

# Think Tanks: *Who's Hot*

BY SUSANNE TRIMBATH

Until about 1970, most Americans thought that the President arrived at the White House by summing up all of the interests represented by the winning party's platform. The ideological divide between Democrats and Republicans in the House reached an all time low around the same time. Thirty years later, with presidential candidates less beholden to their parties and the differences between the parties growing larger on many issues, the world has become increasingly complicated. The more complicated events become, the greater is the need for interpretation along the way to help make sense of what is happening. Only politics and religion could rank ahead of economics in terms of complexity. That's where the economic experts at the think tanks come in: they offer a story to explain the economic data.

A study by Nicolas Ruble (*The International Economy*, September/October 2000) evaluated the press visibility of twelve economic policy think tanks and 171 of their scholars from July 1997 through June 1999. The results attracted so much attention that the survey was subsequently extended by Adam Posen using highly compatible methodology to cover sixteen think tanks and 276 economists through June 2002 (*TIE*, Fall 2002).

In the 2000 results, the top three think tanks were Brookings Institution, the Institute for International Economics, and the American Enterprise Institute. The

---

*Susanne Trimbath, Ph.D., is Senior Research Economist (TIE rank 202) with STP Advisors in Santa Monica. The author wishes to thank Mattan Lurie, now with UBS London, for invaluable assistance on this project.*

THE INTERNATIONAL  
ECONOMY

THE MAGAZINE OF  
INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC POLICY

888 16th Street, N.W.  
Suite 740

Washington, D.C. 20006

Phone: 202-861-0791

Fax: 202-861-0790

www.international-economy.com  
editor@international-economy.com

*The latest TIE study comparing  
economic think tank visibility in the media.  
The hot economists and hot topics.*

# *and Who's Not*

<b>Rank the Tanks: Total Citations by Think Tank, 1997–2005</b>				
Name	Citations	Survey Rank		
		2005	2002	2000
Brookings Institution	2,180	1	1	1
Institute for International Economics	1,621	2	2	2
American Enterprise Institute	1,351	3	3	3
Cato Institute	873	4	4	5
Hoover Institution	658	5	6	*
Economic Policy Institute	634	6	5	6
Urban Institute	577	7	8	8
Heritage Foundation	548	8	7	7
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	421	9	9	9
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	355	10	13	*
Progressive Policy Institute	346	11	15	12
Hudson Institute	328	12	16	10
Milken Institute	275	13	*	11
Center for Strategic and International Studies	265	14	14	*
Council on Foreign Relations	259	15	12	*
National Center for Policy Analysis	220	16	10	*
Economic Strategy Institute	184	17	11	4

\*Not included in the ranking that year.

## Who's Hot? Top Tank Ranks in Recent Years

	Overall	2004	2003	2002	3-Year Average
Brookings Institution	1	2	1	1	1.3
Institute for International Economics	2	1	2	2	1.7
American Enterprise Institute	3	3	3	3	3.0
Cato Institute	4	4	6	14	8.0
Hoover Institution	5	6	4	5	5.0
Economic Policy Institute	6	5	5	6	5.3
Urban Institute	7	7	8	11	8.7
Heritage Foundation	8	8	10	9	9.0
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	9	11	7	4	7.3
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	10	10	11	13	11.3
Progressive Policy Institute	11	9	12	9	10.0
Hudson Institute	12	17	17	7	13.7
Milken Institute	13	15	15	8	12.7
Center for Strategic and International Studies	14	14	12	12	12.7
Council on Foreign Relations	15	13	9	15	12.3
National Center for Policy Analysis	16	12	14	16	14.0
Economic Strategy Institute	17	16	16	17	16.3

### Win, Place, and Show

Although **Brookings** continues to rank first overall, we see that they slipped behind the **Institute for International Economics** in 2004. The **American Enterprise Institute** has been consistently ranked third.

### Most Improved Cato Institute Urban Institute

top three individual economists were Fred Bergsten of the Institute for International Economics plus Robert Litan and Nicholas Lardy of Brookings. In the 2002 results, Brookings, the Institute for International Economics, and the American Enterprise Institute once again took the top three places. Among the individual economists, Bergsten and Litan remained first and second respectively, but Mr. Lardy dropped to fifth place. The number three position over the longer survey belonged to Robert Reischauer who held positions at both Brookings and the Urban Institute during that time.<sup>1</sup>

A ranking of top economists serves several functions. First, it explicitly identifies high-quality economists for think tanks seeking to improve their relative ranking. Think tanks are an aggregation of individual economists: any institution may increase its relative ranking by courting more productive staff members or fellows from higher-ranked institutions, provided that they know who to seek. Second, the ranking can be used by graduating students to measure the “reputational capital” of prospective employers. New Ph.D.s may decide to work for a think tank that offers them more visibility than they might otherwise receive as a university professor. Finally, a ranking of top economists provides information to the public about the

experts whose research policymakers are most likely to use.

