

# The Brookings Institution

## The invisible hand in American government

The year 2016 marked the Brookings Institution's centenary since it was founded in 1916 as the Institute for Government Research (IGR)—the first private organization in the United States devoted to analyzing public policy issues at the national level. Its founder, philanthropist Robert Somers Brookings, originally financed the formation of three organizations, starting with the IGR in 1916 and, thereafter, two more sister organizations: the Institute of Economics in 1922 and the Robert Brookings Graduate School in 1924. On 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1927, the two institutes and the school merged into one contiguous unit, called the Brookings Institution.

The Brookings Institution is an American centrist think-tank, based on Embassy Row in 1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. The institution states that its scholars represent "diverse points of view" and describes itself as non-partisan though others, depending on who you speak to, regard Brookings as liberal or liberal-centrist (a 2011 study examining think-tank employee donations from 2003 to 2010 found that 97.6% of the individuals on staff at Brookings donated to people, or causes, affiliated either directly or indirectly with the Democrats). Conversely, the Heritage Foundation (another think-tank) makes no attempt to hide its stance, describing itself as staunchly Republican. According to their website, the mission of the Heritage Foundation is to "formulate and promote conservative public policies, based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and, a strong national defence". The jury is still out on whether or not think-tanks can truly be centrist, impartial, and non-partisan.

Brookings is ranked as the number one think-tank in the United States in the annual think-tank index, published by *Foreign Policy*, and, the number one think-tank in the world in the *Global Go To Think Tank Index*. James G. McGann, Ph.D. of the Global Go To Think Tank, at the University of Pennsylvania, rated the Brookings Institution in January, 2012 as the:

- #1 think-tank in the world
- #1 think-tank in the United States
- #1 outstanding policy-oriented public policy research programme
- #1 in international development
- #1 for domestic economic policy
- #1 for social policy

*Foreign Policy* magazine's *Think Tank Index* published this quote in January, 2009:

*"When important debates occur in Washington—whether over Middle East peace, global finance, or urban strategy—it's a fair bet that Brookings is driving the conversation...From health care reform to recommendations on closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Brookings has a breadth of experience that allows it to offer innovative fixes for nearly every critical issue facing the United States today."*

*~ Foreign Policy, 2009*

For right or wrong, the Brookings Institution's sphere of influence cannot be denied. It has contributed to the creation of the United Nations in 1945 that President Franklin D. Roosevelt advocated for so much, as well as to the formation of the Marshall Plan in 1948 that granted \$17 billion in aid to Europe in order to rebuild its infrastructure. More recently, the Brookings Institution's portfolio of contributions accounts for such things as the "Project for the New American Century", a defunct American think-tank co-founded by Robert Kagan in 1997 (some sceptics have put across that its members had opportunistically capitalised on 9/11, drawing parallels between the events of that day and the "new Pearl Harbor" stipulated in section V of its 90-page report entitled: *Rebuilding America's Defenses*, "Creating Tomorrow's Dominant Force". Following the aftermath of 9/11, with remarkable speed, Brookings experts devised an array of proposals for homeland security and intelligence operations, and also testified before Congress, all of which eventually led to the conception of the USA PATRIOT Act.

With its international outreach and the degree to Washington's reliance on Brookings for matters pertaining to intellectual discourse, research, and guidance, the lure of the Brookings Institution has garnered the participation of a cross section of leaders on a global scale, spanning presidents, prime ministers, business moguls, chief executives, theologians, royalty, and, even his Excellency, the Dalai Lama. Indeed, the Brookings Institution can be seen in the context of an intermediary between Washington and the international community; a platform embodying policy experts and world leaders that commands so much power and authority, and is esteemed so highly by key players in the upper echelons of the American establishment, in Congress and the White House, that one could call this think-tank the "invisible hand in American government".