

Think Tank Transparency – An Overview of Current Debates

Transparify, Tbilisi (Georgia), February 2014

- **How transparent are think tanks?**
- **Is transparency important?**
- **What are the key debates?**

Some highlights:

- **Existing data strongly suggests that many think tanks lack transparency.** Diane Farsetta from PR Watch conducted an informal survey of the websites of 13 prominent US think tanks in 2009 and found that “funder lists were lacking”. As part of an ongoing effort, Harvard University’s Brooke Williams (2013) has canvassed 50 top think tanks and found that a third do not disclose their donors. In Europe too, think tanks often do not provide financial information (Dieter Plehwe and Matthias Schloegel 2013). Corporate Europe Observatory (2005) browsed European think tank websites and then directly contacted 15 think tanks, with mixed results. In Britain, a recent attempt to rate think tank transparency by the Who Funds You? campaign (Andy Williamson 2012) sparked controversy when it approached a number of UK think tanks and ranked them by their willingness to divulge financial information; Michael Hammer (2012) provides a summary of reactions in Britain.
- **In late 2013, calls for more think tank transparency grew louder in the US.** While Nobel Prize winner Paul Krugman (2005) and a broad range of other commentators from across the political spectrum have long called on think tanks to reveal their funders, the issue gained momentum in late 2013. Public criticism (Ken Silverstein 2013) led the Centre for American Progress to release a list of its funders (Holly Yeager 2013); the Heartland Institute (2013) argued for continued opacity, citing donors’ right to privacy and other concerns. In Britain, there have been similar debates between advocates (Martin Bright 2012) and opponents (Tim Worstall 2012) of funding disclosure.
- **Some US funders are moving towards greater transparency and accountability.** In December 2013, Senator Elizabeth Warren focused attention on the supply side of the funding equation by calling on major financial sector donors to disclose their payments to think tanks; Lydia Depillis (2013) provides an excellent discussion. Indeed, new data suggest that corporations rather than think tanks may be leading the way to more transparency in the sector (CPA 2013). Some non-profit funders are also beginning to reflect on their own commitments to transparency (Larry Kramer 2013). However, Adam Meyerson (2009) warns that greater funder transparency may have negative consequences.
- **Think tank funding is a global concern.** James McGann (2012) warns of the emergence around the world of “phantom NGO think tanks” fronting for “special interests” that provide hidden funding. In Britain, the Guardian’s combative George Montbiot has written a number of pieces warning that “secretive think tanks are crushing our democracy” by engaging in “secret corporate lobbying”. This perspective appears to have gained some adherents within the UK Charity Commission (Jim Pickard 2011), and is driving a recent petition calling on the BBC to mandate that think tanks release their funding sources before getting airtime (Richard Hector-Jones 2013). The link between financial opacity and possible biases in policy advice has also been made in Australia (Brad Norington 2003) and continental Europe, where Dieter Plehwe and Matthias Schloegel (2013) point out that public as well as corporate funding may be problematic if financial information is kept hidden.

Aquilino, Natalia. 2013. **Nine Challenges towards think tanks evaluation in Latin America.** Politics and Ideas.

<http://bit.ly/MdSLBz>

Article. Discusses the need for a system of monitoring and evaluation for *Latin American* think tanks' initiatives, as transparency and accountability is becoming more important. Notes that such a system may come from donors' systems, which are already in place, or they may need to be developed by think tanks themselves.

Association of Fundraising Professionals. 2005. **Think Tank on Fundraising Research: Promoting Ethics as a Guiding Force.**

<http://bit.ly/1epoSoP>

Conference summary. Asserts that "one of the purposes of transparency is to avoid regulation" and that organisations should get ahead of the curve on funding transparency.

Bennett, Laurie. 2013. **Think tanks are hardly quaking in their boots.** Muckety.

<http://bit.ly/1a3Psbj>

Article. Claims that the issue of transparency in think tank funding "has largely been ignored - partly because of larger concerns about dark money in politics, partly because media and journalists rely on think tanks." Claims that newer think tanks in particular are often are partisan.

Bennett, Laurie. 2013. **Bitcoins, think tanks and the Koch brothers.** Muckety.

