

**Donors for Democracy?
Philanthropy and the Challenges of Pluralism in the 21st Century**

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ABSTRACT

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In the wake of the election of Donald Trump, a self-defined “resistance” movement arose to block his agenda. This loosely defined movement cut across the normal boundaries of political activism to new forms of advocacy and new models of cooperation. Major components of the resistance were ideological interest groups, women’s organizations, environmentalists, heretofore apathetic Millennials, racial and ethnic groups, community nonprofits, and, ostensibly, foundations and leading philanthropists – what we term “patrons.” In this paper we systematically examine the behavior of patrons to determine what role they played at this unique time in American history. We place this research in the context of interest group behavior, asking if patrons work in the same way as lobbying organizations, adapting their strategies and tactics to changes in the political environment. Our findings undermine the idea that patrons played a central role in the developing resistance to the new Trump administration, despite the fact that the new president was working against their values and the programs they support. However, a non-trivial minority of patrons, both institutional and individual, did mobilize their voice, institutional resources, and coalitions to resist the Trump agenda. These examples allow us to explore how patrons in some conditions might fulfill the roles of interest groups conventionally understood.

The inauguration of Donald J. Trump as president of the United States sparked a self-styled “resistance” movement encompassing mass protests, social media activism, pressure campaigns aimed at lawmakers, civil litigation, and the emergence of thousands of locally rooted “indivisible” groups. Beginning even before the inauguration, the movement has sought to block administration attempts to crack down on immigrants and refugees, repeal the Affordable Care Act, undermine the nation’s commitments on global climate change, remove protections for people of color and LGBT individuals, use the presidency to benefit Trump business interests, and install White House aides and Cabinet secretaries of dubious qualifications. As everyday Americans mobilized to resist through new and existing organizations, a question emerged: Would big money follow?

In politics, big money typically refers to flows of resources to candidates, party organizations, and political action committees. However, another significant stream of resources merits attention: money flowing from wealthy donors and foundations to charitable and advocacy organizations seeking to influence politics and the policy process. Once seen as passive “patrons” of civil society, these donors increasingly are embracing active roles as “policy entrepreneurs” (Reckhow 2013) and “drivers” of top-down strategies (Fleishman 2007) to formulate and promote policy ideas, influence public agendas, create and sustain think tanks and activist organizations, finance issue-specific SuperPACs and candidates, and support novel approaches to implementing policy and measuring its impact. A decade ago, Joel Fleishman (2007) likened big foundations to interest groups. The present moment provides an opportunity to assess whether philanthropies indeed do act as such by advocating for issues and constituencies threatened in the current political environment.

There are *a priori* reasons to expect institutional and individual donors to step forward as representatives of issue and constituency interests, but there are also reasons to expect donors to hold back. Donors might be expected to speak out, first, because they *want to do so*. Like other political actors, donors have purposive interests in supporting causes to which they are committed. Beyond that, donors might speak out because they *can*. As privileged individuals and institutions, philanthropists would be expected to have exceptional civic skills and resources (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995); enjoy freedom from market and electoral constraints (Fleishman 2007; Frumkin 2006; Reich 2016); enjoy large stockpiles of political capital (Callahan 2017; Freeland 2012; Vogel 2014); and have the opportunity to utilize funding mechanisms that allow them to remain hidden from public scrutiny (Callahan 2017; Mayer 2016; Reich 2016).

On the other hand, there are reasons that big philanthropy, even on the progressive side, might choose to resist “the resistance.” Philanthropists – particularly foundations – face legal restrictions on giving to advocacy groups and electoral organizations. Furthermore, they are influenced by norms that can discourage them from giving that could provoke a political or personal backlash. And, finally, big donors are facing a crisis of moral legitimacy as neo-populist waves – which carried the insurgent campaigns of Trump on the right and Sen. Bernie Sanders on the left – cast elites, experts, and their “solutions.” Elite philanthropy “owes its wealth to an economic system...based on job-draining automation, on job-redistributing processes of globalization, and on neoliberal policies” and focuses “on public problems (e.g., climate change) and constituencies (e.g., poor people of color, feminists, environmentalists, immigrants) that many neo-populists view as opponents in a zero-sum contest for society’s benefits” (Goss and Berry 2017). Thus, “the indebtedness to neoliberalism, the prioritization of elite approaches, and

the orientation toward post-materialist progressive causes... would seem to put much philanthropy at odds with the political zeitgeist” (Goss and Berry 2017). Even donors who feel called to join the resistance movement must navigate serious constraints.

