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Forum

From Generation to Generation Reflections on the Evolution of Think Tanks

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Abstract

This study offers a series of reflections on the evolution of think tanks in Europe and the United States. In addition to exploring how these organizations have come to place a higher premium on political advocacy than rigorous policy research, the article raises a series of questions about how the preoccupation of think tanks with their global rankings, and their desire to inundate stakeholders with quick response policy research, can have serious implications for how policymakers formulate public policy. In the end, this study argues that for think tanks to serve the public interest, they need to engage in scientific research that adheres to proper and verifiable academic standards. Otherwise, these organizations will join the growing chorus of voices whose only interest is to serve their own institutional goals and those of their benefactors.

Keywords

think tanks, public policy, political advocacy, United States, Europe

Introduction

Decades from now, when historians, political scientists and sociologists reflect on the evolution of think tanks since the late nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, it should not take them long to unearth the various factors that led to their emergence and growth. In constructing a compelling argument as to why think tanks, particularly the ones located in the United States and Europe, became prominent fixtures on the political landscape in the years immediately preceding and following the great wars, the role that leading philanthropists and visionaries played in giving birth to many of these institutions will certainly come to light. Prominent figures of the Progressive Era (1880-1920) including Andrew Carnegie, Robert Brookings, and Herbert Hoover, were aware of the formidable challenges confronting the United States and its Western European allies in the decades prior to, and in the aftermath, of the First World War. They understood, as did many of their contemporaries in the public and private sector, the need for social, economic and political reform, the importance of creating more efficient and increasingly accountable government, and the vital contribution “experts” could make in improving the life of nations.

The purpose of this article is not to retrace the history of several distinguished American or European think tanks, nor is it to engage in a prolonged inquiry about how to define and operationalize these diverse and rather eclectic organizations. This laborious, and painstakingly difficult exercise has been taken up elsewhere (McGann and Weaver, 2000; Pautz, 2012). Rather, it is to reflect on how scholars, journalists and political pundits on both sides of the Atlantic have weighed in on discussions surrounding the evolution and changing role of think tanks, and the impact this supposed transformation has had on comparable institutions around the globe. To sharpen the parameters of this inquiry, two central themes, particularly important and relevant to how think tanks in the United States and in other advanced industrialized countries are studied and evaluated, will be explored. The first, which informs current discussions regarding the global think tank phenomenon, and the contribution these organizations make to public policy, is what sociologist Thomas Medvetz aptly coins the transformational thesis (Medvetz, 2012: 112). Simply put, proponents of this thesis, of which I am one, contend that during the latter half of the twentieth century, think tanks, especially those in the United States and in parts of Europe, have undergone a conversion or re-orientation from organizations known for conducting rigorous policy research, to institutions more engaged and invested in political advocacy. Many institutes established since the early 1970s have benefited from the experiences of their predecessors by establishing as their core function the need to engage in political advocacy. The London-based Adam Smith Institute (ASI), a free-market think tank with close ties to several conservative US think tanks comes to mind (Pirie, 2012). But the ASI is hardly alone in its desire to effect policy change. Europe is heavily populated with think tanks that recognize the importance of forging close ties with key stakeholders to shape public opinion and public policy, and they employ a variety of tactics to achieve their institutional goals.

If the desire to place a premium on political advocacy over policy research has become the norm for think tanks in the United States and in Europe, why have scholars who study these institutions become so alarmed? The answer is simple. This transformation has had a significant impact on the quality of work generated by think tanks, which in turn has serious repercussions for how policymakers, the public and other key stakeholders interpret and act upon their policy recommendations.

The second theme relates to the impression shared by many political commentators in Europe and in North America that think tanks in Washington, DC and in some European capitals have assumed too much power and influence. With close and enduring ties to key policymakers in the executive and legislative branches of government and throughout the bureaucracy, think tanks are perceived as powerful organizations with influential friends who occupy prominent positions in the policy-making establishment. This impression is reinforced when two other factors are considered: the incestuous relationship that has developed between think tanks and the media which provides the former with greater public visibility and prominence; and the considerable financial backing some high-profile policy institutes such as the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Center for American Progress, the Royal Institute of International Affairs and several of their competitors receive from philanthropic foundations and corporate donors (Bellant, 1991; Stefancic and Delgado, 1996; Parmar, 2012).

