



Image
Gage Skidmore on Creative Commons

by:

Thinking about Trump: American think tanks and their new political reality

tt Working Paper | 1 | August 2017

Christopher J. Rastrick
The University of Western Ontario
London, Canada

Author Biography

Christopher J. Rastrick received his PhD in political science from the University of Western Ontario, in London, Canada. He regularly writes on public policy issues in Canada and beyond, appearing in the nation's top newspapers and journals. His academic research interests include think tanks, Canada-EU relations, and regional integration initiatives. His first book, *Think Tanks in the US and EU: The Role of Policy Institutes in Washington and Brussels* has recently been published by Routledge.

Email:

crastric@uwo.ca

Funding

There was no institutional funding for this article.

About the On Think Tanks Working Paper Series

On ThinkTanks, University of Bath and Universidad del Pacífico have partnered to produce this Working Papers series focused on the study of think tanks and on evidence informed policy world-wide. The papers respond to the On Think Tanks research agenda.

All documents have been peer reviewed by an editorial panel composed of: Jordan Tchilingirian (University of Bath, Lecturer), Enrique Mendizabal (On Think Tanks, Director), Felipe Portocarrero (Universidad del Pacífico, Principal Researcher), Marcos González Hernando (University of Cambridge), Andrea Baertl (On Think Tanks, Research) and Erika Perez-Leon (On Think Tanks, Digital Content Editor).

The series is coordinated by Andrea Baertl and all documents designed by Erika Perez-León.

The Working Paper Series has been made possible thanks to the generous support of our donor, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of On Think Tanks, The University of Bath, Universidad del Pacífico or the Hewlett Foundation.

Readers are encouraged to use this research as long as On Think Tanks, as the copyright holder, is acknowledged and it is not for commercial purposes. For online use, we ask that the original resource on the On think Tanks website is linked to.

Abstract

The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States has, in many ways, altered the policy-making and public policy *status quo* of previous administrations, which would have likely continued if Hillary Clinton had won the 2016 election. One type of organization that will be impacted by these changes are think tanks, many of which are based in Washington, DC. The purpose of this article is to explore the new public policy landscape that these organizations are facing, with specific regard to the challenges and opportunities that arise from the alterations that have accompanied the election of Donald Trump. Using the astute concept of populism to understand the rise and perseverance of Donald Trump as commander-in-chief, it becomes possible to explicate the dimensions along which think tanks are being impacted, and ways that these organizations can mitigate this new ‘learning curve.’ Despite four principal challenges American think tanks will face—governmental funding, civil society skepticism, closed executive decision-making, and rapid policy priority ‘turnover’—there are areas in which think tanks can expand their reach, relevance, and perceived or actual influence. First, American think tanks can take advantage of a significantly fractured partisan landscape, specifically by expanding their relationships with individual policy-makers in informing their legislative action and ambition. Second, think tanks can leverage a highly-attentive electorate by expanding their institutional reach beyond their traditional constituencies. This can have the added benefit of diversifying their funding constituencies, and ultimately having a positive fundraising effect.

Introduction

On May 2, 2017, the Heritage Foundation's Board of Trustees voted to remove Jim DeMint as President of the organization. When news of the internal turbulence broke days earlier, speculation almost immediately turned to a perceived closeness between DeMint and the Trump administration (including the President himself), and the extent to which this was unfavorable to the interests of the Foundation. In many ways, this was not a stretch of the imagination; DeMint, after all, was well-known before his tenure at Heritage for being a Republican Senator with close ties to the earliest incarnation of the populist-driven Tea Party movement. What is surprising, however, is that the Heritage Foundation, the most visible and familiar conservative think tank in the US (and, arguably, the world) would perceive the intimacy between its president and the President of the United States (US) as damaging or otherwise untoward. Perhaps not surprising, in a public statement confirming the resignation of DeMint, the Heritage Foundation Board pointed to managerial incompetence as the basis for ending the five years of DeMint's leadership. This reasoning was swiftly rejected by most pundits and policy voices, noting that DeMint had, at least publicly, been unqualifiedly praised by the Board during his tenure, not to mention his categorical success in fundraising (Rastrick 2017, p. 37).

The broader story that underpins this episode is the challenges and opportunities that mark the current think tank environment in the United States, especially those operating with a federal public policy focus in Washington, DC. Given the fascinating developments in Washington, DC and the disproportionate visibility that these organizations garner (*vis-à-vis* their state-level and non-DC counterparts), this article will focus on those think tanks which operate wholly, or largely, within Washington, DC—a think tank subset which represents approximately 25% of the American think tank population.¹

Upon the election of Trump, the accompanying shock forced think tanks to recalculate their stratagem for impacting the policy-making process and shaping public policy narratives.

During the presidential campaign that fomented the surprising election of Donald Trump, American think tanks were preparing for a Washington under the executive leadership of President Hillary Clinton: the 'revolving door' between the White House and DC's think tanks was being greased (especially among progressive think tanks, namely the Center for American Progress), 'shadow budgets' were being researched and prepared for dissemination, and think tanks' most visible scholars were preparing their well-rehearsed talking points for regular media appearances. Upon the election of Trump, the accompanying shock forced think tanks to recalculate their stratagem for impacting the policy-making process and shaping public policy narratives.

As tumultuous as the current DC policy-making climate might be, this tumult does not necessarily bode negatively for think tanks. This paper seeks to demonstrate that, although the current US political landscape does indeed provide formidable challenges for think tanks, there are also significant opportunities that exist for think tanks to exploit.

This paper will proceed in three principal stages. First, it is necessary to acknowledge the role of think tanks in the US. To make the case that think tanks can advance their mandate in the current political

1. According to the 2016 *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*, of the 1,835 think tanks based in the US, approximately 400 are located in Washington, DC.

zeitgeist, it is important to understand what they seek to accomplish, and what metrics might be available for gauging this success. It will be especially important to qualify that scholars have faced great difficulty in agreeing on what constitutes ‘success’ for think tanks, despite think tanks’ annual reports and marketing materials suggesting otherwise. Second, it is necessary to indicate how the current US political landscape has actually changed, and especially those elements that are most relevant to think tanks and other civil society actors. While there has been much discussion on how the current political landscape might represent a categorically distinct epoch in American political history, it is important to separate those elements which are evident versus those that are politically motivated or otherwise unfounded (yet). In this section, the concept of populism will be explored as a conceptual tool for understanding the current public policy climate. Finally, the major thrust of this paper will focus on the challenges and opportunities that American think tanks presently face, and will likely face into the foreseeable future. In particular, four challenges will be identified, while two simultaneous opportunities will be presented.

To understand the challenges and opportunities that American think tanks are facing at present, it is important to understand from where these deviations are emanating. In other words, to better grasp the changing landscape that think tanks are facing, it is necessary to explicate the norms and dominant trends that have marked the American think tank community up to this point.