We now extend the survey once again to cover more than eight years, from January 1, 1997, through March 30, 2005. The basic methodology remains unchanged.<sup>2</sup> In addition to extending the time frame, this study adds the *Los Angeles Times* to the publication mix and brings back California's Milken Institute among the think tanks.<sup>3</sup> Los Angeles is the second largest city in the United States and California is the sixth largest economy in the world. The *Los Angeles Times* contributes 15 percent of the citations in this study, a share that would rank it behind only the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal* in the earlier study.

Since most news databases are available electronically at least beginning in January 1997, there seemed no strong argument to keep the mid-year start date. Also, allocating the data across months (rather than years) allows the impact of events on the rankings to be examined. We performed all the searches using the same databases and wording as in 2002. We reviewed each article for content rather than just recording the number of "hits" for each search. This means we did not count mentions of appointments, attendance at dinner parties, or other mentions unrelated to the scholar's research. Several times we found hits in articles completely unrelated to the scholar, especially in the case of scholars with names like Robert Lawrence (two "first names") or Paul London (how many people in London are named Paul?). Those citations were not counted in our study.

Despite the several changes, there are few dramatic differences in the rankings of the think tanks from the 2002 study. Among the top nine, none move more than one position in either direction. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Progressive Policy Institute, and the Hudson Institute move up substantially; the National Center for Policy Analysis and the Economic Strategy Institute, along with the Council on Foreign Relations, move down quite a bit. The inclusion of the *Los Angeles Times* most benefited the Milken Institute, although the impact can't be measured with certainty because there was significant turnover during the study. The addition of Ross DeVol and Bill Frey in the late 1990s (ranked in the Top 30, see Table) boosted the citation count, but Frey moved his primary affiliation to Brookings in 2002 and with that (plus the 2004 departure of Joel Kotkin, ranked in the Top 100), the Milken Institute's citation count dropped from a peak of 85 in 2001 to only sixteen last year.

### **Moving Up:**

**Carnegie Endowment  
for International  
Peace**

**Progressive Policy  
Institute**

**Hudson Institute**

### **Moving Down:**

**National Center for  
Policy Analysis**

**Economic Strategy  
Institute**

**Council on Foreign  
Relations**

Since we extended the survey back to the beginning of 1997, we can now present ranking comparisons over the last three calendar years using our full data set. Although Brookings continues to rank first overall, we see that they slipped behind the Institute for International Economics in 2004. The American Enterprise Institute has been consistently ranked third, while the Cato Institute and Urban Institute are "most improved" since 2002, moving up ten and four places respectively. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities is the only think tank in the group to have slid back significantly from their 2002 position.

A relative newcomer among the think tanks is moving to the forefront since its founding in late 2001: the Center for Global Development. Though not strictly speaking an "economics" think tank, the center includes five scholars who appear in the current study either because they are holding joint appointments with the Institute for International Economics) or because they moved from a ranked think tank to the Center for Global Development (such as Jean Olson Lanjouw from Brookings). Of course, the Center for Global Development cannot be ranked over the full period of the study. However, looking only at the full years 2002 through 2004, it would have ranked at least fourteenth for citations received in each year of their existence.<sup>4</sup>

### **WHAT HAVE YOU DONE LATELY?**

The number of *academic* citations an economist receives during a given year is considered to be a measure of the flow of citations from a stock of past articles; as such it is viewed as a proxy for the value of the human capital an individual has accumulated. For *press* citations, the measure is much more current. Newspapers ask, "What have you done lately?" and are less likely to be concerned about the stock of past articles. In this sense, press cita-

## Super Stars: Top Thirty Think Tank Scholars Overall, 1997–2005

Rank	Citations	Name	Think Tank(s)	2002 Rank
1	461	C. Fred Bergsten	Institute for International Economics	1
2	383	Robert D. Reischauer	Urban Institute & Brookings Institution	3
3	335	Robert E. Litan	Brookings Institution	2
4	330	Marshall Wittmann	Progressive Policy Institute, Heritage Foundation & Hudson Institute	*
5	294	Gary Clyde Hufbauer	Council on Foreign Relations & Institute for International Economics	11
6	292	Nicholas R. Lardy	Brookings Institution & Institute for International Economics	5
7	291	Jared Bernstein	Economic Policy Institute	8
8	255	James K. Glassman	American Enterprise Institute	4
9	217	William G. Gale	Brookings Institution	13
10	215	Kevin A. Hassett	American Enterprise Institute	7
11	185	Will Marshall, III	Progressive Policy Institute	19
12	179	Stephen Moore	Cato Institute	*
13	174	Morris Goldstein	Institute for International Economics	6
14	170	Peter R. Orszag	Brookings Institution	#
15	163	Robert Greenstein	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	14
16	155	John H. Makin	American Enterprise Institute	9
17	154	Bruce Bartlett	National Center for Policy Analysis	17
18	152	Clyde V. Prestowitz, Jr.	Economic Strategy Institute	12
19	143	William H. Frey	Milken Institute & Brookings Institution	#
20	123	Nicholas Eberstadt	American Enterprise Institute	22
21	113	Bruce Katz	Brookings Institution	16
22	111	Henry J. Aaron	Brookings Institution	10
23	110	Ross C. DeVol	Milken Institute	#
24	109	Michael D. Tanner	Cato Institute	23
25	107	Marilyn Moon	Urban Institute	#
26	104	C. Eugene Steuerle	Urban Institute	#
27	101	Adam S. Posen	Institute for International Economics	14
28	98	Jeffrey J. Schott	Institute for International Economics	25
29	97	Benn Steil	Council on Foreign Relations	28
30	94	William A. Niskanen	Cato Institute	#

\*These scholars were not included in 2002.