By exploring these two interrelated and overlapping themes, a much clearer picture will emerge as to the role and function these organizations perform in the United States, Europe and throughout the developed world. It is important to point out that although Europe is home to the largest concentration of think tanks on the globe (2219), it is the United States with 1872 think tanks, according to the *2018 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*, that continues to receive the lion's share of scholarly attention. While considerable work has been conducted in recent years on think tank development in the UK (Denham and Garnett, 1998), France (Boucher and Royo, 2012; Lenglet & Vilain, 2011), Germany (Thunert, 2012; Braml, 2017; Pautz, 2012), the EU (Rastrick, 2017) and in parts of Eastern Europe (Bakowski, & Szlachetko, 2012), American think tanks have attracted unparalleled scrutiny.

It is not surprising that most North American-based scholars are preoccupied with what happens inside the Washington Beltway. Even though Donald Trump has acknowledged his disdain for think tanks, how these institutions try to navigate their way through an increasingly toxic political environment provides researchers with interesting insights into their behavior. But exploring the inner world of high-profile US think tanks should not preclude a discussion of what similar institutions are doing in Europe and beyond. Indeed, much can be gained by understanding the evolution of European think tanks, how their history has been shaped, and how the political setting they inhabit influences how they engage in the discourse around key policy issues.

A systematic comparison of US and European think tanks falls well beyond the scope of this analysis. Still, it is important to keep in mind that while there are some interesting differences between some US and European think tanks, particularly those that serve the needs of political parties in Germany (Pautz) and the ones that try to facilitate political accommodation in the EU (Rastrick, 2017), in many ways, think tanks in the US and in Europe are similar. On both sides of the Atlantic, public policy institutes are committed to shaping the preferences and goals of policymakers and do so by pursuing a range of strategies.

The next section of this article explains why scholarly discussions about the proliferation of think tanks tend to focus on what has occurred in the United States. A consideration of the various factors that have contributed to their higher public profile will lay the foundation for a more detailed assessment of how they have evolved over time. I will then outline the similarities and differences between think tanks created during the Progressive Era and those established since the latter half of the twentieth century. Following this, a brief discussion of how the priority they place on advocacy could affect the design and implementation of public policy will be provided. Finally, I will explore the various channels upon which think tanks rely

to exercise influence, and some of the key difficulties encountered frequently in assessing their impact. Instead of struggling to come up with new and innovative ways to measure the policy influence of think tanks, I suggest we begin to focus more on what value think tanks bring to discussions at various stages of the policy cycle, including when ideas around key policy issues are being articulated, formulated, implemented and evaluated. This may help shed light on the more pressing question of how, and under what circumstances think tanks can make a positive and lasting contribution to the public interest.

Why Think Tanks Thrive in the United States

For think tanks to communicate ideas effectively, they require access to decision-makers and to other key stakeholders (Abelson, 2006, 2018). The highly decentralized and fragmented nature of the American political system offers multiple channels through which to interact with elected and appointed officials in every branch and at every level of government. When this very porous system is combined with a weak party system that does not require members to tow the party-line, and a federal bureaucracy that undergoes considerable turnover when administrations change, think tanks can target hundreds of policymakers. Newly elected members of Congress lacking policy expertise, seasoned White House officials in need of advice, and thousands of bureaucrats looking to tap into extensive policy networks, can benefit from strengthening their ties to think tanks. And in most cases, think tanks are only too willing to lend a hand. Think tanks also understand that while policymakers in Washington generally believe that it is “In God We Trust,” they do not hold as sacred “In Government We Trust.” Indeed, the general distrust many policymakers have in government is one of the reasons why they are willing to turn to the external policy research community for advice.

The so-called “revolving door” phenomenon in the United States is also useful in explaining why think tanks have gained such notoriety inside the Washington, DC Beltway. Scholars from think tanks looking to make their mark in politics frequently vacate the comfort and seclusion of their research offices to participate directly in policymaking. Indeed, in many instances, including the eight years Ronald Reagan held office, some think tanks on the left served as governments in exile, waiting for the right time to emerge onto the political stage. Once their taste for Washington politics has been satiated, or their careers in government have ended abruptly, policy experts often return to think tanks to decompress and to write their memoirs. They are often joined by other mid- and high-level policymakers who decide to cash in on their status as political insiders to secure a lucrative post at a prominent think tank. For many former policymakers, think tanks become their retirement homes.