American think tanks

By the count of James McGann’s now-annual *Global Go To Think Tank Index*, there are presently 1,835 think tanks in the United States—a number which has doubled since 1980, despite a decreased rate of growth over the last decade (McGann 2016, p. 8). Despite McGann’s comprehensive attempt to identify all active think tanks, for some scholars, the characteristic fluidity and ease of creation/dissolution of these organizations makes providing an accurate count difficult. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the number of think tanks in the US has increased, especially over the last few decades. As Smith suggests, “although it is impossible to tally all the newly created independent policy research institutes

and university-based centers across the country, the rapid proliferation of these organizations has been obvious to many observers” (Smith 1991, p. 214). With over four times as many think tanks as China, the state with the second most populated think tank environment, the American think tank community is not in itself a homogenous entity. While reference to an ‘American think tank’ will inevitably elicit an image of a large, deep-pocketed organization with a constantly-revolving door between their offices and the Capitol and White House, such an archetype is an exception, rather than a rule. As Abelson notes, “the majority of American think tanks have little in common with the Brookings Institution, the Hoover Institution, the Heritage Foundation, and a select group of other prominent institutes that have budgets in excess of \$30 to \$80 million” (Abelson 2009, p. 17). Weidenbaum has even narrowed down the hegemony within the American think tank community to what he calls the ‘DC-5’, representing the largest and wealthiest organizations: the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the Brookings Institution, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the Cato Institute, and the Heritage Foundation (Weidenbaum 2009, p. 9). Notwithstanding the ‘DC-5,’ “most think tanks are tiny and often ephemeral operations—the entrepreneurial venture of a scholar-activist, a Washington-based foundation research project, or a political candidate’s short-lived campaign research unit” (Smith 1991, xv).

It is of little surprise that, in the world of think tanks, the institutional context in which they find themselves matters. Accordingly, it is important to begin by identifying some of the principal structural elements of the American system of government that have encouraged the development of a thriving landscape for think tanks to operate and succeed in. In particular, two principal elements are necessary to consider: the separation of powers between policy and decision-making institutions and the absence of a strong partisan fidelity among policy-makers. We will then proceed to consider the principal roles and functions that American think tanks embrace, focusing how these roles and functions are actually executed and fulfilled.



American think tanks and their political-institutional context

Though the sheer number and visibility of American think tanks is unparalleled, the think tank landscape in the US has not developed to its present condition by chance. Instead, it has developed and been strongly emboldened by some of the dominant institutional traits of the American governmental structure and policy-making process. As is the case in other think tank environments, the efficacy and operations of think tanks are inherently constrained by the political institutional context in which they operate (Stone 2004, p. 6, Abelson 2009, p. 5). For example, according to McGann's comparative analysis of think tanks around the world, "countries that have a high degree of political freedom provide the most suitable environment for think tanks to operate," and "open, democratic societies provide the best conditions for independent policy analysis and advice" (McGann 2005, p. 255). Even among liberal democracies—clearly an ideal-type, or even requisite, for think tank proliferation—there are vast differences in the nature and role of think tanks. For instance, in the US and Canada, two ostensibly proximate political cultures and civil society regimes, think tanks differ strongly in their nature and efficacy. This difference, in many ways, can be strongly attributed to different institutional setups (Abelson 2009). I argue that the efficacy and visibility of US think tanks have been made possible in large part due to two principal traits of the American institutional apparatus: the separation of powers and loose party loyalty in decision-making.

The think tank landscape in the US has not developed to its present condition by chance. Instead, it has developed and been strongly emboldened by some of the dominant institutional traits of the American governmental structure and policy-making process.

In the American institutional arrangement, defined by a presidential system of government, powers of the state are divided among distinctly separate branches of government. Notwithstanding the various prerogatives afforded to state and local governments and a federal judiciary, federal powers of policy-making are divided between the executive (whereby the president serves as both head of state and government) and legislature, with veto opportunities provided to each branch in the policy-making process (Saeki 2004, p. 81, Kelley and Marshall 2009, p. 510). Thus, while the distribution of competences between the branches of government are not necessarily equal, there exists a system of 'checks and balances' whereby decisions in one branch of government are subject to the approval of the other branch. In this sense, and quite deliberately, neither the executive nor the legislature possesses a hegemonic role in the policy-making process. In light of the distribution of power among a variety of actors, American think tanks are faced with multiple loci of power and a significant number of individuals personifying this distribution of power. While this might, at first glance, provide think tanks with logistical hurdles to engaging with a wide variety of policy-makers throughout the various institutions, it is also true that the wide distribution of power affords think tanks multiple channels of access and opportunities for engagement with policy-makers. Accordingly, American think tanks do not operate within an 'all-or-nothing' approach to engaging with policy-makers, whereby one actor's rejection or defection from a think tank's proposals or analysis limits the ability of a think tank to successfully engage with other policy-makers.

Instead, with 535 voting members in the House of Representatives and Senate, American think tanks possess a significant number of institutional actors to engage with and disseminate their message.

The second institutional aspect of the American political system that has been critical for understanding think tank development and proliferation in the US is the nature of the relationship between policy-makers and their respective political party. While the US is a quintessential case-study of a two-party system, the degree of fidelity between policy actors and their political party is weak, where fidelity represents the degree to which policy-makers are compelled to ‘toe the line’ of their political party. This phenomenon is especially exacerbated in the current political climate in the US (McCarty et al. 2001, p. 686, Nokken and Poole 2004, p. 565, Brown 2012, p. 197), especially under President Trump, as we will see. While a policy actor’s identification with a political party can be particularly crucial during electoral campaign periods and fundraising efforts, once in office, the individual policy-maker’s ideological will and constituents’ preferences trump considerations of party unity. In fact, there is even the possibility that being too loyal to one’s party can compromise the re-electoral success of a Representative or Senator (Carson et. al 2010). With the absence of a strong ‘whip’ function among the political parties, policy-makers have a high degree of discretion in the decision-making process. Accordingly, without a compelling ‘whipping’ function by party leadership on ‘how to vote,’ individual policy-makers reach their own decisions about their stance on a given policy. A recent, and prolific, example of this occurring can be found in the efforts of the Trump Presidency to usher in a repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act (widely referred to as ‘Obamacare’). Given that the Republican Party commands a majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, this would *prime facie* be an effectively rubber-stamped process. Yet, several Republican Congressmen and Senators have publicly voiced their criticism and skepticism of various plans to modify and/or nullify the legislation, despite (or in spite of) the President’s preferences. Ultimately, the most recent attempt at a repeal and replacement of the legislation failed after three Republican Senators—including John McCain, a Republican Senator who has held that office since 1987—voted in opposition, thereby skirting the majority needed for the bill to pass. What this demonstrates, then, is that partisan fidelity cannot be presumed in the American policy-making process.