# These scholars were included in 2002 but ranked outside the Top 30

## The Perennials

Only **Jared Bernstein**, **Gary Hufbauer**, **Fred Bergsten**, and **Bill Gale** manage to maintain Top 10 rankings overall and in the individual years.



**Jared Bernstein**,  
*Economic Policy  
Institute*



**Gary Hufbauer**,  
*Institute for International  
Economics*



**Fred Bergsten**,  
*Institute for International  
Economics*



**Bill Gale**,  
*Brookings Institution*

tions are more apt to uncover fresh, exciting, and interesting economic ideas.

Furthermore, press citations are not controlled by academics who may have a vested interest in the reputation of a particular school or department and therefore support a network of authors who cite each other's publications relatively frequently, as has been suggested. (In fact, an additional academic citation has been shown to add more to a professor's salary than the publication of an additional article or book.) For newspapers and magazines, on the other hand, their business is to sell more copies.

One way to do this is through the use of "celebrities," in this case, the best-known economists. Drawing on studies on the use of celebrities in advertising, it is possible that celebrity economists serve to call attention to a publication. Using a celebrity economist might also allow the publication to draw some identification between itself and the think tank or the policies supported by the think tank where the economist is associated. The best example of this use of an economist might be where one has a regular column, such as Robert Barro (Hoover Institution) in *Business Week* (about ten times per year from 1998 to 2004); or James Glassman (American Enterprise Institute) writing weekly for the *Washington Post* (1997 to 1999 and 2001 to 2004). Unlike using Britney Spears to advertise soft drinks, the economist is always woven into the context of the product

(the story) and so there is little danger to the reporter in quoting an expert on the economy.

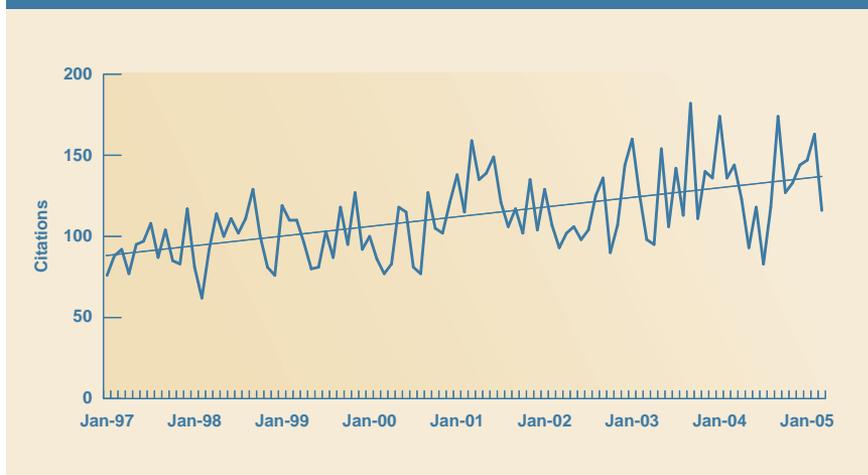
There are different ways to measure the top celebrity economists. Since all of our survey citations included the name of the think tank with the name of the scholar, the most accurate measure of "heat" should include a factor for the duration of the scholar's tenure in the studied think tanks. Many move into and out of government positions, which is a legitimate function of the think tanks, but citations garnered while working in government are not counted here. Of the top fifty scholars in this study, however, only six either didn't enter the survey in January 1997 or exited before March 2005.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, we opt to follow the 2002 method and initially use raw totals to rank the economists.

The three economists with the highest individual total citations remain Fred Bergsten, Robert Litan, and Robert Reischauer, though not in that order. After that, we lose comparison to 2002 in part because of our selection of "economists" being strictly based on the think tanks' own designation of "experts" in economics, and also due to our desire to keep all previous scholars in the study. For example, Marshall Wittmann and Stephen Moore were not included in the earlier study; and William Frey was included during his tenure at Milken which presents all their experts as "economists," yet he is not listed as an

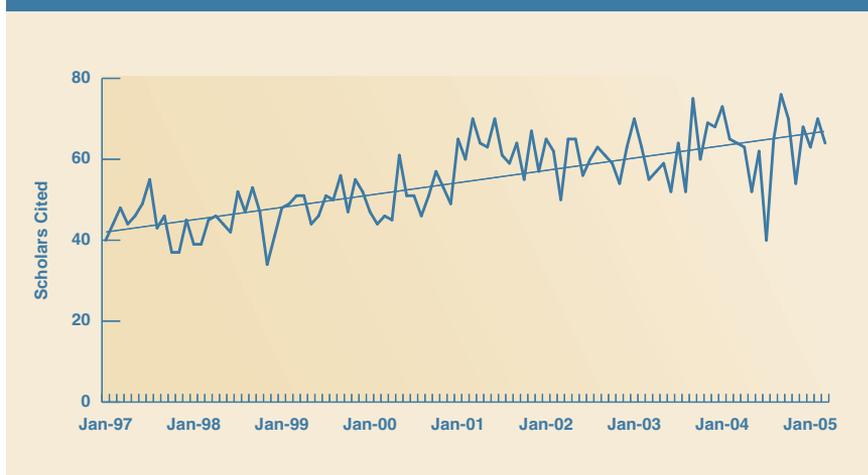
*Continued on page 39*

Continued from page 15

### Number of citations per month, 1997–2005



### Number of scholars cited per month, 1997–2005



expert in economics by Brookings.<sup>6</sup> Yet all three appear here in a sort of “blended” survey that is internally consistent with the studies previously published in *TIE*.