<http://bit.ly/1ntbswT>

Article. Notes that the The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty will begin to accept Bitcoins, or internet currency, for donations. Notes that this can add a new "layer of secrecy" for donors.

Bright, Martin. 2012. **Who funds think tanks?** The Spectator.

<http://bit.ly/1dlI07g>

Blog. Welcomes the "Who Funds You?" think tank transparency initiative in the UK given the "tendency over recent years to outsource political policy to these micro-institutions." Questions why many of the left-leaning think tanks in the UK received high transparency ratings, while some of the right-leaning think tanks received low marks or refused to participate.

Byers, Dylan. 2011. **Think tanks and disclosure.** Politico.

<http://politi.co/1hDMFFK>

Blog. Discusses an incident in which the New York Times disclosed the think tank affiliation of an op-ed author arguing against an online piracy bill, but failed to mention a potential conflict of interest. The think tank in question received funding from Google, a company that opposed the bill.

Cohen, Rick. 2013. **Corporate Money in Network of Right-Wing State Policy Think Tanks.** Nonprofit Quarterly.

<http://bit.ly/1hDKYrV>

Article. Claims that there is a proliferation of conservative think tanks that fill in the policy research gaps for US state legislators who are "thinly staffed." Describes the work of the State Policy Network, which keeps its donors and their donation amounts confidential, citing a study claiming that the SPN has many corporate sponsors that attend its annual meeting. Quotes the director of the Center for Media and Democracy, who calls on think tanks to "self-disclose" and "register as lobbyists," which would entail stricter disclosure

requirements. Concludes that asking think tanks to self-disclose may be fruitless, and suggests mandating that corporations reveal their donations to the public and their shareholders in order to improve the transparency of think tanks.

Corporate Europe Observatory. 2005. **Transparency unthinkable? Financial secrecy common among EU think tanks.** Corporate Europe Observatory.

<http://bit.ly/1gtmYHA>

Article. Discusses the findings of a Corporate Europe Observatory survey of 15 think tanks that and concludes that the financial transparency of many think tanks in the **EU** is “inadequate.” Claims that EU think tanks do less lobbying than their American counterparts, but as they still have an influence over policy, there are calls for more funding transparency. The survey contacted 15 major EU think tanks and asked about their sources of funding; only one responded without further prompting. Includes examples of correspondence with think tanks that “appear to not want the public to know” their funding sources and details financial information given by the think tanks or obtained otherwise. Notes that under Belgian law, think tanks will have to file their annual financial reports with the Belgian government, but that they will not need to specify their sources of income. Includes numerous links.

CPA [Center for Political Accountability]. 2013. **New CPA-Zicklin Index Reveals Surge in Number of Top Companies with Strong Political Disclosure Policies.**

<http://bit.ly/1aBynQT>

Report summary. Discusses and rates transparency in the corporate sector. Reports that more than a third of major companies disclosed their payments to, or had a policy against giving to, non-profit 501(c)(4) groups, which are labelled “dark money” conduits when they make independent expenditures without disclosing their donors. Suggests that corporations are becoming more transparent about who they donate their money to. Includes link to full report.

Depillis, Lydia. 2013. **Elizabeth Warren wants banks to disclose think tank donations. Shouldn't everybody?** The Washington Post.

<http://wapo.st/1cJ1Tnw>

Opinion. Argues that US Senator Elizabeth Warren’s proposal for large financial sector donors think tank to disclose their funding should be adopted. Argues that if donors really do not influence the policy of a think tank, then that think tanks should be more transparent and let the public decide for themselves. Contains numerous interesting links.

Farsetta, Diane. 2009. **Mixing Advocacy, Scholarly Research and Journalism: Can the New America Foundation Square the Circle?** PR Watch.

<http://bit.ly/1eVhYcD>

Article. Notes that an informal survey of Washington D.C.’s 13 most prominent think tanks’ websites “found that political activity policy statements were fairly strong, but their conflict of interest statements and funder lists were lacking.” Suggests that listing all direct funders, banning or disclosing indirect funders, disclosing where funding for specific programs comes from, and clarifying policies for funding and advocacy are ways to increase transparency.