With such autonomy in the decision-making process, policy-makers necessarily rely on external actors, groups, and constituents in formulating the most effective, and politically tenable, appraisals of a given policy. Consequently, American think tanks are able to approach policy-makers with their research, analysis, and proposals, recognizing that each policy-maker largely enjoys free will in making their policy decisions (Hall and Deardorff 2006, p. 76, Bertelli and Wenger 2008, p. 228). Furthermore, the increasing polarization of party competition in the US congress has created a high degree of uncertainty in policy outcomes, more so than in situations where there is a more uniform alignment with decision-makers’ party affiliation and policy-making choices/preferences (Gray et al. 2005, p. 413). Once again, think tanks are able to capitalize on this institutional uncertainty by injecting their research and analysis into the policy debate. In addition to facing a wide variety of actors in multiple institutional loci, the absence of a strong tradition of party loyalty in vote-casting allows think tanks to treat all policy-makers as potentially receptive to external input and, ultimately, subject to persuasion.

With such autonomy in the decision-making process, policy-makers necessarily rely on external actors, groups, and constituents in formulating the most effective, and politically tenable, appraisals of a given policy. Consequently, American think tanks are able to approach policy-makers with their research, analysis, and proposals, recognizing that each policy-maker largely enjoys free will in making their policy decisions.

In short, the separation of powers and the limited party fidelity among policy-makers have allowed think tanks to thrive, whereas the absence of these institutional traits might have, counterfactually, obfuscated and hindered the development of the present think tank landscape.

Besides proliferating in both numbers and visibility to an extent not replicated in any other political system, what do American think tanks ‘do’ with the opportunities afforded by these institutional factors? American think tanks have pursued two principal, overriding objectives in their short and long-term ambitions. First, American think tanks have sought to assert their influence through demonstrating an observable impact in the policy-making process. The goal of demonstrating a policy impact, by its nature, represents a shorter timeframe in which think tanks seek to exercise their influence. The lifespan of a particular piece of legislation, for example, is considerably constrained when viewed against the lifespan of an ideological agenda, which inherently requires a longer-term field of vision that can certainly build upon the legislation of ideologically favourable policy.

The second principal goal that American think tanks have pursued lends to a longer-term ‘field of vision’ that provides a less deducible, metricized benchmark of success or failure than the success or failure of a particular piece of legislation, for example. Specifically, the second goal of American think tanks is to frame national public policy discourse and narratives within the ideological underpinning that most think tanks implicitly, or even explicitly, embrace. Unlike interest groups and lobby groups, which are typically understood to possess a short-term mandate in impacting the immediate outcome of policy-making, think tanks are also simultaneously broadly and normatively invested in the advancement of their ideological vision for US public policy.

American think tanks have pursued two principal, overriding objectives in their short and long-term ambitions. First, American think tanks have sought to assert their influence through demonstrating an observable impact in the policy-making process.

While there is considerable differentiation among American think tanks from a variety of angles, perhaps the most marked divergence among these organizations can be found in their budgets. Of course, like any other civil society organization, think tanks rely on and require funding for their day-to-day operations. Yet, through just a cursory glance at the varying budgets of American think tanks, it is obvious that some think tanks are able to operate with a comparatively smaller bottom line, while other think tanks enjoy robust, consistent funding and endowments that afford them considerable long-term financial discretion and security. Notwithstanding the clear differentiation among think tanks’ budgets, the connection between a given think tank’s budget and its concomitant success or influence is not particularly clear. While the most visible and ostensibly influential think tanks in the US enjoy robust balance sheets, it is unclear whether these organizations are financially privileged *because* of their intellectual and scholastic influence, or whether they have attained their intellectual and scholastic clout *because* of their financially privileged starting point. However, it is not necessarily the case that the visibility of a given think tank is wholly predicated on its ability to secure and compound its financial resources. For example, the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), during its relatively brief existence, relied on an annual budget of \$600,000 to fulfill its mandate – by comparison to the most visible American think tanks, this is a paltry and precarious financial existence. Yet, PNAC has been controversially touted as laying the intellectual foundation for what ultimately became known as the ‘Bush Doctrine’ following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Despite these pronouncements, several scholars have suggested that the actual influence of PNAC on the Bush administration has been greatly exaggerated (Abelson 2006, p. 93, Hammond 2007, p. 72).

With the exception of the RAND Corporation and the Urban Institute, which receive the majority of their funding from various departments of the American government (RAND Corporation 2017, p. 45, Urban Institute 2014, p. 1), most of the wealthiest American think tanks were created by virtue of a large initial endowment from their founder(s) and, oftentimes, namesake. Think tanks benefitting from such sizable endowments include the Brookings Institution, Hoover Institution, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Russell Sage Foundation, and the Heritage Foundation. Beyond the founding monetary contributions many think tanks have received, there are various sources of funding which these organizations use to sustain their day-to-day operations. Of these funding sources, there are two general categories under which think tanks' benefactors fall: individual and organizational. Of these two categories, the organizational donors are typically (though, with notable exceptions) responsible for fulfilling the majority of think tanks' annualized budgets. Yet, individual-level donations not only contribute to the operating expenses of think tanks, but can also be seen as symbolizing a broader grass-roots appeal.

From an organizational perspective, corporations, trade associations, philanthropic organizations, and other private and civil society groups frequently make financial contributions to think tanks. At the individual level, contributions are typically considerably less sizable than those of organizational benefactors, though several think tanks have also benefitted from multi-million dollar donations from wealthy individuals. In return, think tanks are often able to offer naming opportunities (for internal centres or research endowments), and certainly entitle the donor to a tacit 'all-access pass' to the think tank's events and activities. However, individual donors can serve as an important source of revenue for think tanks, in part because of the recurrent nature of many of these individual donors. In their fundraising appeals to individual donors, American think tanks actively encourage donations to be made on a recurrent basis, as opposed to a one-time contribution. Many American think tanks now offer the opportunity for funders to bequeath portions of their estate to the organization, for example. This push for consistent funding effectively serves two purposes. First, it allows for increased predictability in these organizations' financial planning and budgeting. By having an indication of what an organization's budget will look like year-to-year, it becomes possible to allocate resources appropriately and efficiently. Second, in addition to ensuring a consistent financial engagement with individual donors, American think tanks are also able to use this financial relationship to engage with individuals in the context of the wider work of the organization. In other words, fostering a relationship with individual donors also allows think tanks to keep these individuals apprised of the 'output' of the organizations they are contributing to. This frequent communication allows think tanks to market their message and demonstrates to donors that their contributions are leading to an effective output. Effectively, donors are looking for a 'return on investment,' and think tanks are keen to provide funders with an impression that supports this.