This study examines two groups of big donors – grantmaking foundations and individual philanthropists – as they figure out whether and how to join the resistance movement arising out of the 2016 election. These donors have hundreds of billions of dollars at their disposal, powerful networks, and stockpiles of political capital; these resources allow them to have an outsized influence on the direction of the movement and the country. Recent works have raised troubling questions about how big philanthropy fuels civic and political inequality (Callahan 2017; Freeland 2012; Mayer 2016; Vogel 2014). This study looks at the political inequality question from a different angle: Will philanthropy use its financial and moral resources to defend policy approaches, constituencies, and norms threatened by the administration? While scholars have examined the patrons in established democracies (Goss 2006; Hammack 1999; Jenkins and Halcli 1999; Nielsen 1989; O’Connor 1999; Teles 2012; Walker 1991; Weaver 1967) and in nations seeking to become democracies (Quigley 1997; Herrold 2014), we focus on how patrons operate in a third setting: an established democracy whose pluralist traditions are under strain. Will they be donors for democracy?

We are especially interested in whether philanthropy, should it choose to defend interests under threat, will opt to do this work in public view. Our study is of course constrained by the fact that donors can do much of their work in secret; thus, we cannot claim to be providing an unbiased sample (or census) of philanthropy’s response to the election. Rather, we claim to be capturing that part of resistance activities that donors have chosen to do in plain sight. We argue,

however, that working in plain sight is a meaningful signaling device on the part of philanthropists that tells us something about how they think about their roles as political actors.

Briefly, we reach three findings. First, looking at a representative sample of major donors and foundations, we find that they were generally slow to respond, at least publicly, to the political moment. Second, a fair number of leading donors, both individual and institutional, did choose to devote their money and their voice toward to the resistance and to do so publicly. Third, individual donors tended to be faster, more public, and sharper in their opposition to the administration's agenda than were institutional donors.

Are Patrons Interest Groups?

A long literature, largely neglected by mainstream social science, has examined the roles that philanthropic patrons, whether individual or institutional, play in pluralist democracy. A sanguine view holds that patrons are critical to democracy: developing and promoting innovative approaches to public problems (Fleishman 2007); providing forums for the expression of individual values and voice (Frumkin 2006); and supporting collective action by underrepresented groups (Berry 1999; Goss 2007; Jenkins and Halcli 1999; O'Connor 1999). To critics, however, patrons constitute "bastions of unaccountable power" (Ravitch 2010) who "weaponize philanthropy" to advance personal agendas (Mayer 2016). On this view, "imperious" patrons (Barkan 2011) impose their preferences on the public and its elected representatives (Herbert 2014) and exacerbate civic inequality (Callahan 2017). Although the sanguine and critical perspectives differ on the benefits of elite philanthropy, they agree that these actors are politically consequential and, in fact, fulfill many of the key functions of interest groups.

An interest group is generally understood to be "an organization that tries to influence government" (Berry and Wilcox 2009, p. 5). Thus, any organization becomes an interest group

when it engages in advocacy. It can be largely devoted to other endeavors and only act as an interest group when it needs to make its voice heard. General Motors is in the business of car manufacturing, and very little of its budget is spent on lobbying. Yet it has crucial interests before many government bodies and its advocacy is crucial to its long-term health. Since the defining characteristic is advocacy, interest groups can vary in structure. Indeed, the very term *interest group* is a misnomer. Only 12 percent of interest groups have individuals as members (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, 320). Almost all the rest are institutions, such as corporations or associations of institutions (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, 320). The point is that “interest group” is not synonymous with “mass membership association.” Interest groups can have many members or no members; if a group has members, they can be masses of everyday citizens, or a handful of activist elites, or nonprofit organizations, or corporate entities, or unions, or some combination thereof.

Whatever their structure and constituency, interest groups play a variety of important roles in the American political system.¹ The most obvious and most central is that of representation. They give voice to different sectors of society, not only to those that are established and have access to the resources that facilitate interest group activity, but also to those emergent interests that challenge the establishment (Goss 2007; Jenkins 1998; Jenkins and Halcli 1999). Most of what we think of as lobbying or, more generally, advocacy, fits the role of giving voice: representing interests by conveying what a constituency wants policymakers to know. A second, related role is to facilitate participation by citizens in politics and policymaking. Such participation might take the form of writing letters and emails to legislators, participating in protests, and attending meetings and hearings, among other activities.