A favorable tax regime also helps explain why the United States offers such a hospitable environment for think tanks. Registered as charities under the Internal Revenue Code, think tanks have benefited enormously from the contributions of several philanthropic foundations and corporations. In return for their gift, donors receive a generous tax deduction. Think tanks have also benefited from a strong culture of policy entrepreneurship in America. Several of the most visible think tanks in the US, including the Heritage Foundation, the CATO Institute and the Center for American Progress, were established by policy entrepreneurs willing and able to secure the funds required to help advance and promote their vision of the country. Unlike in other advanced industrial nations such as Canada, where several think tanks owe their existence to government initiatives, the majority of think tanks in the United States, in the UK, Germany and other European countries are financed by the private sector (Abelson, 2018).

When the various factors highlighted above are considered, it is not surprising that the United States has produced so many think tanks. Not only do there appear to be enough funds to underwrite the cost of establishing more of these institutions, but there is a growing demand on the part of policymakers, journalists, business leaders and other opinion makers for the various products and services think tanks provide. Ironically, while the currency of think tanks might have decreased because of the lack of serious policy research they produce, an observation made by former Hudson Institute scholar Tevi Troy (Troy, 2012), the market value of think tanks may be increasing, despite the obstacles many of these institutes are facing in interacting with the Trump White House (Abelson, forthcoming). In other words, since think tanks can cater to the varied needs of stakeholders – from providing pithy and easily accessible policy briefs, to validating a presidential candidate's policy prescriptions – their relevance and standing in the Washington political community has largely remained intact. If this is truly the case, it is even more important to consider if the re-orientation of think tanks from repositories of policy expertise to agents of advocacy has enhanced or undermined their status in the policy-making process.

It is difficult to ignore how the conditions described above have facilitated the development and growth of think tanks in the US. However, many of these conditions, including the rise of policy entrepreneurs, and the introduction of more favorable tax incentives for philanthropic donors to contribute to think tanks, also exist in many European countries. Compared to countries like the UK, France and Germany, the US provides more access points for think tanks and other non-governmental organizations to engage in discussions with policymakers. But what really sets the US think tank community apart from many of its European counterparts is the revolving door phenomenon which is often in full swing when administrations change. It is when a new president comes to power, and with him/her, thousands of bureaucratic positions to fill, that are created valuable opportunities for think tank staff to enter government.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

When scholars on both sides of the Atlantic observe the behavior of more advocacy-oriented think tanks, it is difficult for them not to become nostalgic about early twentieth-century policy research institutions. Reflecting on think tanks of this period, social and cultural historian James A. Smith, political scientist David Ricci (Smith, 1991; Ricci, 1993), and several others conjure up images of experts working tirelessly at their desks to identify the underlying causes of economic, social and political unrest. Given the ideological leanings of many of today's think tanks, it is understandable why these and other admirers of Britain's Fabian Society and Chatham House, home of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, and of the Brookings Institution during its formative years, are concerned about the direction think tanks have taken in recent decades. For those longing for the re-emergence of more traditional policy research institutes, it is both troubling and worrisome that think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation (Edwards, 1997, 2013), the overtly racist National Policy Institute, and many others have in effect become lobbyists for various political causes. Rather than helping government think its way through complex policy problems, a goal articulated by institutions during the Progressive era, contemporary think tanks appear to have embarked on a far less virtuous and more dangerous path. But have they?

In retracing the history of think tanks, it is tempting to portray Progressive era think tanks as high-minded and virtuous, and advocacy think tanks as opportunistic and sinister.

But to do so would be inaccurate and misleading. Think tanks at the turn of the twentieth century might have made a concerted effort to infuse discussions around various public policy issues with social science, but they did not turn a blind eye to how their research could influence policy debates. Heralded as the quintessential think tank because of its commitment to policy research, the Brookings Institution, for example, took great pride in advising members of Congress to draft the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 (Critchlow, 1985; Smith, 1991). Similarly, in the same year, the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations was established as an exclusive club for intellectuals and statesmen to discuss America's role in the world (Parmar, 2004). Some of the earliest think tanks refrained from interfering directly in deliberations on Capitol Hill and in the White House. However, from the time these institutions took root in America, they were aware of how their ideas could shape and influence the politics of the day.