Friedman, Benjamin H. 2011. **You Gotta Serve Somebody.** The National Interest.

<http://bit.ly/1dH6igR>

Opinion piece. Claims that US think tanks are neither independent nor non-partisan. Argues that rather than “purge” policy debates of biased voices, the focus should be on recognising such bias. Discusses bias stemming from institutional funding and suggests that reporters be

aware of potential think tanks biases before using them as ‘impartial’ sources. Argues that publishers should require contributors to openly state any conflict of interest, and that think tanks should list their donor contributions.

Hammer, Michael. 2012. **Does it matter Who Funds You?** One World Trust Blog.

<http://bit.ly/1fNnQcR>

Blog. Discusses the new UK think tank transparency initiative “Who Funds You?”. Claims that many were supportive of this initiative because think tanks have influence on policy and public opinion. Notes that others believe that donors have a right to privacy and that think tanks should be judged on their research rather than on their funding. Claims that other research organisations see transparency as vital to independent research as transparency is often a part of researchers’ ethical code and helps to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

Harvard Law Review. 2002. **The Political Activity of Think Tanks: The Case for Mandatory Contributor Disclosure.**

<http://bit.ly/1jI0dTW>

Journal article. Argues that funding disclosure is important for two reasons: first, to understand the biases of an organisation, including those that acknowledge their partisan leanings, and second, to deter corruption and “quid-pro-quo” arrangements. In-depth discussion of the benefits of funding disclosure and the role of the US Internal Revenue Service. Explores the legal challenges for complete disclosure.

Heartland Institute. 2013. **Reply to our Critics.** The Heartland Institute.

<http://bit.ly/1BSbdF>

FAQ. Rebuts criticisms of the Heartland Institute, its policies, and its donors. Notes that one of the people critiquing Heartland’s association with oil corporations represented renewable energy firms. Also claims that the environmental movement is a “political” movement and discusses scandals within the climate change movement. States that in the past Heartland published their donors and encouraged other organisations to do the same, but because some people “abused” this information they stopped disclosing them.

Hector-Jones, Richard. 2013. **Petition: More Think Tank Transparency.** Change.org

<http://chn.ge/1k63Ws4>

Petition. Petition created by a UK citizen asking the BBC to mandate that think tanks release their funding sources before getting airtime as “they are paid for and funded by powerful individuals and organisations promoting their own financial and political interests.” Had gained over a thousand signatures by January 2014.

Herb, Jeremy. 2013. **Atlantic Council releases list of foreign donors for Hagel.** The Hill.

<http://bit.ly/1hFvd3F>

Article. Reports that Republicans in the US Congress asked the Atlantic Council to disclose all its foreign donors during Chuck Hagel’s tenure as chairman of the organisation in preparation for his US Secretary of Defence nomination hearing. Notes that the Atlantic Council complied in creating a list of foreign governments and organisations that made donations, but they did not disclose any individual foreign donors. Hagel claimed that the funding information was legally controlled by each organisation and that he could not legally disclose it himself. One Republican senator called the funding request “unprecedented” and hoped it would not be mandated for the hearing. The Atlantic Council voluntarily listed its foreign donors in a letter to Hagel, but chose not to publish the amount of each donation or provide a list of individual donors.

Joyner, James. 2013. **The Atlantic Council, Foreign Funding, and Intellectual Independence.** The Atlantic Council Blog.

<http://bit.ly/1kPJQWX>

Blog. The managing editor at the Atlantic Council quotes the US chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee as saying that the US Congressmen requesting financial details about the Atlantic Council's donors are "insist[ing] upon financial disclosure requirements that far exceed the standard practices of the Armed Services Committee and go far beyond the financial disclosure required of previous Secretaries of Defense." Dismisses claims that Council is under "nefarious foreign influences" and discusses the Atlantic Council's long history of non-partisanship.

Kempe, Frederick. 2013. **Letter to Senator Chuck Hagel.**

<http://on.wsj.com/1mk4JVE>

Letter. The President and CEO of the Atlantic Council explains the role Hagel had at the Atlantic Council and lists foreign companies and governments that have donated to the Council over the past five years. Includes the Council's review process for foreign donors and its intellectual independence policy.

