

# Whither Knowledge: Notes on the Credibility of Evidence for Policy

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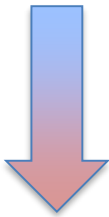
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# Preview

“Strategic” philanthropy +  
uncertain science budgets +  
increased supply of researchers



*Competition and its effects on the quality,  
objectivity, and credibility of evidence*

- US science policy
  - 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century innovations
  - Recurrent battles
- Philanthropy
  - Brake and accelerator
  - Wealth and its discontents
- Our appetite for knowledge
  - Think tanks and their discontents
  - What do policymakers need or want?
- Some modest proposals

# Scientific America



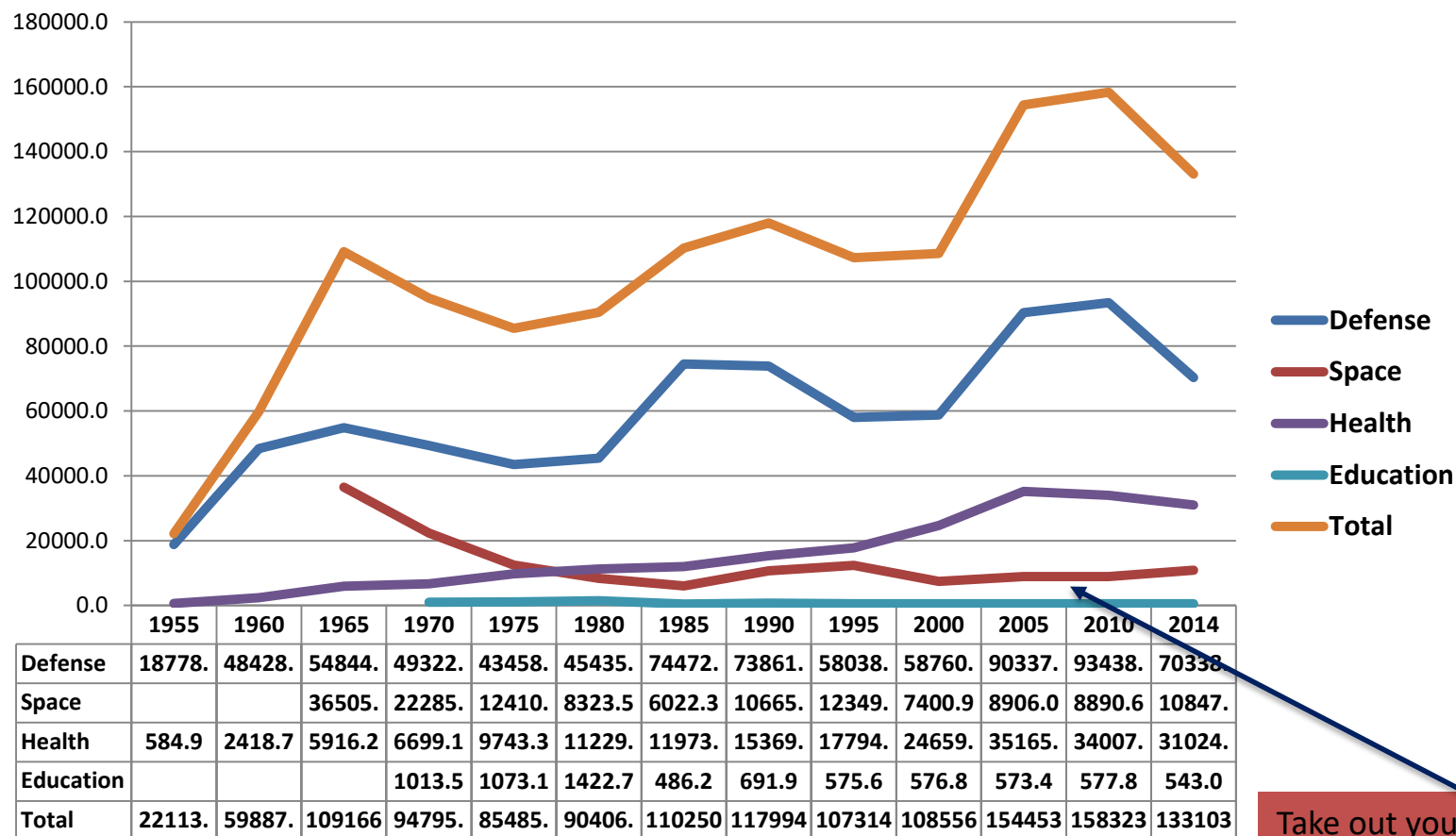
- Milestones
  - APS, AAAS, AAAS, NAS, NAEd, OTA, OAC\*
  - Vannevar Bush, John Steelman
  - Government-university-industry partnership
- Duality of science:
  - production
  - consumption