Early twentieth-century think tanks, as well as those created over the past 40 years, perform similar roles and functions. Yet, regardless of when they were incorporated, what sustains them is their ability to engage in policy research and public advocacy. It is not the role of think tanks that has changed. It is that their orientation has shifted. Put simply, most think tanks tend to place a premium on marketing ideas which may at times compromise the quality of research they generate and disseminate. Nonetheless, their decision to become more invested in advocacy than in research was predictable, particularly in a political system that values political expediency over policy knowledge. In fact, think tanks that can provide policy makers and other key stakeholders with the ammunition they need to achieve their political goals are handsomely rewarded. By satisfying the wishes of their core constituents, think tanks may, at the very least, become even more entrenched in the policy-making process.

Garbage In, Garbage Out

It has long been understood by those in the fields of computer science and software engineering that if computer programs are built on faulty assumptions, the data generated will be problematic. By the same token, if think tanks produce studies which rely on questionable data, their work, and the policy recommendations they outline, will undoubtedly be compromised. If think tanks conducted their work in isolation and had no intention of sharing their findings with policymakers and other stakeholders, then the public would have little cause for concern. But the research produced by think tanks is not generally confined to diaries for safe keeping. It is packaged in various forms and disseminated to multiple audiences. While some think tanks subject their studies to internal and external peer review, much like the process academics undergo when their work is submitted to various refereed publications, many think tanks are less concerned about quality control.

Unlike professional associations that regulate and monitor the credentials and conduct of physicians, dentists, lawyers, engineers, accountants, and many other groups, there is no regulatory body in place that is tasked with overseeing the work of think tanks. Universities are required to abide by a host of regulations imposed by the state, but no such system has been established to ensure that think tanks meet agreed upon standards. Although think tanks are not directly responsible for the health and safety of citizens, as other professional groups are, their policy recommendations can have far reaching implications for the health of the body politic. After all, think tanks are in the business of developing and marketing ideas that, if implemented, could affect, among other things, how the public is educated, what health care they have access to, and the extent to which their civil liberties may be compromised to secure state borders.

Among the few restrictions imposed on think tanks in the United States, Canada, and in parts of Europe, are provisions related to their tax-exempt status. For example, the *Internal Revenue Code* in the United States and the *Income Tax Act* in Canada require think tanks to remain non-partisan (Abelson, 2016). In recent years, the United States Congress has also required scholars from think tanks testifying before the legislative body to disclose the source (s) of their funding. But following the guidelines for non-partisanship and/or revealing who has funded a research project has nothing to do with evaluating the quality of work these organizations produce. That responsibility falls directly upon the shoulders of academics, journalists and government employees who have the time, training, and inclination to dissect these reports. However, given the sheer volume of policy briefs, occasional papers, commentaries and full-length monographs that are written by think tanks each year, fact-checking thousands of studies would be an impossible undertaking.

Rather than engaging in the futile exercise of tracking and reading all but a handful of think tank reports, some scholars who study these institutes have resigned themselves to evaluating think tank performance through other means. They have decided to construct a comprehensive list of the top think tanks in the world without requiring those evaluating individual institutes to read any of the organization's reports. The annual *Global Go-To Think Tank Index* Report written by James McGann and his associates at the University of Pennsylvania, represents the Rolls Royce of think tank rankings. Released with much fanfare in January, the report sets out various criteria experts in the field are asked to follow in ranking think tanks, but alas, there is no way to monitor or regulate how they carry out their responsibilities. Even if one assumed quality control among the experts called upon to carry out this survey, there are few, if any mechanisms installed to ensure fairness and accuracy. The findings are anecdotal and ad hoc.

In the final analysis, scholars are left to figure out how best to evaluate the work of think tanks, but this task is far from hopeless. Determining which think tank deserves the highest standing in a category seems far less important (particularly to scholars) than understanding the conditions under which these organizations can affect policy change, a subject that we will return to in the last section. Although scholars continue to debate this and related questions, when it comes to understanding how think tanks in North America and in Europe make their presence felt, they seem to have found common ground. In the section below, we turn our attention to the strategies US think tanks employ to capture the attention of policymakers and other key stakeholders. As noted, think tanks around the globe have tried to emulate top-tier US think tanks and how they managed to become entrenched in the policy-making process.