Our 2005 group of Top 30 scholars had an average of three citations per month and authored one article every quarter. Five of the Top 30 worked for more than one ranked think tank during the study. Brookings and the Institute for International Economics appear most frequently as the destination think tank. Since those two are the top-ranked think tanks, it would seem with the information we have so far that a scholar might choose

to move to a more visible think tank, although we would need to interview the movers individually to determine their motivations for changing employment.<sup>7</sup>

We break out the top twenty scholars by citations for the last two calendar years. Twenty-seven scholars altogether were ranked in the top twenty in at least one of those two years. There are significant differences in the year-to-year rankings, as one would expect. Michael Tanner of the Cato Institute best demonstrates the real potential variation in the number of citations an individual scholar could receive in any given year: he ranked 106th in 2003 and 18th in 2004. “International issues like the war in Iraq were at the forefront of the news in 2003,” explains Mr. Tanner. “My primary economic topic is social security, which came to the forefront in 2004.” Only Jared Bernstein, Gary Hufbauer, Fred Bergsten, and Bill Gale manage to maintain Top 10 rankings overall and in the individual years.

Missing from the Top 20 in Recent Years list are Top 30 Overall scholars such as Marshall Wittmann, who spent all of 2003 and most of 2004 as director of communications for Senator John McCain. Also missing is Ross DeVol, who remained with the Milken Institute but dropped out of the Top 50 for 2004, possibly due to the loss of Milken Institute’s association with *Forbes’* ranking of U.S. cities. Others, such as Morris Goldstein (13th overall) and William Niskanen (30th overall) ranked just outside the Top 20 in both years. Of the economists at the newcomer Center for Global Development, only Nancy Birdsall would have cracked the Top 20, and then only in

*Want to know how to boost your ranking? It doesn't hurt to have a scholar get a column in an important national publication, such as Robert Barro of the Hoover Institution, who runs a regular column in Business Week.*



## What Have You Done Lately? Top Scholars in Recent Years, 2003 and 2004

Name	Tank(s)	Rank 2004	Rank 2003	Rank 1997–2005*
Jared Bernstein	Economic Policy Institute	1	1	7
Peter R. Orszag	Brookings Institution	2	4	14
Gary Clyde Hufbauer	Council on Foreign Relations & Institute for International Economics	3	6	5
C. Fred Bergsten	Institute for International Economics	4	2	1
Kevin A. Hassett	American Enterprise Institute	5	5	10
Nicholas R. Lardy	Institute for International Economics & Brookings Institution	6	12	6
William H. Frey	Milken Institute & Brookings Institution	7	13	19
William G. Gale	Brookings Institution	8	3	9
Bruce Bartlett	National Center for Policy Analysis	9	20	17
Catherine L. Mann	Institute for International Economics	10	62	34
Will Marshall, III	Progressive Policy Institute	11	10	11
Daniel J. Mitchell	Heritage Foundation	12	23	35
Robert D. Reischauer	Urban Institute & Brookings Institution	13	7	2
Claude E. Barfield	American Enterprise Institute	13	55	45
James K. Glassman	American Enterprise Institute	15	42	8
Chris Edwards	Cato Institute	16	30	50
Philip K. Verleger, Jr.	Council on Foreign Relations & Institute for International Economics	16	42	70
Robert Greenstein	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	18	9	15
Michael D. Tanner	Cato Institute	18	106	24
John H. Makin	American Enterprise Institute	20	14	16
Alice Rivlin	Brookings Institution	25	15	40
Benn Steil	Council on Foreign Relations	39	8	29
Marcus Noland	Institute for International Economics	39	11	32
Clyde V. Prestowitz, Jr.	Economic Strategy Institute	39	15	18
Bruce Katz	Brookings Institution	42	19	21
Lawrence Mishel	Economic Policy Institute	59	15	42
Nicholas Eberstadt	American Enterprise Institute	59	18	20

\*For all citations from January 1, 1997, through March 31, 2005

2004 when she accounted for more than 80 percent of the think tank's citations.

### RISING IMPORTANCE OF EXPERTS

There is a noticeable upward trend in the number of press mentions given to the think tank scholars since the survey began in January 1997. The number of scholars being cited each month from these seventeen think tanks has also been increasing across time. In fact, there is evidence that people will tend to make their own decisions, to think for themselves if you will, when presented with conflicting information from authority figures. (In the well-known Milgram experiments, the subjects were less likely to shock the "patient" after he started screaming if there were two authority figures present who disagreed with each other.) The body politic can only benefit from the fact that many reporters elect to cite more than one scholar on a topic.