\*Office of Acronym Control

## Founding of the National Academy of Sciences, 1863

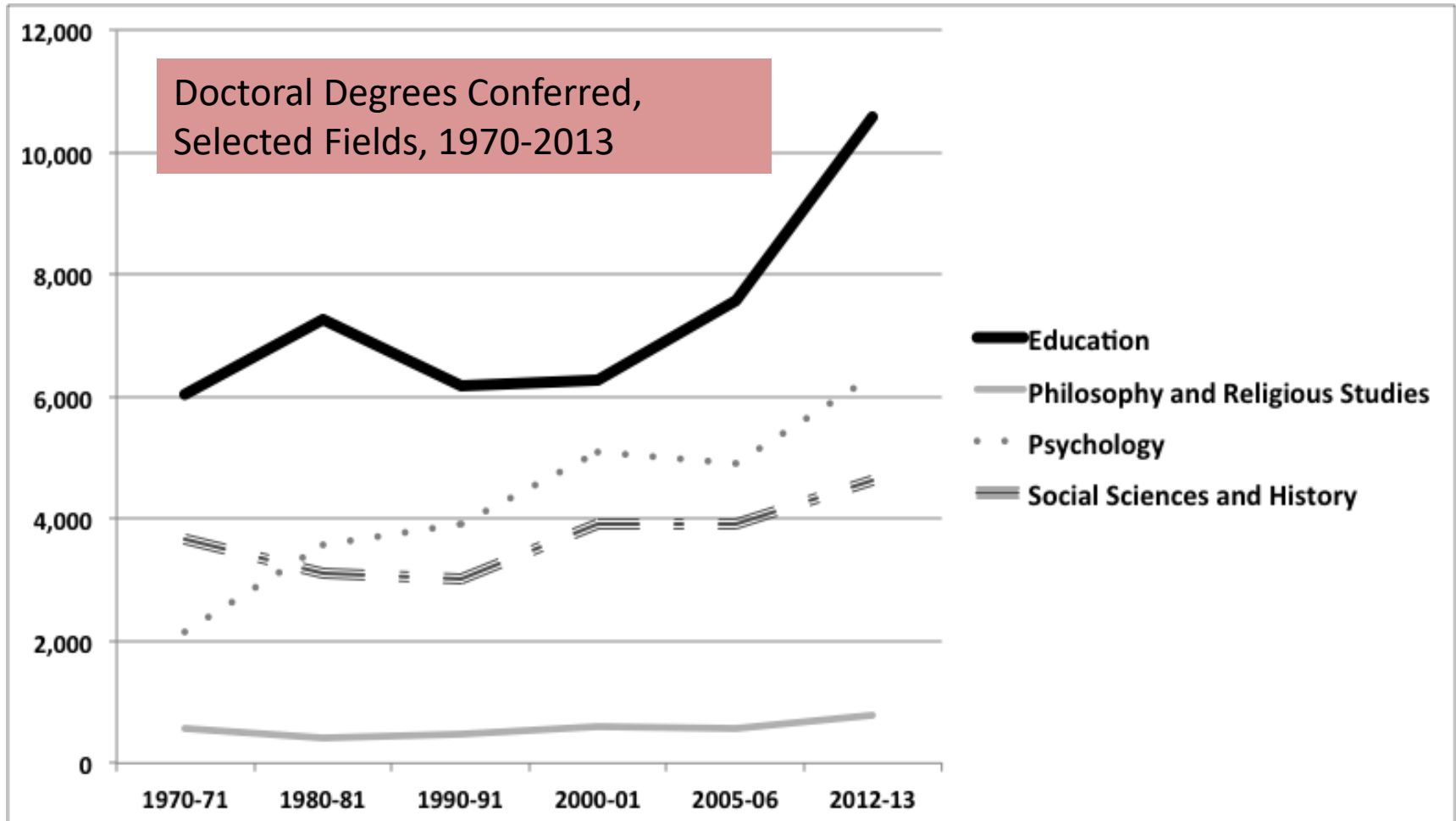


## Federal Funding for R & D, selected categories, 1955-2014



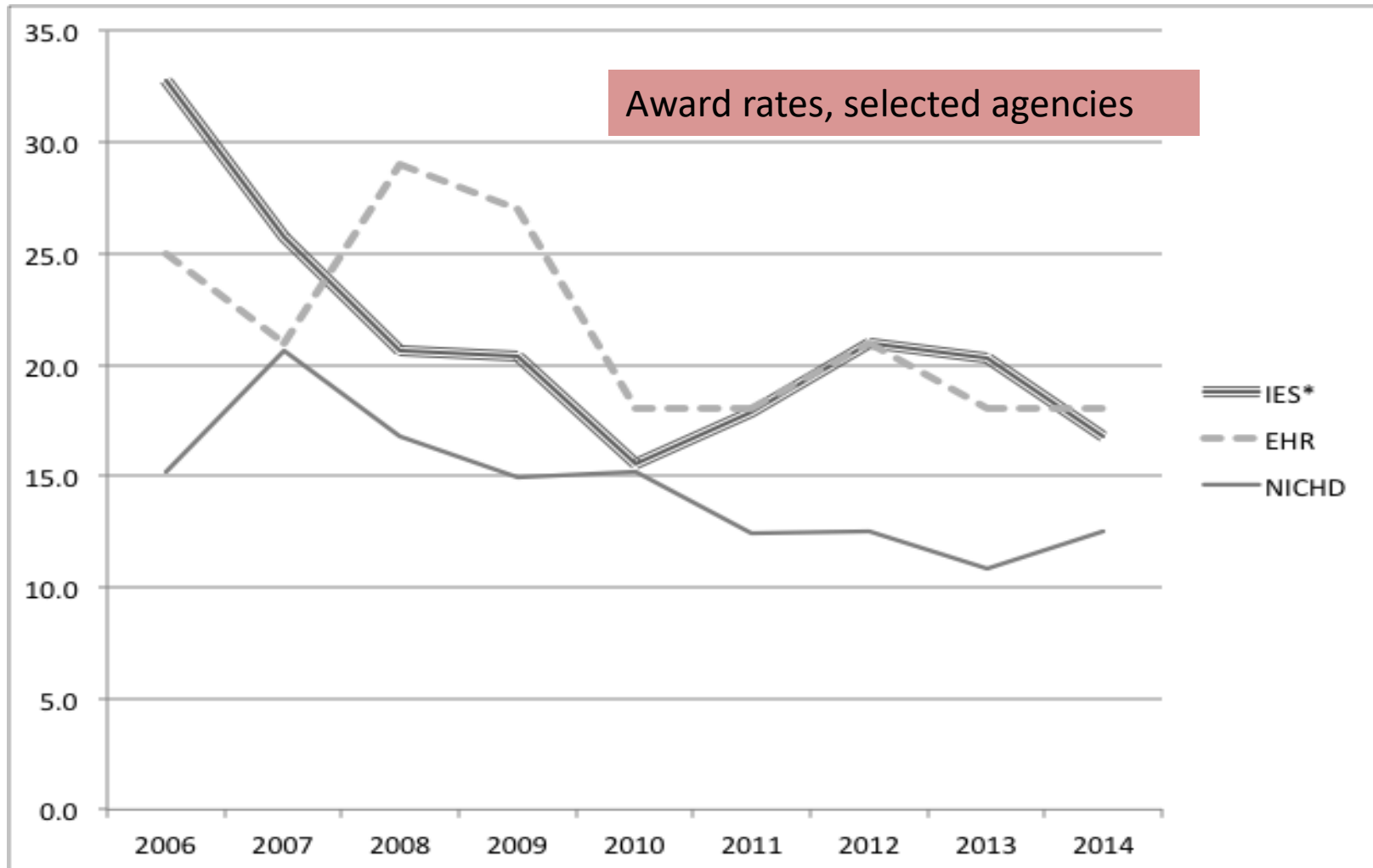
Take out your microscopes

## On the brighter side...



Source: author's computations based on data from NCES Digest of Education Statistics, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14\\_324.10.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_324.10.asp)

## But behind the silver lining...








## On the private side: “foundations” of science

- Wealth and altruism
- Andrew Carnegie and beyond
- Shifting stands
- Rhetoric and reaction



# More good news: American generosity

	 CAF World Giving Index ranking	 CAF World Giving Index score (%)	 Helping a stranger average (%)	 Donating money average (%)	 Volunteering time average (%)