The Strategies of Think Tanks

Determining what constitutes a think tank continues to allude most scholars in the field but identifying the various ways these kinds of organizations interact with decision-makers and other influential stakeholders is hardly a mystery. During the Progressive Era, think tanks communicated their findings primarily by producing and disseminating reports, and by holding conferences and meetings with policymakers, business leaders, academics and journalists. In recent years, several studies have documented the extensive ties that were established between prominent think tanks such as Brookings, the Council on Foreign Relations and RAND (Smith, 1991b; Parmar, 2004; Abella, 2008) and the leading political and business leaders with whom they discussed and debated a range of issues.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, think tanks began to think more strategically about how to capture the attention of policy makers and the public. London's Adam Smith Institute,

which had ties to the Washington-based American Enterprise Institute (AEI), and the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), which would go on to play a major role in advising the government of Margaret Thatcher, were well aware of the importance of sharing ideas with the right people at the right time. But no organization would prove to have more of an impact in shaping how think tanks would communicate in the future than the Heritage Foundation. Established in 1973 by former congressional aides Edwin Feulner and Paul Weyrich, the Heritage Foundation not only changed the complexion of the think tank community but introduced new and revolutionary techniques for think tanks to enhance their visibility (Edwards, 1997, 2013). For Feulner and Weyrich, think tanks could become far more relevant in the policy-making process if they better understood the needs of policymakers. Rather than replicating what the Brookings Institution and other more traditional think tanks had done for years, Heritage introduced a model based on what they called “quick response policy research.” Simply put, instead of only producing book-length studies that policymakers rarely had the time or inclination to read, Heritage researchers were instructed to write and disseminate briefs on timely and relevant policy issues.

Heritage’s approach to marketing its ideas to multiple stakeholders has been adopted by hundreds of other think tanks both inside the Beltway and across the United States and Europe. Not surprisingly, those institutions that have bought into the Heritage model rely on similar channels to enhance their visibility. Scholars from think tanks appear regularly as “talking heads” on television and radio programs, testify before legislative committees, organize seminars, workshops and conferences for policymakers, journalists, congressional staffers and academics, establish close ties to appointed officials throughout the bureaucracy, distribute publications electronically, maintain blogs on their web sites, deliver lectures at various universities, and occasionally take a leave of absence to work on congressional and presidential campaigns.

Think Tanks by the Numbers

It was not long ago when think tank directors, and university administrators for that matter, celebrated the publication of a study that enhanced the prestige of their institution. The quality of the book or article written by one of their scholars, and the positive reviews it generated, was what mattered most. However, in recent years, as the competition for funding has intensified, the priorities of those entrusted to oversee research programs at think tanks and institutions of higher learning has changed dramatically. Think tanks and universities have adopted the language of corporations, and, in doing so, devote much of their time to discussing metrics and performance indicators. In the era of corporatization, numbers matter. For think tanks, this means identifying the various ways their achievements can be evaluated relative to their competitors. Although they may disagree on which indicators or measurements are most significant, there are few numbers they can afford to disregard.

In an effort to lure potential donors, and to appease those who have already contributed generously to their coffers, think tanks track how often their institution has been cited by the print and broadcast media; the number of interviews experts have given; how many followers they have on Twitter and Facebook; and the number of times their colleagues have been asked to testify before congressional hearings. They also keep a close watch on the number of publications that have been downloaded from their web site; the number of visits to their web site; and how many of their staff have served in various government posts (Abelson, 2006, 2018). If that is not enough, some think tanks monitor the number of times they have been

referred to in the *Congressional Record* and in other government and academic indices. And, of course, they are vigilant when it comes to determining how well they have done in fundraising.

Many of these so-called indicators of policy influence make their way into the annual reports of think tanks and are showcased in the most positive light. For think tanks, these numbers are intended to convince stakeholders that with more funding, they could become even more influential players in the political arena. Unfortunately, in their efforts to paint a glowing portrait of their accomplishments, directors of think tanks fail to point out the vast difference between public visibility and policy relevance. While there is no doubt that some of the indicators referenced above may help scholars determine how much visibility think tanks enjoy, they are of little use when it comes to assessing how much of an impact these institutions have in influencing policy outcomes. Recording the number of publications downloaded from a think tank's website, or how often the media refer to policy institutes does not provide valuable insight into who or what influenced the actions of Congress or the White House.