Kramer, Larry. 2013. **Learning, Transparency, and Blogs.** The Hewlett Foundation Blog.

<http://bit.ly/1iPR7nQ>

Blog. Hewlett Foundation blog discussing the importance of philanthropic transparency. Claims that the current lack of transparency is because of a lack of "urgency" regarding disclosure in the past. Claims that transparency and openness matter and announces the Hewlett Foundation's new transparency policy. See also the interesting comments and discussions in the comments section below the main piece.

Krugman, Paul. 2005. **Think Tank Transparency.** New York Times.

<http://nyti.ms/1eKJIAw>

Opinion piece. Suggests that think tanks' briefings and reports that influence political officials in Washington D.C. are often funded by organisations and corporations with a vested interest in shaping policy. Claims that think tanks act much like lobbyists and argues that funding for think tanks should be publicized and subjected to public scrutiny.

MacColl, Spencer. 2010. **Capital Rivals: Koch Brothers vs. George Soros.** Open Secrets Blog.

<http://bit.ly/1givkoG>

Blog. Explores the two most visible donors in the US: the Koch brothers and George Soros. Notes that think tank donations are "notoriously difficult to track."

McGann, James G. 2012. **Global Trends in Think Tanks and Policy Advice.** University of Pennsylvania Press.

<http://bit.ly/1dNf4nN>

Report. Reports on major trends in the *global* think tank sector. Specifically points to the emergence of "phantom NGO think tanks," which are used by governments, private corporations or individuals to promote "special interests." Claims this comes from a lack of transparency in think tanks, allowing private interests to pose as public interest. Includes several graphs and charts about think tanks around the world.

McGann, James and Stephen Boucher. 2004. **Think Tanks in Europe and US: Converging or Diverging?**

<http://bit.ly/1mhJgfY>

Seminar publication. Stresses the “importance of financial transparency and effective relations with the media.” Claims that American think tanks have greater transparency than their **European** counterparts and suggests that European think tanks follow that example. States that there is “tension between academic credibility and funding” and suggests that European think tanks move away from public funding.

McMorris, Bill. 2013. **Progressives for Sale**. The Washington Free Beacon.

<http://bit.ly/1f0oFeZ>

Article. Claims that the former chairman of the Center for American Progress was a major proponent of the bailout of General Motors, which was a donor to CAP. Notes that CAP itself does not disclose funders from the “Business Alliance,” while it calls on the US Congress to pass more stringent disclosure laws.

Mendizabal, Enrique. 2011. **A good example of think tank transparency**. On Think Tanks.

<http://bit.ly/1hzbCBJ>

Blog. Explains that Ecuadorian think tank Grupo FARO proactively made funding information from its financial reports more accessible by making a table with information on “the project objective, the funder, the amount provided and spent, and the implementation project period.”

Mendizabal, Enrique. 2011. **Transparency should replace (strive to) impartiality in policy research**. On Think Tanks.

<http://bit.ly/1mJvYZU>

Blog. Argues that transparency is essential for think tanks to “enjoy a reputation as neutral transmitters of scientific ideas and policy analysis” and that a code of ethics can “guard against attacks on independent policy research” in **Central and Eastern European** think tanks. Discusses how transparency can help think tanks to overcome perceptions of conflicts of interest.

Meyerson, Adam. 2009. **How Foundations Should and Should Not Be Held Accountable**. Philanthropy Roundtable.

<http://bit.ly/1kDC41a>

Article. Notes there is little external accountability for foundations so long as they follow tax laws, which gives them the freedom to do “unconventional” things. Argues that donors and trustees should “set a high standard” for foundations, but that no one should require foundations to be accountable to outsiders or allow outsiders to “have the authority to determine what foundations can and cannot do.”

Meyerson, Adam. 2013. **Misconceptions About Dark Money**. State Policy Network News.