Myanmar	1	70	63	91	55
United States of America	2	61	73	63	46
Australia	3	60	68	73	40
New Zealand	4	59	61	71	44
Sri Lanka	5	57	61	61	49
Canada	6	56	65	65	38
Indonesia	7	56	43	75	50
United Kingdom	8	54	61	69	33
Ireland	9	54	56	66	40
United Arab Emirates	10	53	75	63	21
Uzbekistan	11	52	67	62	27
Kenya	12	52	70	44	42
Netherlands	13	52	55	66	33
Norway	14	50	52	67	31
Turkmenistan	15	50	49	40	60
Malta	16	49	47	73	28
Iceland	17	49	52	70	26
Bhutan	18	49	52	56	39
Kuwait	19	48	78	48	17
Denmark	20	47	54	62	23

Charities  
Aid  
Foundation  
2016

# Milestones in philanthropy

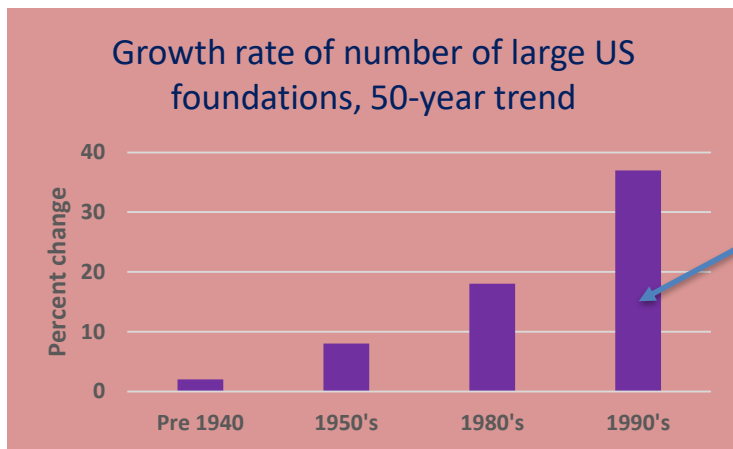
- 1907
  - Russell Sage, \$10M
- 1911
  - Carnegie Corporation, \$ 130M
- 1913
  - Rockefeller, \$35M
- 1917
  - *Charitable deduction*