A third role is educating. Interest groups generate information on an ongoing basis and disseminate it to their members, to policymakers, and often to the broader public. A fourth role is agenda building. Interest groups put new issues on a governmental agenda, define or redefine issues in favorable terms, and try to raise or lower an existing issue's place on the agenda (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Finally, interest groups engage in program monitoring, meaning they try to ensure that government is administering programs in the way that the organization prefers.

In many ways foundations and other organized forms of patronage seem to easily fit the modern profile of interest groups. A focus of this paper will be to see which of these roles are most characteristic of these patrons. To set the stage, we suggest that patron organizations are institutions that can freely operate without a membership as they overcome the collective action problem by virtue of having a source of revenue other than member dues. Foundations are surely among the most highly respected institutions in America and possess the sophistication to gain access to policymakers when they choose (Hammack and Anheier 2013). Nevertheless, despite their recent emphasis on institutions, interest group scholars have focused little on foundations. Partly, this is the reality of numbers. Few foundations have offices in Washington or their state capitals. Despite the imposing size of the top foundations, such as Gates and Ford, most foundations are small and are focused on a single community or cause.

Foundations also go out of their way to communicate that they are not politically oriented and they've been deft at selling this narrative. In a sense "politics" dirties the sheen of virtue that defines the image of foundations. When seen as benevolent institutions, foundations escape the public scrutiny that might otherwise facilitate insight into their spending habits. Foundations also want to be viewed as unique institutions, bridging the worlds of commerce and civic affairs.

They see themselves as dynamic visionaries, researching existing best practices but then thoughtfully crafting programs to move beyond convention to real innovation.

The unique legal status of foundations also plays a role in inhibiting advocacy. Foundations were created as a way of diverting wealth into tax-sheltered entities that could exist into perpetuity if so desired. But there was also mistrust of the very concept of a foundation, of institutions created by the wealthy who would be advantaged in the tax code. As the legal form evolved in law, foundations were restricted by government in ways that ostensibly prevent funds from being spent on non-charitable endeavors, including political activity (Reich, Cordelli, and Bernholz 2016). Foundations were willing to accept this tradeoff, as they were not formed to be political and their donors benefited from being able to funnel their fortunes into tax-advantaged vehicles.

Like most nonprofits, foundations exaggerate the restrictions that government places on them (Berry and Arons 2003). They can actually donate funds for advocacy, though they need to describe such grants as for general expenses rather than earmarking funds for lobbying. The Internal Revenue Service actually does very little to monitor the behavior of nonprofits, even though they all are effectively subsidized by taxpayers. A small minority of foundations have been outspoken about what they see as their right to be politically active. In general, however, foundations are not eager to revisit this trade-off as they fear more government oversight and, thus, prefer to let sleeping dogs lie. For many small family foundations, the preference is to remain opaque so that internal processes can remain casual and relatively unrestricted. More broadly, there are vulnerabilities that any review of philanthropy inevitably would bring into focus. Donor-advised funds, for example, offer an exceptional tax break to those who create one,

and any substantive oversight efforts could re-define them as tax havens for the rich (Madoff 2016).

To the extent that political science has thought about foundations and individual donors, they've been seen as supporting actors, providing money to solve collective action problems for citizen groups (Walker 1991). However, case studies of leading foundations suggest that political science may have underestimated the depth and scope of patrons' engagement, even in earlier eras. Beyond providing seed capital for the initiatives of issue entrepreneurs, some patrons have proactively identified gaps in the interest groups system and provided the strategic leadership, as well as the money, to help fill these gaps. For example, the Ford Foundation played a key role in establishing and ensuring the long-term maintenance of the modern civil rights and consumer rights infrastructures (Fleishman 2007); and the Olin Foundation and other conservative funders did the same for the ecosystem of right-leaning think tanks and litigation organizations (Teles 2012). Recent literature tells us that contemporary philanthropies are increasingly embracing these models (Bishop and Green 2008; Callahan 2017).