---

*The New York Times clearly favors  
the liberal think tanks.*

---

### DOES CREDIBLE EQUAL INFLUENTIAL?

The issue of think tank legitimacy is closely related to whether or not, and to what extent, think tanks have influence. Whereas Congressional testimony or citations by members of Congress may be a more direct measure of influence than press citations, they are also more difficult to measure. Further, the legislative process is so complex and covers such a long period of

## Leaning Towers of Ivory: Political Labels on the Think Tanks

	Press	G&M*
American Enterprise Institute	Conservative	Conservative
Brookings Institution	Liberal	Neutral
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Liberal	Neutral
Cato Institute	Conservative	Conservative
Center for Strategic and International Studies	Nonpartisan	Neutral
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	Liberal	Liberal
Council on Foreign Relations	Nonpartisan	Liberal
Economic Policy Institute	Liberal	Liberal
Economic Strategy Institute	Nonpartisan	Liberal
Heritage Foundation	Conservative	Conservative
Hoover Institution	Conservative	Conservative
Hudson Institute	Conservative	Conservative
Institute for International Economics	Nonpartisan	Neutral
Milken Institute	Undefined	Undefined
National Center for Policy Analysis	Conservative	Undefined
Progressive Policy Institute	Centrist	Undefined
Urban Institute	Centrist	Liberal

\*These labels are based on the average Americans for Democratic Action scores of the members of Congress who cite the think tanks, as calculated in Tim Groseclose and Jeff Milyo, "A Measure of Media Bias," Quarterly Journal of Economics, forthcoming.

## What's in a Name? Think Tank Citations by Press's Political Labels

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total	Share
Conservative	360	351	438	476	581	517	502	552	201	3,978	37%
Liberal	394	458	448	332	451	381	519	493	114	3,590	33%
Nonpartisan	262	276	221	191	277	286	381	372	63	2,329	22%
Centrist	92	60	84	144	126	103	138	134	42	923	9%

time that it would be foolish to claim to be able to measure which think tanks have impacted legislation (though some think tanks and many economists do just that). We admit that media citations are only a proxy for influence. Still, as Doyle McManus, Washington bureau chief for the *Los Angeles Times*, tells us, “The measure of the influence of a newspaper goes beyond its national circulation. For example, in addition to being delivered to every

member of Congress and most of the New York-based leaders in the financial and entertainment industries, the *Los Angeles Times* exports journalistic content to six hundred newspapers in the United States and overseas.”

Furthermore, the most influential think tank may not necessarily be the most credible. An August 1999 article in the *Washington Post* cited work by Wake Forest University Professor Andrew Rich based on a survey of Capitol Hill staffers and Washington-based journalists. Of twenty-seven think tanks studied, Heritage ranked first in influence, but Brookings ranked first for credibility.

Because of the need to stay on the leading edge of the research frontier, the requirement for credentialed economists in the think tanks and among press reporters should be very high. Of the economists examined in the study, we know the college degrees of over three hundred—63 percent have Ph.D. degrees. On the downside, only 65 percent of those advanced degrees are in economics. However, nearly all of the lower degrees we were able to identify (masters and bachelors) are specialized in economics. It might be that the think tanks are serving some purpose as a place where budding economists can test their skills and desire to make research their life's work. About 75 percent of the economists studied have taught classes at the university level. In addition to revealing information about graduate degrees that we might not otherwise know about (most universities require at least a master's degree to teach undergraduate classes), teaching is an important way for our economist to spread their influence.

---

*It almost looks as if  
the press cited the scholars from the  
liberal think tanks until a  
conservative president was elected in  
2000. At that point, perhaps they  
figured they should find out what the  
other guys were saying.*

---

## Who Talks to Whom—According to the Media’s Own Bias Labels\*

Press	Conservative	Liberal	Nonpartisan	Centrist
Wall Street Journal Europe	50%	19%	26%	4%
Wall Street Journal (New York)	49%	26%	18%	7%
BusinessWeek	46%	32%	13%	9%
Asian Wall Street Journal	46%	20%	31%	3%
USA Today	37%	36%	14%	13%
New York Times	30%	46%	15%	10%
Washington Post	35%	39%	16%	10%
Los Angeles Times	30%	35%	23%	12%
Foreign Affairs	16%	28%	54%	1%
International Herald Tribune	34%	23%	42%	2%
Economist	24%	33%	38%	5%
Financial Times	28%	30%	36%	6%
All	36.8%	33.2%	21.5%	8.5%

\*Rows may not total to 100% due to rounding.

### RIGHT, CENTER, AND LEFT; OR RED, WHITE, AND BLUE

Data based on an analysis of lifetime roll-call voting by Congress shows that the gap between liberals and conservatives in the House is as wide as it has been since the early 1900s. More recent evidence shows that the distance between senators of the same party is also declining over time, meaning that they are becoming more partisan as well. At this point, we look at the partisan labels applied to the think tanks by the press. We also look to see if some publications “lean” more toward one type of think tank or another.