Since  
then



Kellogg	1930
Ford	1936
Lily	1937
Packard	1964
Buffett	1964
Hewlett	1966
Mellon	1969
MacArthur	1970
Walton	1987
Broad	1999
<b>Gates</b>	2000

# Turbulence and growth

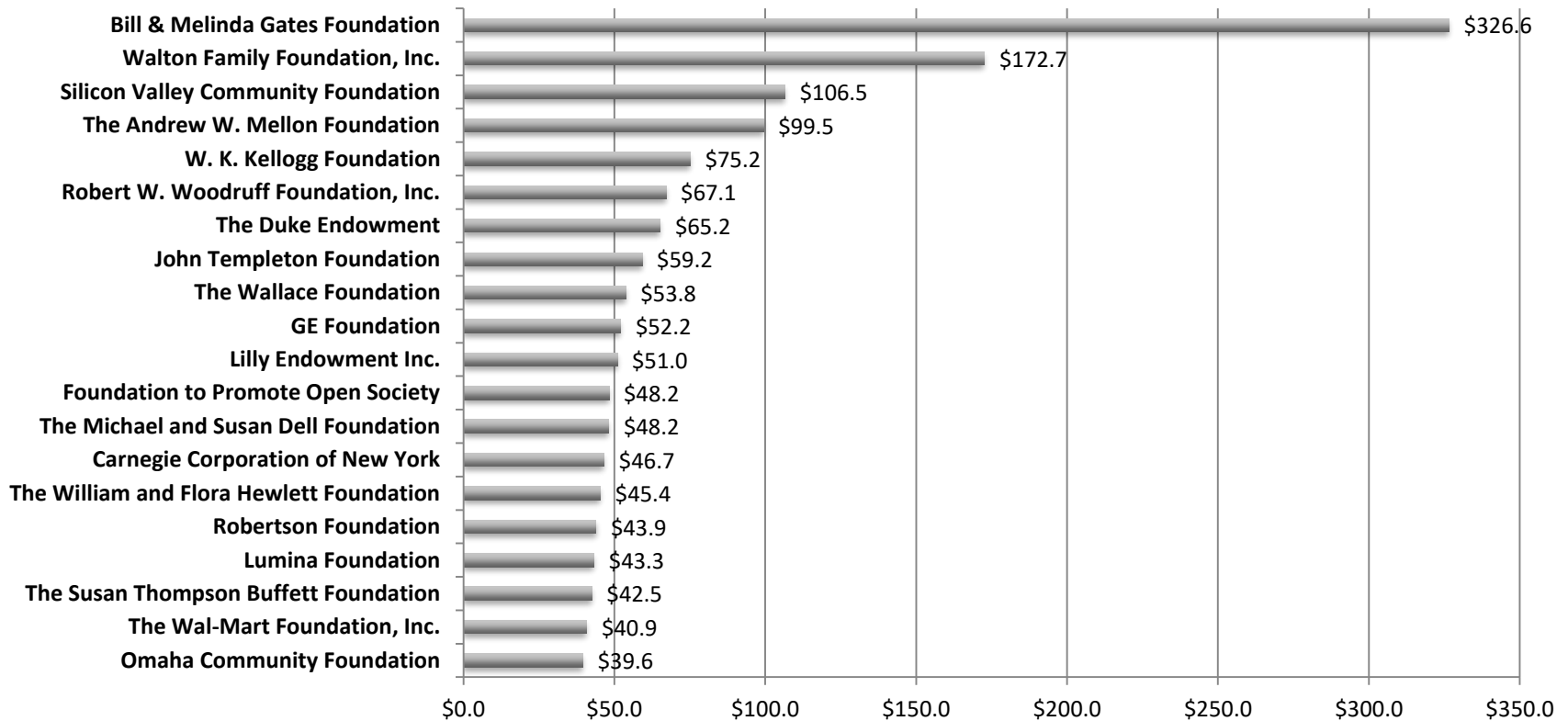


New “large” foundations established in the 1990’s: 8,139 (Fleishman)

Total number of large foundations (assets > \$1M), by end of 1990’s: ~ 22,000  
Number of family foundations: ~ 41,000  
Largest foundation today: Gates, ~\$44B  
Second largest: Ford, ~\$12B  
Gates spending on education, 2002-2012: ~\$2.3B