The balance between individual and organizational donors is not consistent across all American think tanks, nor is it the case that all think tanks place the same emphasis on fundraising in their day-to-day operations. Further, it is not the case that all donors are looking for the same 'return on investment' nor are they making contributions on the basis of the same rationale. For example, some donors might be drawn to a particular think tank on the basis of its leadership. Once again, the case of Jim DeMint is telling. The appointment of DeMint led *The Economist* to suggest that, as the former senator vacated his seat and assumed leadership of the Heritage Foundation in 2012, "Mr DeMint, a favourite of the tea-party movement, will lead to a fund-raising bonanza. There is a clear sense in which that is very good for Heritage" (*The Economist*, "Heritage DeMinted," 2012). Given that revenue for the Heritage Foundation increased by roughly \$10 million between 2012 and 2015 (Heritage 2012, Heritage 2015), the case could be made that Mr. DeMint's appointment has indeed led to a 'fundraising bonanza.' Whatever the inspiration for donors, it is the case that American think tanks require engagement from

private individuals and organizations to provide the financial stability that allows them to pursue their mandates without a paralyzing preoccupation over their financial security.

Clearly, the institutional composure of the American policy-making process has been generous to American think tanks in terms of opportunities for access and ‘influence.’ Further, the advocacy, research, and analysis for many think tanks—and especially the ‘DC-5’—has been bolstered by considerable budgetary resources. However, it is also true that the current political climate, policy-making mores, and public policy exigencies in the US do not entirely resemble the political period in which these organizations built and established their role in contributing to policy-making process and public policy narratives. One of the most distinct phenomena to mark this *zeitgeist* centers on the rise of populism within the US, as well as in many liberal democracies. While American think tanks have, empirically and theoretically, commanded a significant role in the policy-making and public policy communities in the US, it is not necessarily the case that this new political reality will leave these organizations unaffected. The remainder of this article will be dedicated to considering the relationship between think tanks and a shifting political and public policy landscape in the US, especially vis-à-vis populism.



Image by Gage Skidmore on Creative Commons

by:

A rising (or resurgent) populism

In recent years across many liberal democracies, there has been a discernible motif of increased electoral representation of what are broadly understood to be populist actors and parties.² Though this has not been uniform across all liberal democracies, “populist leaders like Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, Norbert Hoffer, Nigel Farage, and Geert Wilders are prominent today in many countries, altering established patterns of party competition in contemporary Western societies” (Norris and Inglehart 2016, p. 2). Populist leaders and parties have long existed in liberal democracies, to be sure. In most of these instances, however, the electoral success of populist candidates and parties has been minimal and episodic. Yet, it is uncertain whether the current ‘wave’ of populism reflects a distinct ontological

2. While we will be discussing the precise (though no less contested) components of populism shortly, this article will be adopting tripartite understanding of what a populist philosophy, framework, or orientation broadly entails (with varying degrees of emphasis on each): anti-establishmentarianism, authoritarian leadership, and nativism (i.e. the protection of domestic-born citizens’ interests before those of immigrants).

separation from previous theoretical and normative conceptions of populism—situating this current ‘wave’ of populism as a distinct phenomenon will almost certainly be subject to considerable analysis and debate in the future. What *is* distinct, however, is the empirical extent to which populist leaders and parties are gaining political traction in these institutional contexts.

In the US, the campaign leading to the presidential election on November 9, 2016 was marked by the prolific ascension of two populist candidates in both major parties—Democratic (Bernie Sanders) and Republican (Donald Trump). In both cases, these populist candidates represented a distinct ‘shock’ to the norms and conventions of previous presidential campaigns. While Sanders was ultimately unsuccessful in winning the Democratic candidacy for president, his grassroots voter engagement and (self-described) variant of socialism appealed to a significant segment of the Party. Even more impressive was that Sanders captured this significant support despite running against a candidate (Hillary Clinton) who was the presumed unchallenged candidate to run in the presidential campaign; a campaign, it should be noted, that was widely predicted to be an unprecedented success for Clinton and the Democratic Party more broadly. While Sanders provided a populist ‘shock’ to the Democratic Party, Donald Trump represented a populist ‘shock’ to the electorate in both the Republican Party and the general election. Throughout the presidential campaign, then-candidate Trump highlighted an extensive number of policy areas in which he had ambitions to reform or, in many cases, repeal. Though the policy agenda of President Trump is far beyond the scope of this article, the approximately six months of the Trump presidency thus far have left policy-making, bureaucratic, and legal institutions of government in an era of unprecedented uncertainty. Assuming an uninterrupted Trump presidency, this near-ubiquitous uncertainty is likely to be compounded over the remaining years in his first term in office.

Donald Trump represented a populist ‘shock’ to the electorate in both the Republican Party and the general election.

One way to attempt to understand the public policy agenda and environment that Trump has fomented is to explicate the components of ‘populism’—a term that has increasingly been applied to Trump, but has not been sufficiently unpacked in its meaning and framework. By ‘populism,’ this article is referring to a concept that has attracted a diversity of interpretations in definition, key concepts, and theoretical frameworks. Though the purpose of this article is not to contemplate the meaning and ambit of what is considered ‘populism,’ there are three principal components to populism that are near-ubiquitously employed throughout the literature: anti-establishment, authoritarian leadership, and nativism (Mudde 2007).

First, by adopting an anti-establishment tone, emphasis is placed on the rejection of ‘elitist’ establishment politics, instead preferring the elevation of ‘ordinary’ voices as central to public policy narratives and objectives. It is somewhat ironic, it should be noted, that many of the more successful populist leaders in contemporary politics have categorically belonged to the most privileged and elite segments of the population. It is, instead, the public advocacy and policy positions of these leaders that have been populist. Nevertheless, the rejection of establishment politics has remained central to the platform of populist leaders. Second, contemporary populism has demonstrated a propensity for leaders who are perceived as strong and, therefore, capable of standing up to establishment politics that have become ‘sticky’ and reinforced over time. It is not surprising, then, that many of the populist successes we have seen in recent years have been marshalled by leaders who have attracted a ‘cult of personality.’ Of course, and as we are currently seeing, it is considerably easier being a populist candidate than it is being a populist leader. During a campaign, candidates can make pronouncements, vows, and incite

controversy in ways that are politically, institutionally, or legally untenable once in office. The third principal component to populism entails the preference for policies and narratives that emphasize self-interest of the state and the belief in monoculturalism (as opposed to multiculturalism). Oftentimes, this manifests in a nostalgia for ‘the past’ (parts thereof, or wholesale) and the concomitant preference for traditionalism in many forms. Among the populist movements and leaders that have attained success in the contemporary period, most, if not all, of these aspects are present. There are, of course, differences in their respective emphasis on these traits—some populist candidates and leaders have placed great emphasis on the anti-establishment narratives (such as Nigel Farage and Bernie Sanders), while others have placed emphasis on nativist elements (such as Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen).

The three dominant components to populism all represent a departure from the *status quo* in many liberal democratic polities. As such, when populist leaders attain political and institutional traction, this also requires non-governmental public policy actors and organizations to adapt to unfamiliar territory if they seek to maintain utility and relevance to the policy-making apparatus.

One such type of organization is think tanks. If think tanks desire to continue impacting policy-making processes while also shaping public policy narratives, they are required to grapple with the political realities within which they function. Thus, with the rise of populist success, think tanks would not be best served by remaining idle. Instead, think tanks that face both the challenges and opportunities that come with ‘shocks’ to the political *status quo* are the most likely to continue to remain relevant. What are, then, the challenges and opportunities that American think tanks face in the current populist landscape?