We begin by using the political labels the press applies to the think tanks. We did a simple news search in Factiva for the past six months associating each think tank’s name within five words of the labels liberal, conservative, centrist, and nonpartisan. Using this methodology, we found clear distinctions in the way that the think tanks are represented. Each think tank scored hits with one label to the exclusion of the others. (Only the Milken Institute could not be classified in this way, and therefore is excluded from the remainder of this section.)

In direct contradiction to claims of a liberal bias in the media, the conservatives garnered more cita-

tions in all but one of the past six years. It almost looks as if the press cited the scholars from the liberal think tanks until a conservative president was elected in 2000. At that point, perhaps they figured they should find out what the other guys were saying. Although this speaks poorly to the influence of the press in politics, it does at least speak to the perceived influence of the think tanks. It could be that the think tanks considered most likely to influence the president are more likely to be quoted.

Statistically, we can state without a doubt that there is an association between the leanings of the think tank cited and the publication making the citation.

---

*The Economist is voted*

*“Least Likely to Quote a Liberal”*

*in our study.*

---

## Who Talks to Whom—According to the G&M Labels\*

Press	Conservative	Liberal	Neutral
Wall Street Journal Europe	50%	11%	39%
BusinessWeek	48%	12%	39%
Wall Street Journal (New York)	47%	17%	36%
Asian Wall Street Journal	46%	11%	43%
USA Today	38%	26%	37%
Foreign Affairs	17%	15%	68%
Economist	25%	10%	65%
International Herald Tribune	33%	14%	54%
Financial Times	28%	20%	52%
Los Angeles Times	31%	24%	45%
Washington Post	35%	22%	42%
New York Times	29%	29%	42%

\*Rows may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Four of the twelve publications obviously favor economists from conservative think tanks. *USA Today* is nearly neutral devoting about the same share to both conservative and liberal think tanks. The *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Economist* and *Financial Times* also come close to evenly dividing their attention across the spectrum of major political labels. The *New York Times* clearly favors the liberal think tanks, and nonpartisans get the nod from *Foreign Affairs* and the *International Herald Tribune*. No publication in the study gave preference to citing scholars from think tanks they labeled as centrist.

However, because these labels are applied by the publications it is possible that they are simply repeating what the think tanks themselves prefer, especially in the case of “nonpartisan,” which all 501(c)3 institutions must be in order to avoid problems with the Internal Revenue Service. In fact, in some cases the press doesn’t describe the political orientation of a think tank consistently. For example, the *Wall Street Journal* calls the Progressive Policy Institute the “Democrat’s centrist” think tank, while *Business Week* leaves off the close ties with the Democratic Party and calls them simply “centrist.” Yet the Progressive Policy Institute doesn’t label itself “centrist” nor do any of the other think tanks label themselves much of anything other than “nonpartisan.”

For that reason, we repeated the analysis using labels based on the scores from the Groseclose and Milyo (G&M) analysis (shown in the last column of the table). The scores are calculated using 1999 as the “base” year, and represent the average political leaning of the members of Congress who cite the think tank. After discussing the scores with Tim Groseclose, we label scores of 40 or less as “conservative,” scores between 40 and 59 as “neutral,” and scores of 60 or greater as “liberal.” In so doing, we remove two more undefined think tanks, National Center for Policy Analysis and Progressive Policy Institute.<sup>8</sup> The “nonpartisan” label is no longer available to the four think tanks so described by the press. One “centrist” think tank is changed to “liberal” (Urban) and two “liberal” think tanks are found to be neutral (Carnegie Endowment and Brookings).

We see a very different picture of the leanings of some these publications using this more objective measure of bias. None of these publications favor liberal think tanks, although the *New York Times* comes closest to giving them a full one-third share. The other two “liberal” press outlets actually gave the second highest share of citations to conservatives (behind neutrals). The *Economist*, which appeared to be “nonpartisan” using press labels for the think tanks, is voted “Least Likely to Quote a Liberal” in

our study; although in fairness they and *Foreign Affairs* still lean most heavily toward neutral think tanks. Once again, *USA Today* comes closest to balanced reporting with a relatively small slight to the liberals.

Finally, whether it results from the nature of the publications that favor them or from the nature of the think tanks themselves, we note that the conservative think tanks appear by way of authored articles at a rate more than three times that of their peers (35 percent of conservative citations are authored articles). For the liberal and neutral think tanks, their scholars and research were directly mentioned by reporters and writers in 90 percent of their measured citations.

#### EVENT ANALYSIS

We began by mentioning the changes in the political and economic landscape that could have been the reason that the role of economic experts became more important in the last thirty years. Changes in citations for the top scholars around the time of the Asian crisis, a recession, and a Presidential election were examined in 2002 using annual counts. With the new database in monthly format, we can take a closer look at the idea that think tank scholars provide a valuable service to the public through their analysis and interpretation of events. For example, since 1997, the U.S. economy experienced one recession beginning in March 2001. In addition, also highly relevant to the economy, is the debate and passage of a major tax bill in the first half 2001. In either case, there were more citations in the early part of 2001 than around the September 11 terrorist attack. Indeed, scholar citations jumped in 2001 even above the long-term upward trend.