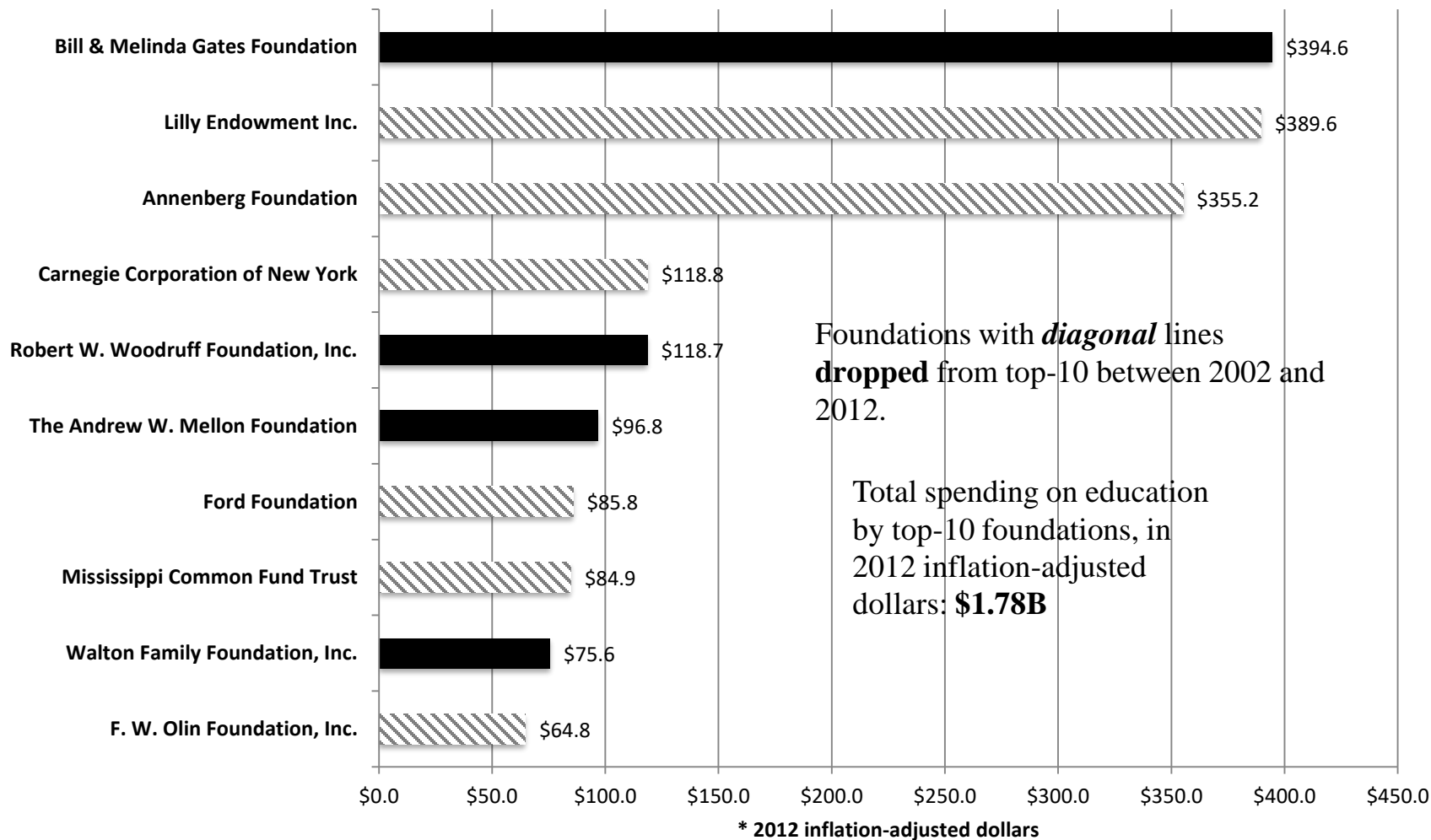
# Today's crowded scene

**Top Twenty Foundations by Spending on Education, 2012, in millions**



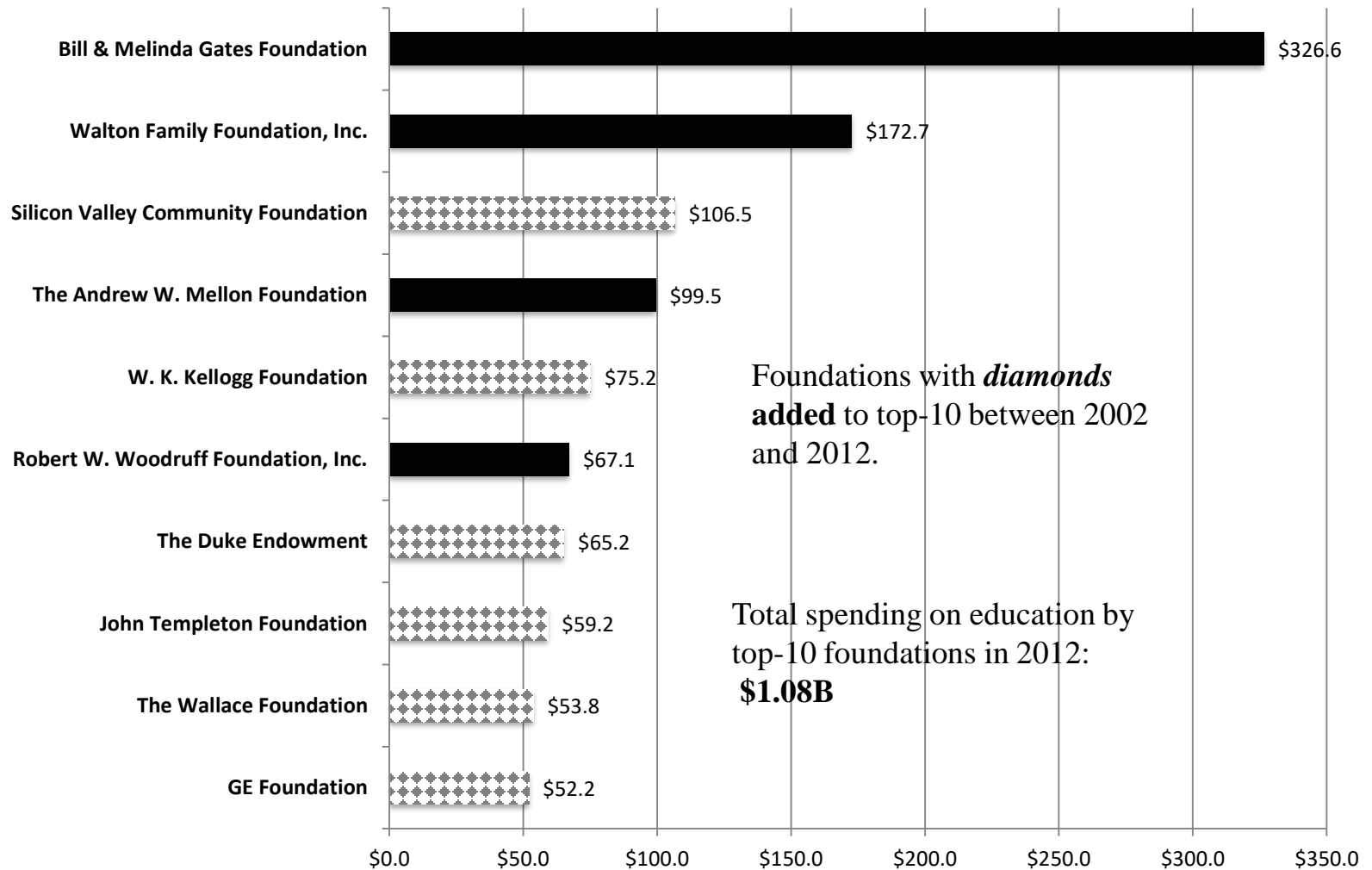
Source: Author's computations based on data from Foundation Center, 2015