Challenges and opportunities for think tanks in an era of Trump

Challenges

The first principal challenge that American think tanks face in the current public policy landscape is that of funding. This specifically applies to think tanks that whose operations depend significantly on their receipt of government funding. It should be noted, however, that most American think tanks do not receive a proportionally robust degree of federal government funding, in the form of grants, tenders, or (highly lucrative, though elusive) untied funding. In many cases, this is not the result of a dearth of funding, but rather a deliberate attempt of think tanks to craft a perception of independence from the institutions and actors they wish to assert influence upon. Nevertheless, some think tanks

do rely heavily on governmental funding, and there are three think tanks that could be particularly adversely impacted by the prerogatives of Trump's budgetary powers: RAND Corporation, the Urban Institute, and the Wilson Center.

RAND is the least likely to face threats to its operations, for two reasons. First, at approximately \$300 million in annual revenue (RAND 2017) from multiple donor constituencies (despite institutions and agencies of the US government providing the bulk of funding, at approximately 80%) (RAND Corporation 2017), it is unlikely that the withdrawal of government support would force the organization to 'close its doors.' Even if the entirety of US funding to RAND was cancelled, the organization could likely survive several years until a more favorable president reinstated funding. Second, not only is RAND particularly well-funded, but its ties (both historic and present) to matters of defence policy are likely enough to warrant the continuation of funding from the Trump administration. The Trump administration is particularly sympathetic to the various organs of the US military, as well as advocating a broadly 'pro-military' standpoint. Although RAND has significantly expanded its scope of research and policy analysis, its founding as a defence-based research institute can serve to placate any calls for funding cuts from the administration. Thus, RAND's longevity is unlikely to be compromised in light of the Trump administration.

For the Urban Institute and Wilson Center, however, these are particularly uncertain times. Both of these organizations receive significant grant funding from the American government: approximately 44% in the case of the Urban Institute's roughly \$95 million budget (Urban Institute 2016), while the Wilson Center depends on the federal government for roughly one third of its budget (The Wilson Center 2017). In the specific case of the Wilson Center, however, there have already been 'warning shots' in a scale-back of federal governmental funding. In the proposed 2018 President's Budget, for example, "The Budget proposes to eliminate activities supported through Federal appropriations at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (Center), given these activities can be supported through private fundraising and the Administration does not consider them to be core Federal responsibilities" (Executive Office of Management and Budget 2017, p. 106).

Through this proposed scenario, the Wilson Center would face a decline in federal funding from \$11 million in 2017 to \$7 million in 2018, followed by an elimination of the entirety of government funding thereafter. Clearly, the Trump Administration's threat to the operational longevity of certain think tanks is far from rhetorical; if this proposed budget is indeed adopted, the Wilson Center faces a severe shortfall that could compromise its immediate future, let alone its capacity to provide the scale and depth of research it currently does.

For most DC-based think tanks, the vanishing of governmental support would hardly be welcomed. Yet, their operational survival would be unlikely to be jeopardized by the withdrawal federal government grants, tenders, and untied funding. Many think tanks in Washington, and certainly the most visible and financially robust, have a diversified funding base, ranging from individuals to corporations to philanthropic foundations to foreign governments.³ For example, the Brookings Institution is unlikely to face major operational upheaval if its federal government support were to vanish, encompassing just 2% of their budget (Brookings Institution 2017). For the deep-pocketed Heritage Foundation,

3. The significant inflow of foreign government funding to American think tanks has only recently been exposed. This issue became particularly acute after the New York Times ran a 2014 expose on foreign governments funding Washington-based think tanks for the explicit purposes of attracting attention of, and exerting influence upon, the US government.

Cato Institute, and Center for American Progress, their absence of any US federal government funding makes this a moot predicament (Heritage Foundation 2016, Cato Institute 2016, Center for American Progress 2017). For the Wilson Center and Urban Institute, though, these are precarious times, at best. With no evident closeness between the Trump administration and the specific mandates of these organizations, the next four years (at least) are likely to mark a particularly uncertain period for both of these organizations.

A second challenge to emerge from the current American political landscape is more reputational, and is linked to President Trump's inculcation of a populist skepticism toward organizations such as think tanks. Though then-campaigning Trump was unlikely referring exclusively to think tanks when he characterized the Washington 'swamp' that he vowed to 'drain,' think tanks are undeniably part of the Washington policy establishment that Trump is, at best, skeptical of and, at worst, antagonistic toward.

The challenge is not so much that Trump has his own prejudices toward public policy institutions and organizations, but rather that this skepticism is informing the decision-making processes in the Executive branch. Whereas in recent presidential administrations think tanks had served as insightful, innovative, and comprehensive sources of policy inspiration, the Trump administration is showing a propensity to rejecting this tradition.

In fact, there are reports suggesting that there might be a reverse movement of the revolving door: staff in the Trump administration are actively seeking employment in think tanks. One of the principal concerns here is that the Trump administration's skepticism to independent policy voices could 'spill over' to other policy-makers and institutions that have traditionally been receptive to the input of think tanks. This could have the effect of delegitimizing think tanks as veritable sources of policy knowledge, all the while hampering their advocacy efforts to be 'heard' by policymakers. Though it is unlikely that Trump can singlehandedly delegitimize organizations that have been active participants in the American public policy discourse since at least the post-war period, think tanks face increased pressure to justify their indispensable roles within the American public policy environment.

A third challenge that American think tanks face in the current political landscape is the real or perceived closed decision-making process that currently defines the Executive branch of government. Historically, presidents have turned to think tanks as repositories of policy research and analysis; even those presidents who campaigned on an 'outsider,' anti-establishment platform have, in one way or another, incorporated think tank research and insight into their decision-making (Abelson and Carberry 1997). During presidential campaigns, there is an insufficient capacity to provide rigorous and comprehensive research and analysis 'in-house,' which leads to these campaigns including outside actors and organizations in a consultative relationship. According to Abelson and Carberry, there are two particular factors which might lead a presidential candidate to seek the counsel of think tanks: the candidate's status as a Washington 'insider/outsider' and the intensity of their ideological adherence. Despite the absence of a distinct, homogenous ideological underpinning, Trump's status as a categorical Washington 'outsider' would suggest that his campaign would have been replete with think tank input and personnel. Yet, during the presidential campaign, the Trump team was curiously devoid of think tank personnel and discernible relationships to these organizations. This was particularly curious given the historical pattern of presidential campaigns developing relationships with think tanks, as well as Trump's absence of previous experience in a public policy context.