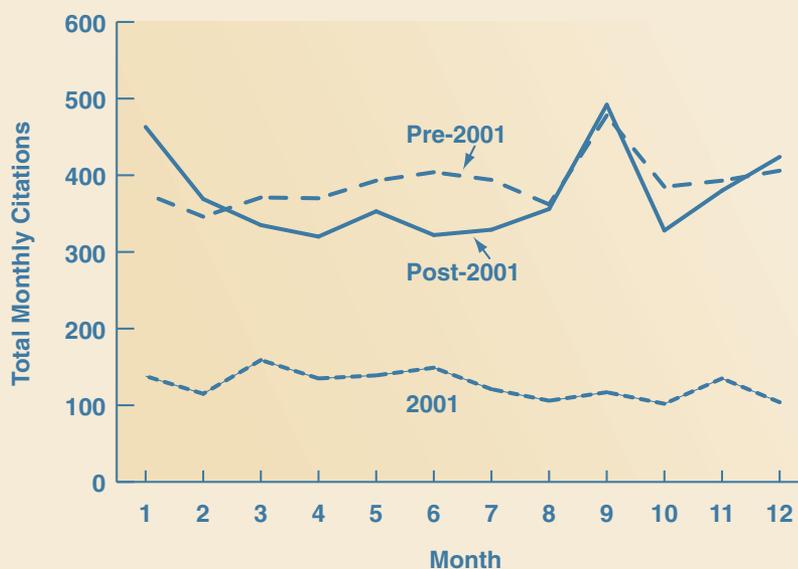
One might think that the increase in citations in 2001 could be due to the September 11 attacks, although our goal here is to measure the influence of economists, so that the economic events should be more important in this analysis. A closer look at 2001 shows a consistent increase in

### Total Citations by Year



Note: 2005 observation annualized based on survey data through March 31

### Monthly Citations for Years Around 2001



Pre-2001 is 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000. Post-2001 covers 2002, 2003, and 2004, but excludes 2005, for which only three months' data are available.

economist citations every year in September, possibly due to the federal fiscal cycle. Yet in 2001, there was no such increase. Rather, there was a slight rise in citations in March as the recession took hold and the House of Representatives marked up the tax bill.

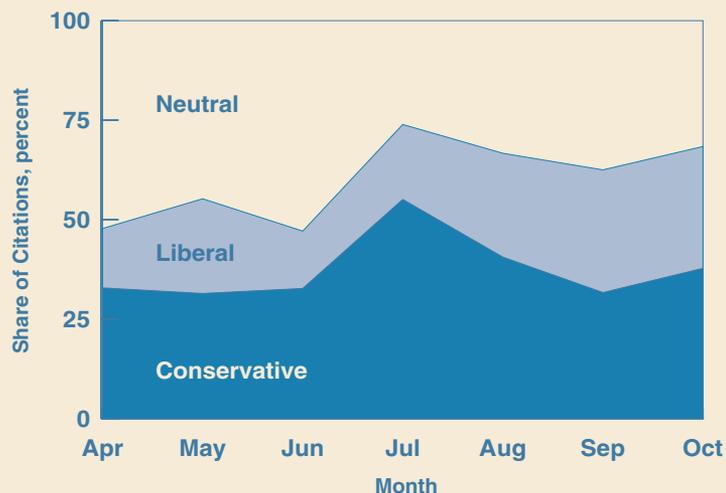
Before concluding, we take another look at the political impact of the think tanks by measuring citations around the two Presidential elections that occurred during the study: 2000 and 2004. Laying the two election years against each other doesn't tell much except that there was more activity in 2004 than in 2000. In fact, if we plot those years against all other years, we see that 2004 citations are a little higher than "usual" and the 2000 citations are a little lower than "usual," although they trace a similar pattern.

To examine the election event, we show citations using the G&M ratings and the percentage of citations given to each category. What we see is that the two election years look very different. Citations from scholars at neutral think tanks took a decreasing share of the total in the months leading up to the 2000 conventions, while the opposite was true in 2004. In both events, the conservatives took an increasing share of citations as the election approached. Was the political dynamism seen in 2000 moderated during the 2004 election out of respect for troops in combat? Conservatives, in particular, had a marked reduction in citations in July.