## Top Ten Foundations by Spending on Education, 2002, in millions\*



Source: author's computations based on data from the Foundation Center, 2015.

## Top Ten Foundations by Spending on Education, in millions, 2012



# Cause for concern?

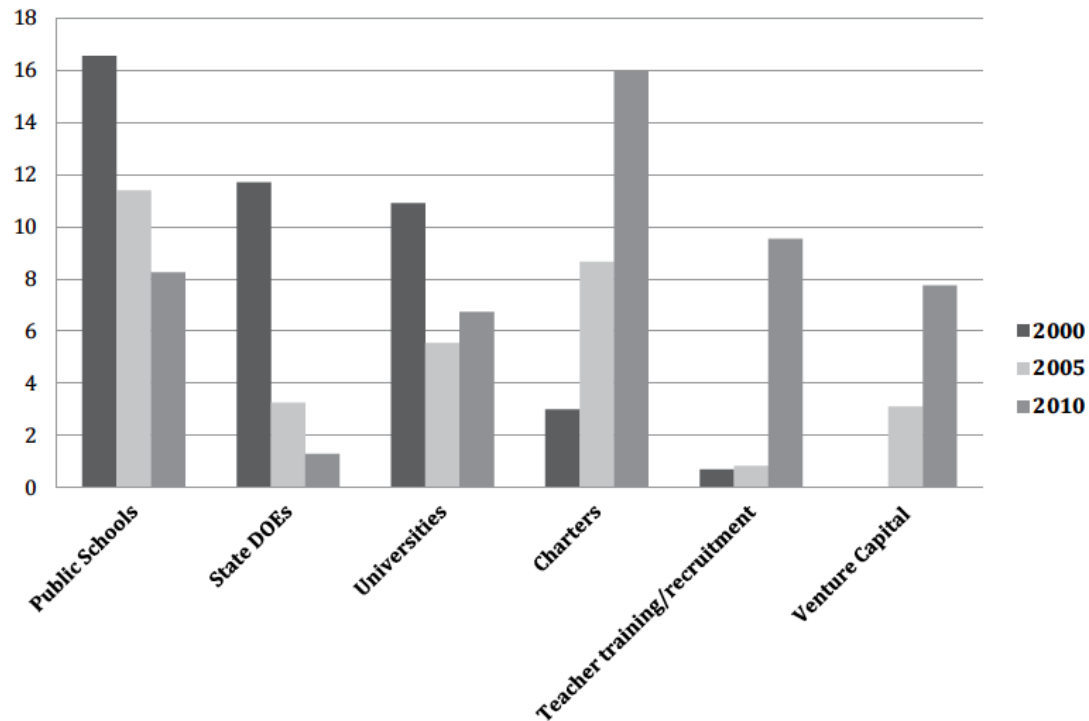


FIGURE 1. *Percent of major foundation grant dollars in traditional institutions versus jurisdictional challengers, 2000-2010*

Source: Sarah Reckhow and Jeffrey W. Snyder, *The Expanding Role of Philanthropy in Education Politics*, EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER 2014

# Perspectives

Joel Fleishman

The greatest contribution of America's private foundations, therefore, is in continually empowering widely diverse individuals and groups, holding a rainbow of views on every conceivable matter of social policy and civic concern, to organize themselves, to make their views heard, and to transform their ideas and dreams into reality.