<http://bit.ly/KukqNB>

Opinion piece. Defends the freedom to make charitable contributions anonymously as being in line with American’s constitutional freedom of association. Argues that organisations should not be forced to reveal their supporters because doing so could lead “to economic reprisal, loss of employment, threat of physical coercion, and other manifestations of public hostility.” Notes that non-profits already disclose their largest donors to the IRS. Explains that donor-advised funds [charitable giving vehicles that make donations on behalf of organisations, families, or individuals] must disclose what they give to charities, but

individual donors do not. Suggests that there are a number of reasons that donors may want to keep their donations a secret: to protect themselves from unwanted solicitation, to be able to check up on the organisation without the staff knowing who they are, or to keep the knowledge of their wealth to themselves. Concludes that “so-called ‘dark money’ illuminates our free society.”

Miller, Ellen. 2010. **Foreign Transparency Policies the US Government Could Learn From.** Sunlight Foundation.

<http://bit.ly/1icJ7gu>

Blog. Discusses a number of policies that governments and organisations have to increase transparency and suggests that the US government adopt some of these policies.

Monbiot, George. 2006. **Who’s Paying?**

<http://bit.ly/LcQnKC>

Article. Argues that corporate-funded think tanks should disclose their funding when they “speak on matters of public interest.” Discusses think tank funding from oil and tobacco companies.

Monbiot, George. 2011. **Secretive thinktanks are crushing our democracy.** The Guardian.

<http://bit.ly/LCm0yr>

Opinion piece. Argues that think tanks that do not disclose their donors are a threat to democracy. Quotes an American corporate lobbyist who explains that think tanks have “considerable influence and close personal relationships with elected officials” and that they “support and encourage one another, echo and amplify their messages, and can pull together ... coalitions on the most important public policy issues.” Claims that many think tanks lobby for particular issues depending on who funds them and argues that more transparency is necessary to avoid this “secret corporate lobbying”.

Monbiot, George. 2012. **Plutocracy’s Boot Boys.**

<http://bit.ly/Lrw5Ok>

Article. Discusses the history of the Adam Smith Institute, a UK think tank, in the context of the conservative government of the late 1970s and 1980s. Quotes corporate lobbyist Jeff Judson, who says think tanks are “virtually immune to retribution” as “the identity of donors ... is protected from involuntary disclosure.”

Monbiot, George. 2013. **The educational charities that do PR for the rightwing ultra-rich.** The Guardian.

<http://bit.ly/1aBGbID>

Opinion piece. Argues that think tanks have increasingly become public relations firms for the organisations that fund them. Claims that corporations use “independent-looking think tanks” to support their ideas so that sponsors do not have to enter the political conversation themselves. Argues that more transparency will help the public to understand the influences on the think tanks quoted in the media.

Morgan, Lucy. 2012. **New think tank’s veil of transparency.** Tampa Bay Times.

<http://bit.ly/1i2KsUv>

Article. Reports that The Foundation for Government Accountability, an American think tank in the state of Florida, promotes financial accountability by the state government by listing the salaries of government workers and “other public records related to government spending.” Notes that the think tank itself does not disclose its own donors unless they specifically ask to be listed.

Norington, Brad. 2003. **Think tank secrets.** The Sydney Morning Herald.

<http://bit.ly/1mqLxIK>

Article. Alleges a number of conflicts of interest involving think tank funding in **Australia**. Cites politician who “says the benefactors of think tanks should be declared if their purpose is to persuade governments to change policy based on their research ideas.” Cites a think tank employee claiming that disclosing donors is irrelevant if the organization only “promotes discussion and debate.” Discusses donors from tobacco, oil, mining and other industries that give money to think tanks, and the related potential for conflicts of interest.

Perrottet, Margaret. No date. **Thoughts About Think Tanks – Are They Biased?**

<http://bit.ly/1e4cmLw>

Blog. Claims that think tanks’ non-partisan label means that they are not formally affiliated with any political party, but that this does not mean that they do not have any biases. Notes that US think tanks are tax-exempt 501(c) organizations so they do not need to divulge their funding sources.

Pickard, Jim. 2011. **Commission calls for think-tanks’ funding disclosure.** Financial Times.