The Clinton campaign, in contrast to Trump's approach, included a robust network of scholars and researchers, many of which were/are directly connected to several of the nation's most prominent think tanks. This can, in part, be explained by Bill and Hillary Clinton's long-standing relationships with several progressive think tanks, most notably the Washington-based Center for American Progress (CAP). It is reasonable to suggest that think tanks in a Clinton presidency would have, counterfactually, fulfilled a significant 'human resources' role. The trend of think tank absence in Trump's campaign has thematically spilled over into his role as President: there is little evidence pointing to a robust engagement with the think tank community. Of course, no president is obliged to seek the input of civil society actors into decision-making, but the extent to which Trump has isolated himself from other public policy voices (competing or sympathetic) is unprecedented. What this means is that the closed-door decision-making process in the Trump administration has stymied think tanks' capacity, and desire, to inform executive-level decision-making. This is a motif that was made clear well before Trump became commander-in-chief, and has largely been uninterrupted into his presidency.

A final major challenge that American think tanks are facing in the Trump administration is the swiftness of changes in policy priorities and 'fields of vision.' Many mornings of his presidency thus far, Trump will use Twitter to express short, but acerbic, statements on his appraisals of ongoing political and international events, or laying out his short-term policy priorities. As will be discussed, this presents opportunities for think tanks with a cadre of readily-deployable scholars to provide commentary to the media. However, for many American think tanks, this challenges their capacity to provide relevant substantive, long-term policy analysis and recommendations that will be widely considered and debated among the policy-making and public policy communities. If the policy priorities of the President and, by extension, other institutions of government are unpredictable and subject to such unpredictable variation, think tanks face fewer opportunities to generate and disseminate timely, informed analysis and recommendations that can be genuinely considered by policy-makers and the broader public. In the first 100 days of the Trump administration, for example, the issues the President had expressed immediate interest in reforming, cancelling, or creating include the corporate and personal tax code, border security, healthcare, trade agreements, lobbying limits, and a Supreme Court nomination, among many other policy issues. Clearly, just in the first 100 days of his Presidency, there has been a marked diversity in priorities for the administration, which has thus far been met with mixed success. For American think tanks, such variation in the policy agenda provides a challenge to their ability to dedicate necessary time and resources to introducing substantive analysis into these public policy discussions.

American think tanks are facing a particularly formidable set of challenges in the wake of Donald Trump's election. Although these challenges are not necessarily *caused* by the election of Trump, nor are they entirely unprecedented (government funding, for example, has not always been a 'given' for certain think tanks), they have nevertheless become heightened in the wake of Trump's election as president. Thus, the discourse, action thus far, and *zeitgeist* of the current presidential administration has exacerbated the extent to which these challenges are a reality for the American think tank community.

Opportunities

Despite the significant challenges that think tanks face in the current US political climate, there simultaneously exist significant opportunities for these organizations to exert impact on policy-making and the public policy discourse. In particular, there are two principal opportunities that think tanks can take advantage of: a fragmented partisan landscape and a particularly engaged citizenry.

In particular, there are two principal opportunities that think tanks can take advantage of: a fragmented partisan landscape and a particularly engaged citizenry.

Within the first 100 days of the Trump presidency, partisan in-fighting has become a central theme of the policy-making landscape. In addition to the aforementioned weak compulsion to party loyalty that US policy-makers demonstrate, I would further argue that the ‘shock’ that Trump has brought to Washington has also left political parties further divided on how best to govern and legislate effectively in these unprecedented circumstances. As a result, policy-makers are increasingly divided not just on policy grounds, but also on strategic and procedural grounds. This was perhaps most famously exemplified by the failure of the Trump administration to secure healthcare reform support in the House of Representatives. However, it was not just Democratic members of Congress that threatened the passage of the Bill, but members of the Republican Party as well. Within the Republican Party, which possesses majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate (alongside, of course, the Presidency), there are fissures and fractures. This means that partisan affiliation is an insufficient guarantee of Trump’s legislative success. Furthermore, a fractured partisan structure means that individual legislators are not shying away from voting in accordance with priorities other than party loyalty.

For think tanks, this represents a significant opportunity to provide receptive individual policy-makers with research and analysis. Unlike many other liberal democracies, especially in the Westminster tradition, legislators in the US exercise considerable individual discretion in their policy-making decisions, even under the risk of reproach from the party establishment. For think tanks, this represents a great opportunity: if individual policy-makers enjoy latitude in their policy priorities and decisions, the insight and analysis of independent policy research organizations is a valuable resource. This is not to say, however, that the political parties do not attempt to influence the legislative priorities and decisions of their party’s elected representatives. In fact, they attempt to do this quite vociferously. Yet, individual policy-makers still take it upon themselves to formulate their own measured approach to public policy issues and legislative decision-making. It is in providing independent research and analysis where think tanks have a comparative advantage. Given a fragmented partisan landscape, and the concomitant weakness of party unity on legislative decisions, think tanks are presented with an opportunity to further enmesh their viewpoints and analysis in policy-making circles.

For think tanks, this represents a great opportunity: if individual policy-makers enjoy latitude in their policy priorities and decisions, the insight and analysis of independent policy research organizations is a valuable resource.

The second opportunity for think tanks, which is also related to one of their aforementioned challenges, rests in the level of engagement among the American citizens (as well as individuals around the world). One of the strategies employed by a populist presidential candidate (such as Trump) is to spark political interest among segments of the population who are ostensibly detached and disengaged from political activity. By engaging these citizens, and ultimately compelling them to voice their frustration and disenchantment through voting, the level of interest in political issues and activities post-election increases (Liu 2017). However, the increase in voter engagement does not necessarily mean voters are more enthusiastic or positively impassioned by the campaign or presidency. During the summer preceding the election, for example, the Pew Research Center noted that “the 2016 campaign has

attracted a high level of interest from voters. Several key measures of voter attention and engagement are currently as high—or higher—than at any point over the last two decades” (Pew Research Center 2016). However, this does not imply that voters’ engagement with the political process has been positive: “the current campaign is perceived by many to be interesting rather than dull (77% vs. 17%), but also too negative (68% vs. 28% not too negative), and not focused on important policy debates (65% vs. 28% focused on important policy debates)” (Ibid). Furthermore, researchers at George Washington University believe that “this election cycle introduced a new tone and tenor of rhetoric used on the campaign trail. The coarseness of the language has started to have an impact on voter perceptions of the race. Half of the likely voters surveyed said that this language is ‘repulsive’ and has no place in a presidential campaign” (George Washington University 2016). What this demonstrates is that, on the one hand, citizens were more engaged with the political process than in recent memory while, on the other hand, this engagement was largely marked by negative perceptions and distaste for the campaign rhetoric and most of the candidates.