To make better sense of the complex world of policymaking, and the role think tanks play in it, scholars must rely on far more than numbers. They require context. Through interviews and surveys with key participants in the policy-making process, and by accessing relevant archives, it is possible to shed far more light on the conditions under which think tanks can achieve influence. But to do this requires the construction of case studies that provide a detailed account of how ideas advanced by various think tanks made their way through the policy-making process. Still, isolating the impact that think tanks have had at different stages of the policy cycle remains a formidable undertaking. As the late Martin Anderson, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution for many years observed, "Every successful idea has a hundred mothers and fathers. Every bad idea is an orphan." (Abelson, 2010)

Determining how much or little influence think tanks wield at each stage of the policy cycle – issue articulation, policy formulation, policy implementation, and finally policy evaluation –, is inherently difficult, a conclusion reached several years ago by Leslie Gelb, former president of the Council on Foreign Relations. In reflecting on this issue, he remarked that it is virtually impossible to measure the influence of think tanks on Congress, the executive branch and on the media as it tends to be "highly episodic, arbitrary, and difficult to predict." (Abelson, 2006: 167) Yet, notwithstanding the methodological obstacles that must be overcome to properly assess the impact of think tanks on public opinion and public policy, directors of think tanks remain convinced that their institutes wield enormous influence. When funding dollars are at stake, think tanks have an incentive to measuring their performance. However, the preoccupation think tanks have with metrics need not become an obsession for the scholars who study them. In fact, as think tanks continue to proliferate in the United States and around the globe, historians, political scientists and sociologists will need to think more critically about how to evaluate the contribution these organizations make to policy development.

Conclusion: New Thinking About Think Tanks

As interest in the role of think tanks in the United States, in Europe and in other countries continues to grow, it is important to take stock of what we know and don't know about these eclectic and diverse organizations. While much has been written about the evolution of think tanks, and the various strategies on which they rely to influence policy change, we know far less about their impact on specific policy outcomes. There has been ample speculation about how a small group of think tanks convinced President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Blair to wage war on Iraq (Abelson, 2006), and even more discussion in the media

about the prevalence of think tank scholars in the Obama administration. But, despite being a popular topic for discussion in the media, scholars still know very little about how to evaluate the impact of think tanks. Part of the problem is that those who study think tanks need to ask different questions. Rather than fixating on how much or little influence think tanks wield, we should try to determine what value or contribution institutes make to important policy discussions. How have they enriched our understanding of complex policy issues? Were their ideas useful? In what ways? If their ideas were deemed irrelevant, why was this the case? Did the political climate in Washington, Brussels, Paris or Berlin facilitate or undermine the ability of certain think tanks to participate in policy debates? In other words, we need to develop a new narrative around think tanks that explores in greater depth what they have contributed, instead of how much *influence* they might have exercised.

The orientation of think tanks has indeed changed dramatically since the days of Carnegie, Brookings and Hoover. As this article has illustrated, these institutions now devote far more attention to advocacy than to policy research, and this is unlikely to change. It is unlikely to change because despite increased competition for funding, think tanks have grown in numbers and in popularity. Indeed, over the past three decades, hundreds of think tanks have taken root throughout the industrialized and developing world. While they vary enormously in terms of size and scope, what they share is an admiration for what American and several European think tanks have achieved. Although those nostalgic for Progressive-Era policy institutes may mourn the rise of advocacy think tanks, their apparent success will likely ensure their longevity. The founders of early twentieth century think tanks might not have imagined a time when these organizations would become such an integral feature of the political landscape and might have taken issue with some of the tactics they employ to enhance their visibility. They might also have been disappointed with think tanks that do not place a premium on generating rigorous policy research. However, they would have celebrated the extent to which these organizations have been able to encourage and stimulate discussion about important policy issues.

It is understandable why think tanks are appealing to policymakers and to other stakeholders who expect and desire little more than a basic knowledge of US domestic and foreign policy. It is also very troubling. As Thomas Medvetz (2012: 225) observes in his recent book, the success and popularity of think tanks has made it increasingly difficult for social scientists at universities to have their voices heard. Policy makers want policy briefs, not lectures, from the professoriate. The unlimited value social science research could bring to the United States motivated Carnegie, Brookings and Hoover to establish think tanks at the turn of the twentieth century. Ironically, within a matter of decades the discipline they valued most was being marginalized by the very institutions they created. Nevertheless, it seemed like such a good idea at the time.

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