<http://on.ft.com/LtQ5iT>

Article. Head of the UK Charity Commission claims there is a “thin line between educational research that charities are allowed to do and political activity, which is banned” and says that more funding transparency would be useful in making “difficult judgements.”

Plehwe, Dieter and Matthias Schloegel. 2013. **New kids on the European blocks: European party foundations and their think tank partner networks.** WZB Berlin Social Science Center.

<http://bit.ly/1b81l8V>

Paper. Discusses think tanks’ role in promoting political positions in **Europe** like Euroscepticism, specifically looking at the links between Eurosceptic parties and Eurosceptic think tanks different countries. Claims that think tanks are influenced by the groups that fund them “no matter if they are public or private” because they are not financially independent. Also notes that very few European think tanks publish financial information and “none revealed their funding source.” Includes case studies for **Sweden, Germany, and Austria**.

Read, Sam. 2012. **Think tank funding matters: it’s central to democracy.** The New Economics Foundation Blog.

<http://bit.ly/1bbCJhA>

Blog. Claims that transparency is fundamental to democracy. Discusses the impact that donating to a think tank can have on policy. Opines that “until a think tank discloses who funds them, the question of whose interests they are really representing should hang over them, undermining every policy pronouncement and every media appearance they make.” Advocates open donor lists.

Samples, John. 2007. **Donor Disclosure Won’t Help Think Tanks.** CATO Institute.

<http://bit.ly/1e4lmjv>

Opinion. Argues that donor disclosure would “discourage donors from giving to think tanks, thereby curtailing their liberties.” Argues that the public can decide if research is “good or bad” without knowing who funds the think tank, and that the argument about disclosure “distract[s] us from real arguments about policy.” Claims that think tank funding is different from campaign donations because campaigns have the power to elect leaders who make

decisions while think tanks can only create ideas. Written by CATO's Director of the Center for Representative Government.

Shapiro, Gary. 2007. **It's Time for Think Tank Funding Disclosure**. Roll Call.

<http://bit.ly/1dTHzDI>

Opinion piece. Written by the president and CEO of the Consumer Electronics Association. Argues in favour of greater funding transparency for think tanks. Notes that when two industries disagree over policy, they can engage each other, but that when think tanks produce reports without disclosing their funding, there is no way to understand and engage their sponsors. Claims that transparency is "a fair trade-off for the tax-free status of the groups."

Silverstein, Ken. 2013. **The Secret Donors Behind the Center for American Progress and Other Think Tanks**. The Nation. [updated 24 May]

<http://bit.ly/19KplpJ>

Article. Claims that the Center for American Progress has "praised" the US government's renewable energy loan program while having ties to the renewable energy industry and being funded in part by First Solar, a solar energy company. Quotes the director of the Center for Responsive Politics saying that "the only thing more damaging than disclosing your donors and having questions raised about the independence of your work is not disclosing them and have the information come to light and undermine your work." Includes a letter from the Center for American Progress in response to the article, and the author's response to that letter.

Silverstein, Ken. 2013. **Corporate Influence at the Center for American Progress?** The Nation.

<http://bit.ly/1f8kPiy>

Laments that "unlike most major think tanks, it [CAP] doesn't publish or make available an annual report or otherwise disclose at least basic financial data". Claims that "there is evidence that CAP's interest in wooing and pleasing corporate donors has shaped coverage." Reports on alleged "editorial intrusion by senior think tank officials, in cases that included **Saudi Arabia**, when CAP was seeking Saudi support", but cautions that "it is true that CAP has run tough pieces on the Saudis and on some of its donors." Concludes that "CAP should disclose its donors, corporate and otherwise."

Smith, Ben and Chris Frates. 2008. **Where's transparency of Podesta group?** Politico.

<http://politi.co/1bdbNy6>

Article. Discusses Obama's focus on transparency during the transition into the White House after the 2008 elections, but notes the "exception" of a "closely tied Democratic think tank that keeps many of its donors secret." The president of this think tank, the Center for American Progress, led Obama's transition. Quotes a senior fellow of the Sunlight Foundation who claims that "the connections between donors and folks overseeing the whole transition is a legitimate question." Discusses the potential conflicts of interest between the think tank and the government role its president has chosen.