Faced with an attentive citizenry, think tanks can take advantage of this phenomenon in two principal ways. First, American think tanks have an expanded number of individuals who might be interested in research and analysis of the salient public policy issues of the day. This might not necessarily take the form of an individual perusing a think tank’s webpages to download comprehensive reports on healthcare reform, for instance. But, each time a think tank’s scholar or other representative is featured in print or on television, for example, the awareness of their associated think tank is consequently exposed to a wide audience who may not have been familiar with their organization. From a ‘brand awareness’ perspective, then, a more politically engaged population can help to inflate the name-recognition and repute of a think tank. Further, and more ethereally, an engaged—though viscerally skeptical, frustrated, and angered—citizenry can provide an opportunity for American think tanks to bolster their credibility in the public’s eye. As Americans’ faith in the levers of government in Washington continues to flirt with historical lows (Pew Research Center 2017)—alongside record lows in trust and confidence in the mass media (Gallup 2016)—think tanks are interestingly situated to perhaps capture some of the credibility, trust, and confidence that has been eroded from major institutions. Of course, capturing this credibility is no easy task for think tanks; frequently appearing on/among the mass media, hosting policy-makers at events, and providing analysis on the government-of-the-day does little to encourage the impression of a separation of think tanks from credibility-challenged sectors. Yet, for think tanks with extensive networks of supporters, funders, and followers, directly reaching these groups could serve to enhance the perception of think tanks as independent arbiters of research and analysis. This is not, however, the most tangible benefit that think tanks can reap from this phenomenon.

With a more engaged population, think tanks can use this opportunity to fundraise and ultimately expand their number of donors.

With a more engaged population, think tanks can use this opportunity to fundraise and ultimately expand their number of donors. Whereas politically disengaged citizens are unlikely to direct their donations to organizations whose mission is to engage with political issues and actors, the increase in political engagement represents a significant opportunity for think tanks to access donors who might have never considered, or even heard of, their respective organizations. If think tanks are able market themselves as truly independent organizations that are unafraid to confront the organizations and institutions that Americans are increasingly disenfranchised and distrustful of, it is quite possible that donors will find think tanks to be a worthwhile investment.



Image
Gage Skidmore on Creative Commons

by:

Conclusion

The election of Donald Trump has represented a significant rattling of the policy-making and public policy landscapes in the US. The beginning period of the Trump Presidency has left no shortage of controversy, criticism, and ‘palace intrigue.’ Among the proliferating list of potentially impacted states, actors, and organizations, think tanks face an uncertain trajectory going forward as their strategies, priorities, and perhaps even roles are being ontologically challenged. Among these challenges, this article identified four that are particularly acute: funding, escaping their status as part of the ‘swamp,’ penetrating a closed decision-making executive, and maintaining policy relevance as the vicissitudes of the President’s priorities are unpredictable.

While the tenure of President Trump is still young, for think tanks to continue to exert a valuable and relevant role, these organizations must face the policy-making and public policy realities in which they are currently operating.

Despite the challenges the Trump Presidency is posing for think tanks, there are opportunities these organizations can capitalize on. First, a fractured partisan landscape (particularly within the Republican Conference in the House of Representatives and Senate) affords think tanks opportunities to ingratiate themselves in the policy-making outcomes of individual policy-makers. Though think tanks have long enjoyed a general receptiveness among many policy-makers to their research and analysis, a fragmented partisan unity can serve to further open policy-makers to think tank input. A second principal opportunity arises from an attentive, engaged citizenry. Regardless of one’s partisan or ideological stripe, a large segment of the electorate is engaged in the ongoing public policy issues the Trump administration is advancing and reacting to. For think tanks, this creates an expanded number of politically-engaged citizens who might derive interest in the publications and activities of their organization. As such, think tanks can capitalize on a captive public by disseminating their research and message to a wider audience. If these challenges are heeded, American think tanks can not only survive the current period of uncertainty, but could also thrive.

There remain numerous questions that have emerged throughout the course of this article, but deserve further observation and sufficient space for analysis in future research. First, can the American think tank experience with populism be helpful to think tanks in other liberal democracies that are experiencing similar trends? Given that similar populist movements and leaders are gaining political traction, the immediate temptation might be to suggest that think tanks in other states with rising populist tides should pay close attention to the successes and failures of think tanks in the US. Yet, this might not be the most effective strategy. As has become clear, think tanks relate quite differently to their policy-making apparatus on the basis of form of government, tax/finance law, and party structure, among many other features. Think tanks functioning at the post-state level in the EU, for example, possess fundamentally different roles, priorities, and constituencies than their American counterparts (Rastrick 2017). Thus, while the temptation might exist to transpose the American think tank experience under President Trump to similarly populist-affected think tank contexts elsewhere, such comparisons should be made with considerable caution. Nevertheless, scholars should begin to ask what impacts a more visible and successful populist movement might bear upon think tank communities beyond the US.

A second question centers on the undulatory nature of think tank proliferation in the US and how, throughout their history, American think tanks have both waxed and waned in numbers in response to certain domestic and international events. The question then becomes whether this current political period marks a distinct episode in the history of American think tanks. So, given the temptation scholars have faced in categorizing think tank emergence in a series of ‘waves,’ is it possible that the current political climate in the US will mark the beginning (or end) of a new ‘wave’ of think tanks in number and/or nature? In some ways, an early postulation could be that American think tanks are indeed facing a new ‘wave’ marked by shifting prerogatives and preferences of the donor community. Though think tanks are preparing to adapt and confront the new realities of policy-making and public policy in the US, their funders and beneficiaries might not be as willing to donate to these organizations without reappraising their niche in the current political *zeitgeist*. There is already evidence of this taking place—the Foreign Policy Initiative (FPI), a right-leaning DC-based think tank, will be shuttering its doors at the end of August 2017. Facing financial difficulty, “those close to the organization said that in the new policy and political environment marked by the ascendancy of Donald Trump, many donors, including [billionaire Paul] Singer, are reassessing where to put their funds and FPI, although well established and well liked, simply didn’t warrant the continued investment” (Rogin 2017). While it is too early in the Trump Presidency to determine the extent of impact upon think tanks, it is telling that we already see relatively established think tanks being met with uncertainty and ‘soul searching’ from their donor constituencies. As such, there is early evidence to suggest that think tanks may very well be entering a new ‘wave,’ though it will take several years before authoritative analysis will be possible on this question.

This article sought to explicate some of the implications of the Trump administration on think tanks in the US, particularly those based in Washington, DC. While the tenure of President Trump is still young, for think tanks to continue to exert a valuable and relevant role, these organizations must face the policy-making and public policy realities in which they are currently operating. For some think tanks, this might mean a considerable effort to diversify their funding sources, while for others this might mean a reinvigorated strategy to interact directly with policy-makers in their legislative actions and ambitions. What is for certain, however, is that no think tank in DC can proceed with a ‘business as usual’ mandate and expect similar influence, access, and visibility that previous administrations might have fomented.

References

Abelson, Donald E. and Christine M. Carberry. (1997). “Policy Experts in Presidential Campaigns: A Model of Think Tank Recruitment.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27(4): 679–697.

Abelson, Donald. (2006). *A Capitol Idea: Think Tanks & US Foreign Policy*. Montreal: McGill–Queen’s Press.

Abelson Donald. (2009). *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*. Montreal: McGill–Queen’s Press.

Bertelli, Anthony M. and Jeffrey B. Wenger. (2008). “Demanding Information: Think Tanks and the US Congress.” *British Journal of Political Science* 39(2): 225–242.

