COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY NETWORKS: 1791-1793



COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY NETWORKS: 1794-1799



STANDARD MODEL OF COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS IN WESTERN FRANCE, 1791-99



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Archival Material from:
 The National Archives of the UK
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