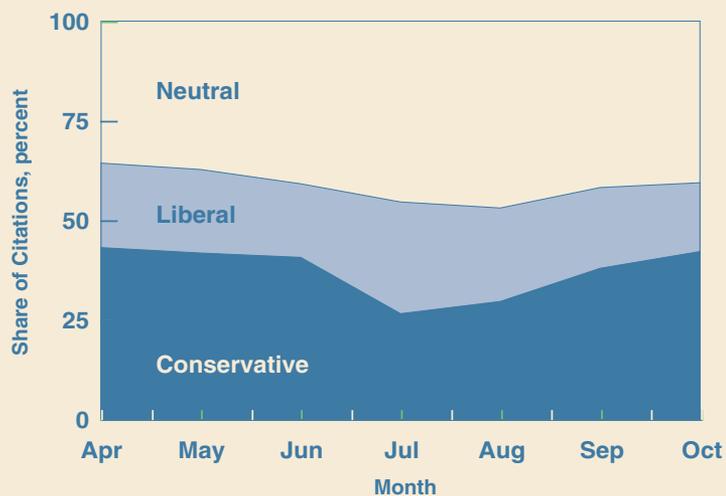
### CONCLUSION

A range of competing advocacy think tanks might provide an extra dimension to policymaking procedures while avoiding the remoteness of academia. Alternatively, they may be viewed as a politically motivated group of elites bent on securing their own policy agendas. The reality, I'm sure, is somewhere in between where the legitimacy of think tanks reflects prevailing political conditions and preferences. Like them or not, think tanks will be with us for many years to come. There seems now to be global agreement that think tanks of various types are important and valid components of the policy making process.

### Leading Up to 2000 Elections: Citations by G&M Bias Ratings



### Leading Up to 2004 Elections: Citations by G&M Bias Ratings



As democracy spreads around the world, think tanks seem to follow. There is growing recognition in governmental, civil service, and university circles that the think tanks have a useful role to play in civil society.<sup>9</sup> There are about three hundred independent think tanks in the United States (depending on how "think tank" is defined) and another thousand connected to universities. The United Kingdom, with a fraction of the population, has nearly one

hundred; there are 110 in Canada. In a democracy, the problems in society and government are openly reported and discussed thanks to freedom of the press. And that, ultimately is where think tanks meet media: as the interpreters of the facts reported by the media.

Authoring articles is another way to boost your ranking. Of course, maybe it doesn't hurt to have a scholar get a column in an important national publication, or even date a famous newscaster. Just don't worry that you'll be boosting my own citation count by mentioning these rankings. As a "free agent" rather than being in the employ of one of the listed think tanks, all those well-deserved citations of this study won't show up in the next Think Tank survey. ♦

#### BRIEF COMMENTS ON DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The complete database used in this study will be available online at [www.international-economy.com](http://www.international-economy.com) in tab-delimited format to encourage researchers to review their population-file details and submit updates and corrections.

The 2002 study used Dow Jones Interactive search for the *Wall Street Journal*, *Asian Wall Street Journal*, *Wall Street Journal Europe*, *Economist*, and *Business Week*, and a LexisNexis search for the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Financial Times*, *International Herald Tribune*, and *Foreign Affairs*. The explanation for using two databases was that "Dow Jones Interactive is more powerful for the business publications . . . LexisNexis has only abstracts for the *Wall Street Journal*, weekly listings for the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, and no listings for the *Wall Street Journal Europe*, but is much more powerful for publications such as the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *International Herald Tribune*."

Since that time, Dow Jones Interactive became known as Factiva and carries full coverage of the *New York Times* and *USA Today*, though still only selected coverage of the *International Herald Tribune*. For consistency, we use the same sources as 2002 for our search. The *Los Angeles Times* was added using LexisNexis, which provided superior results to Factiva for that publication.

Although it would seem that the next logical addition would be television appearances, they cannot be added to this study because there is no consistent source for all news program appearances. Although the newswires carry transcripts of many programs, including the names of the "talking head" appearances, they aren't up to the type of rigorous searching we require. Also, they are only recently available. For example,

America's Intelligence Wire carries the transcripts of MSNBC programs like "Scarborough Country" beginning in January 1999. The International Wire, which also carries transcripts of news programs, became available in August 2003. Further, the full transcripts of the programs are posted to searchable news databases as one continuous document. Searching for the appearance of an economist's name with the think tank is generally futile, as they can occur in different contexts within the program yet be contained in the same transcript document.

#### NOTES

1. An updated/corrected version of the rankings was subsequently posted at [www.iie.org](http://www.iie.org). In fact, we did not rely on the earlier results for our database. New results in this edition supersede previous editions.
2. The methodology employed in 2002 can be found online at <http://www.iie.com/study/study.htm>. A fuller description specific to the current study will be available at [www.STPAdvisors.com](http://www.STPAdvisors.com).
3. The Milken Institute was included in the 2000 survey but eliminated in 2002 for producing too few citations (less than 1 percent of the total).
4. In the working paper, I will attempt to create an unbiased selection process for think tank inclusion in the survey based on the number of articles that mention "economist" or "economics" in connection with the think tank's name. Hopefully, this will settle the question of which think tanks and scholars should be routinely included in the ranking.
5. Very few think tanks include hire dates in bios and not all personnel changes are reported in the press. The entry and exit dates are to the best of our knowledge correct.
6. Mr. Frey tells me, "No offense, but I'd rather not be identified as an economist. I'd lose my low-paying niche." Bill Frey is a demographer by training, profession and choice.
7. We have sixteen economists who spent at least twelve months at more than one think tank. The numbers are quite small and the differences are not large enough for statistical analysis. Nine of the movers increased their citations per month at the new think tank and seven moves resulted in decreased citation rates.
8. Although the loss of the two think tanks reduces the total number of citations being evaluated by 566, there are still 10,252 citations being analyzed.
9. James G. McGann and R. Kent Weaver (eds.). *Think tanks and civil societies: catalysts for ideas and action* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000).