The Brookings Institution. (2017). *2016 Annual Report*. Available online at: www.brookings.edu/about-us/annual-report/

Brown, Adam R. (2012). “The Item Veto’s Sting.” *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 12(2): 183–203.

Carson, Jamie L., Gregory Koger, Matthew J. Lebo and Everett Young. (2010). “The Electoral Costs of Party Loyalty in Congress.” *American Journal of Political Science* 54(3): 598–616.

The Cato Institute. (2016). *The Cato Institute 2015 Annual Report*. Available online at: <https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/cato-annual-report-2015-update-ii.pdf>

Center for American Progress. (2017). *Our Supporters*. Available online at: www.americanprogress.org/c3-our-supporters/

Denham, Andrew. (1996). *Think-Tanks of the New Right*. Aldershot, UK: Dartmouth.

Edwards, Lee. (1997). *The Power of Ideas: The Heritage Foundation at 25 Years*. Ottawa, IL: Jameson Books.

Etzion, Dror and Gerald F. Davis. (2008). “Revolving Doors? A Network Analysis of Corporate Officers and U.S. Government Officials.” *Journal of Management Inquiry* 17(3): 157–161.

Executive Office of Management and Budget. (2017). *Major Savings and Reforms: Budget of the U.S. Government, Fiscal Year 2018*. Executive Office of the President of the United States. Available online at: www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/budget/fy2018/msar.pdf

Gallup. (2016). “American’ Trust in Mass Media Sinks to New Low.” Available online at: www.gallup.com/poll/195542/americans-trust-mass-media-sinks-new-low.aspx

The George Washington University. (2016). “Americans Overwhelmingly Engaged in 2016 Election but Tone of Race Is Affecting Voters, New GW Battleground Poll Shows.” Available online at: <https://mediarelations.gwu.edu/americans-overwhelmingly-engaged-2016-election-tone-race-affecting-voters-new-gw-battleground-poll>

Gray, Virginia, Lowery, David, Fellowes, Matthew and Jennifer L. Anderson. (2005). “Legislative Agendas and Interest Advocacy: Understanding the Demand Side of Lobbying.” *American Politics Research* 33(3): 404–434.

Hall, Richard L. and Alan V. Deardorff. (2006). “Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy.” *American Political Science Review* 100: 69–84.

Hammond, Philip. (2007). *Media, War and Postmodernity*. Oxford, UK: Routledge.

“Heritage DeMinted.” *The Economist*, 6 December 2012.

The Heritage Foundation. (2012). *Leading the Fight for Freedom & Opportunity*. Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation. Available online at: http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2012/pdf/2012AnnualReport.pdf

The Heritage Foundation. (2015). *Opportunity for All, Favoritism for None: Annual Report 2014*. Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation. Available online at: https://s3.amazonaws.com/thf_media/2015/pdf/2014annualreport.pdf

The Heritage Foundation. (2016). “The Heritage Foundation’s Financial Information.” Available online at: www.heritage.org/article/the-heritage-foundations-financial-information

Kelley, Christopher S. and Bryan W. Marshall. (2009). “Assessing Presidential Power: Signing Statements and Veto Threats as Coordinated Strategies.” *American Politics Research* 37(3): 508–533.

Liu, Eric. (2017). “How Donald Trump is Reviving American Democracy.” *The Atlantic*, available online at: www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/03/how-donald-trump-is-reviving-our-democracy/518928/

McCarty, Nolan, Poole, Keith T., and Howard Rosenthal. (2001). “The Hunt for Party Discipline in Congress.” *American Political Science Review* 95(3): 673–687.

McGann, James G. (2005). *Comparative Think Tanks, Politics and Public Policy*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

McGann, James G. (2016) *2015 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*. Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania. Available at http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=think_tanks

McGann, James G. (2017) *2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*. Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania. Available at: http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=think_tankstanks

Mudde, Cas. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Nokke, Timothy P. and Keith T. Poole. (2004). “Congressional Party Defection in American History.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 29(4): 545–568.

Norris, Pippa and Ronald Inglehart. (2016). “Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Havens and Cultural Backlash.” *Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Working Paper Series*, RWP16-026.

Pew Research Center. (2016). “2016 Campaign: Strong Interest, Widespread Dissatisfaction.” Available online at: www.people-press.org/2016/07/07/1-campaign-engagement-and-interest/

Pew Research Center. (2017). “Public Trust in Government: 1958–2017.” Available online at: www.people-press.org/2017/05/03/public-trust-in-government-1958-2017/

RAND Corporation. (2017). *2016 RAND Annual Report*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Available online at < https://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate_pubs/CP1-2016.html>

RAND Corporation. (2017a). “How We’re Funded.” Available online at: www.rand.org/about/clients_grantors.html

Rastrick, Christopher J. (2017). *Think Tanks in the US and EU: The Role of Policy Institutes in Washington and Brussels*. New York: Routledge.

Ricci, David M. (1993). *The Transformation of American Politics: The New Washington and the Rise of Think Tanks*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Rogin, Josh. (2017). “Conservative national security think tank shutting down.” *The Washington Post*, June 29, 2017. Available online at: www.washingtonpost.com/news/josh-rogin/wp/2017/06/29/conservative-national-security-think-tank-shutting-down/?utm_term=.bbbebdde7224

Saeki, Manabu. “Override Propensity in the US Congress: Veto Challenge and Override Vote by the Two Chambers.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 10(4): 70–83.

Shoup, Laurence H. (2015). *Wall Street’s Think Tank: The Council on Foreign Relations and the Empire of Neoliberal Geopolitics, 1976–2014*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.

Shulzinger, Robert D. (1984). *The Wise Men of Foreign Affairs*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Smith, James A. (1991). *The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Stone, Diane. (2004). “Think tanks beyond nation-states.” In *Think Tank Traditions: Policy research and the politics of ideas*, ed. Stone, Diane and Andrew Denham, 35–50. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Troy, Tevi. (2012). “Devaluing the Think Tank.” *National Affairs* 10 (Winter): 75–90.

Urban Institute. (2014). “Our Funders.” Available online at: www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2014_funders_2.pdf

Urban Institute. (2016). *Elevate the Debate: 2015 Annual Report*. Available online at: www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2015-annual-report.pdf

Weaver, Kent and James McGann. (2000). "Think Tanks and Civil Societies in a Time of Change." In *Think Tanks & Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action* ed. James G. McGann and R. Kent Weaver. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Weidenbaum, Murray. (2009). *The Competition of Ideas: The World of the Washington Think Tanks*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Wiarda, Howard J. (2008). "The New Powerhouses: Think Tanks and Foreign Policy." *American Foreign Policy Interests* 30(2): 96–117.

Wiarda, Howard J. (2009). *Conservative Brain Trust: The Rise, Fall, and Rise Again of the American Enterprise Institute*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

The Wilson Center. (2017). *Budget Justifications for the Fiscal Year 2017*. Available online at: www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/fy2017_budget_justification.pdf