Diane Ravitch

We have never in the history of the United States had foundations with the wealth of the Gates Foundation and some of the other billionaire foundations ... committed now to charter schools and to evaluating teachers by test scores...

Joanne Barkan

A few billion dollars in private foundation money, strategically invested every year for a decade, has sufficed to ... sustain a crusade for a set of mostly ill-conceived reforms...

Rob Reich

The diversity of goods supplied by foundation grantees helps to create an ever evolving, contestatory, and diverse arena of civil society. Such decentralization tempers government orthodoxy...



# The evidence movement

## Think tanks in 2014

- N. America: 1,989
- USA: 1,830
  - 1/3 established 1981-1990
  - 91% established since 1951
- In DC: 40%
- Globally: >6,000



## Annual expenditures, selected (social science) think tanks and research organizations, 2009-2013

	FHI	SRI	RAND	AIR	WestEd	Brookings	Urban	NBER	AEI	Cato	CAP	NAS	Total
2009	390.9	419.4	286.7	314.7	123.4	100.8	75.0	41.4	29.1	24.6	34.7	321.9	2162.9
2010	514.5	464.1	289.9	287.8	118.9	95.9	69.8	39.2	31.6	26.2	37.1	342.7	2317.7
2011	755.4	646.2	298.5	279.3	134.8	100.6	78.1	40.7	34.2	23.5	36.4	369.6	2797.4
2012	680.2	630.3	286.0	308.9	139.6	100.9	78.0	37.4	33.3	27.0	35.4	342.9	2699.9
2013	658.9	612.8	288.7	342.7	147.8	102.0	79.6	36.7	35.7	25.5	38.8	313.9	2683.0
Source: IRS Form 990; for WestEd audited financial statements provided													

12 Organizations spent about \$2.6B in 2013

Is competition a good thing?

# Threats to credibility: procedural

**NYT Sept 2014**

***“Foreign Powers Buy **Influence** at Think Tanks”***

**NYT Aug 2016**

***“Think tanks are seen as independent, but their scholars often push donors’ agendas, amplifying a culture of corporate **influence** in Washington”***

# Threats to credibility: substantive

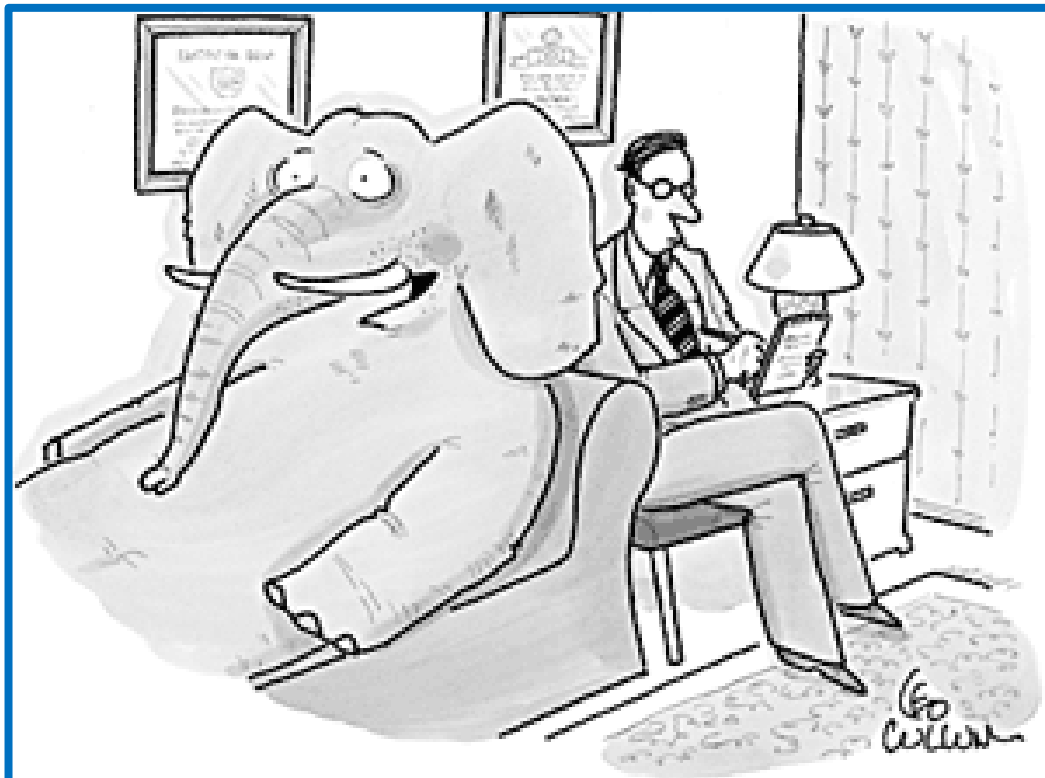
Nate Silver:

“Clinton is a 71 percent favorite to win the election according to our polls-only model and a 72 percent favorite according to our polls-plus model...”