Snider, J.H. 2009. **Strengthen think tank accountability**. Politico.

<http://politi.co/LqPNcx>

Opinion piece. Argues in favour of greater think tank accountability. Claims that in 2007, the media cited the top 25 think tanks 14,790 times. Explains that think tank employees and government officials pass through 'revolving doors' each time a new party enters the White House. Notes that President Obama signed a bill placing restrictions on the 'revolving door' between the executive branch and lobbyists, but no such ban was put on think tanks, which

often do similar work under a different name. Suggests that think tanks should adopt guidelines governing lobbying activities, and that “the government should enhance laws regarding think tanks’ fiduciary responsibilities to the public” via the IRS and “require think tanks — like lobbyists and political candidates — to disclose their donors.”

Williams, Brooke. 2013. **Just Asking: An Appeal for Voluntary Disclosure**. Harvard University Edmond J. Safra Center For Ethics.

<http://bit.ly/KFIVaE>

Blog. Claims that 16 out of the 50 top US think tanks do not disclose their donors. The author asked these think tanks to voluntarily disclose their funders, and lists the responses. An update on this project can be found here: <http://bit.ly/1jzFNKm>

Williams, Brooke and Ken Silverstein. 2013. **Meet the Think Tank Scholars who are also Beltway Lobbyists**. New Republic.

<http://bit.ly/KCCTYr>

Article. Claims that 49 people “have simultaneously worked as lobbyists for outside entities while serving as top staff, directors or trustees of 20 of the 25 most influential think tanks in the United States.” Argues that without financial disclosure, people may allege that researchers have undisclosed conflicts of interest. Favours more transparency.

Williamson, Andy. 2011. **The think-tank model has passed its use by date**. LSE.

<http://bit.ly/1kNICfP>

Blog. Discusses issues facing think tank such as the “drift of ideology” and “current economic conditions.” Claims that much of the research coming from think tanks is independent, but not always objective. Part of being transparent is giving the reader enough information to decide if there is a bias. Claims that biases can come from government departments, commercial sponsorships or trusts; it might be difficult to publish something that is critical of a donor. Notes that researchers will always have some personal bias, but transparency can help. (An insightful comment on this piece by Enrique Mendizabal with further links can be found here: <http://bit.ly/1izwADY>)

Williamson, Andy. 2012. **Why I want to know who funds you**.

<http://bit.ly/1dH5E37>

Blog. Post by one of the founders of the Who Funds You?, a transparency campaign that rates think tanks in the UK based on their funding transparency. Argues that think tank funding transparency is critical because think tanks influence policy so it is important for people to know who influences the think tanks. Criticises the Adam Smith Institute for labelling its low transparency ranking the “top ranking in donor privacy”.

Worstell, Tim. 2012. **It doesn’t matter who funds think tanks, but if it did, Left-wing ones would do particularly badly**. The Telegraph Blogs.

<http://bit.ly/1dH8yEY>

Blog. Argues that people and organisations have a right to privacy with regards to the way they spend their money and claims that think tanks should be judged on the quality of their ideas and arguments alone, rather than by their donors. Claims that the ratings system used by the UK initiative “Who Funds You?” is faulty because it gave an organisation an A rating for disclosing that it was funded by an organisation that keeps its own donors anonymous, thereby making the disclosure essentially meaningless.

Yeager, Holly. 2013. **Center for American Progress releases donor list.** The Washington Post. <http://wapo.st/1dnECHU>

Article. Discusses donations to the Center for American Progress, which include “a broad sampling of corporate interests.” Notes that the centre did not disclose the amount of money from each donor, but it did say that corporations made up less than 6% of the organisation’s funding. Reports that the centre claims to be independent and to support policies that may hurt corporations, even if they are among its donors. Links to list of donors.

This annotated bibliography was compiled by Ms Taylor Braun-Dorrell. Transparify will release a total of four bibliographies on think tanks in the course of 2014, and updated versions in 2015. Please register for updates at www.transparify.org or follow us on twitter [@Transparify](https://twitter.com/Transparify).