--November 8, 2016 10:41 am

Timothy Egan, NYT, Nov 11, 2016:

**“... Read your horoscope; it's far more likely to be accurate.”**



*"I'm right there in the room, and no  
one even acknowledges me."*

# Pre and post Nov 9

*MJF, circa  
summer 2016:*

*“Americans may  
flirt with  
stupidity but  
they buy  
knowledge.”*

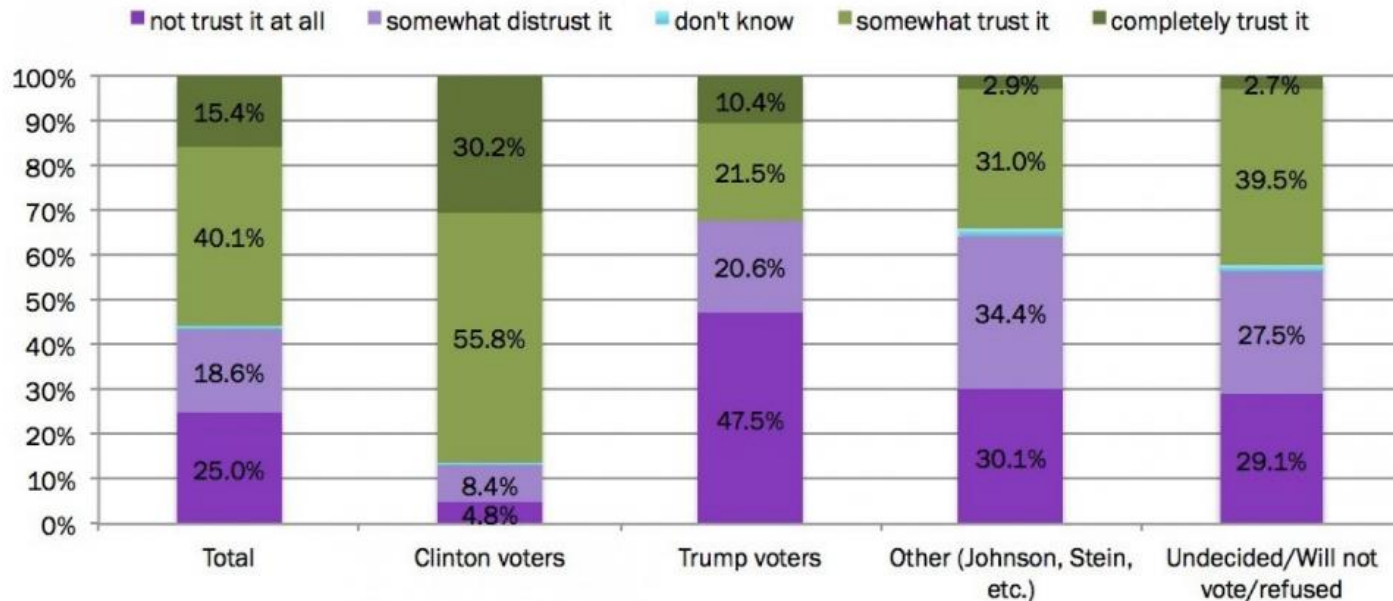
*Scottie Nell Hughes, circa November  
2016:*

“People that say that facts are facts —  
they’re not really facts . . . there’s no such  
thing, unfortunately ...”

# Whither science?

Marketplace-Edison Research Poll, cited by Catherine Rampell, WP, Oct 17

How much do you trust the data about the economy that is reported by the federal government? Do you...?



# What to do?

Logic model  
of the  
current  
situation

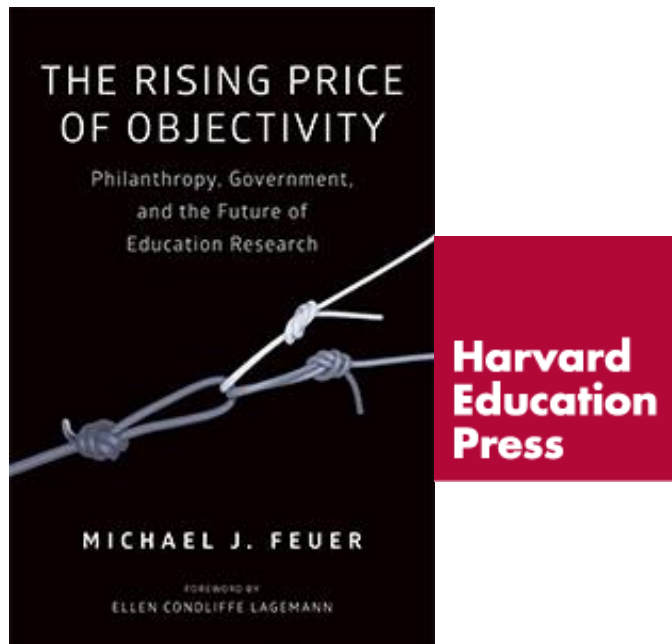




# Congenital optimism?

Policy option	+	-	Probability of adoption
Tweak the tax	Improved accountability	Where to set the dial?	.5
Vertical integration	Increased specificity in education advice	Will Congress be interested?	.00001
Accounting for science	Collaboration and dialog	Who will pay?	.1
Advisers' Summit	New approach to indicators	Collective action is costly	.5

# For more...



Thank you

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