Given changes both in interest group ecology and in philanthropic scope and practice, we argue that it is time for political science to take individual and institutional donors seriously. Following Reckhow (2016), we suggest that they are "more than patrons." Her work finds that philanthropists have driven policy change by developing reform strategies, unifying in coalitions around them, and creating organizations to carry them out. Using public school reform as a case, Reckhow focuses on two of the five interest group functions mentioned above: agenda setting and program monitoring. We suggest that philanthropy's role in the policy process stretches beyond these two functions. Besides doing agenda-setting and monitoring, patrons may represent and mobilize interests, as well as amplify their cause through public education. Patrons have

always done so indirectly, by supporting the activities of civil society organizations. However, we argue that are also capable of doing so directly by exercising their own public voice, by mobilizing resources of such magnitude that they effectively define and organize interests, and by assembling coalitions that look strikingly like interest groups. As we shall see, not all patrons assume the functions of interest groups. Some reject the role; some embrace it fully; and some fall somewhere in between. Using the post-election environment as a case study, we assess the relative distribution of these choices – at least as can be determined through publicly available data – and we construct an argument for how the actions of a subset of patrons map onto the functions of interest groups.

Data and Methods

We recognize that by focusing on the first few months of the Trump administration, we run the risk of taking a snapshot that will not accurately presage the longer story that will emerge. Still, what we are asking is what happened in the wake of Trump’s election? What was the response to the immediate threat he posed to the world of most large foundations and to liberal philanthropists? The longer-term impact will surely be a subject of future research that will call on different tools and will allow for perspectives on how these early months may have influenced longer-term responses.² Here, though, we use the methods available to develop the first chapter of this longer history.

The snapshot that we have taken covers the first three months of President Trump’s first year in office (January 20, 2017 to April 20, 2017) for foundations and the first five months (January 20, 2017 to June 15, 2017) for individual donors. These were turbulent times, with daily controversies over policies such as immigration and health care, as well as larger questions of the President’s fitness to govern and the health of American democracy itself. For most large

foundations and for many individual philanthropists, President Trump represented a deep yet unexpected threat to the very purpose of their efforts. Although foundations may not have prepared for Trump's election in early November 2016, they did have more than two months to formulate their plans by the time our data collection began in late January 2017.

A major part of our efforts was gathering data on 40 large U.S. based foundations. The initial effort documented what we could determine about programming in the 20 largest foundations (as measured by 2014 giving totals) from a database available at the Foundation Center.³ To broaden our research beyond these top 20 behemoths, we examined another 20 foundations from the same database. To construct this stratified sample, we pulled every 20th foundation, by grantmaking, starting at #40. If our sampling procedure turned up a foundation that had no website, we went on to the next 20th foundation. We continued this procedure until we had 20 foundations; the final sample ranged from the 40th largest (by grantmaking) through the 500th largest.⁴ The 20 foundations in our stratified sample were different in scope and operations from the Top 20.

A central focus of our data gathering was a deep dive into each foundation's web site. Although we set forth some guidelines at the beginning of our review, it was not possible to follow strict rules of what we would read and what could be safely ignored. Each foundation organizes its material differently. In the end the web pages we read most closely were those that provided an overview of the foundation, described different programs being funded that had some relevance to national public policy, offered news about the foundation that was collected from outside sources, showed letters and statements from the foundation leadership, or presented announcements regarding new and existing programming. Another line of data gathering was to look for public statements by either the CEO of the foundation, its board chair, or any legacy

funder (i.e., Bill Gates) who was still active in public affairs. These could take the form of interviews, speeches, or articles about them in the press. These sources could be dated at any time during the first three months of President Trump's term.

Further, we looked at the tweets sent by both the Foundation or by its CEO during the three-month period. We take tweets for what they are: signals about current attitudes along with links to more substantive documents. Tweets are seen as supplemental to the web sites and formal statements by leaders but were considered relevant in that they are immediate. In contrast, the foundations themselves can be ponderous bureaucracies, slow to finalize new policies and set up new processes even when there is consensus on changes to be made.

Beyond institutional foundations, we also reviewed the publicly visible activities of 107 individuals, couples, and families identified by Goss (2016) as "policy plutocrats." To identify members of this group, Goss first compiled a sample of America's most prominent philanthropists (n=194) from three sources. As described in Goss (2016, 444), these sources were: "(1) The Giving Pledge, through which people of wealth publicly self-identify as intending to donate more than half of their wealth during their lifetime (givingpledge.org); The Philanthropy 50, a yearly list compiled by *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* of the most generous charitable donors (data are for 2012, 2013, 2014; bequests are excluded); and foundations that made the Foundation Center's Top 100 lists of the largest philanthropies (by assets and by grants) *and* had the donor(s) at the helm." These donors' philanthropic activities were then examined using public sources, including press accounts, websites, and Form 990 informational tax returns.

From these sources, Goss identified a subgroup of donors whose philanthropy indicated an interest in influencing the policy-making process at any stage by "(1) conducting and

disseminating policy-relevant research; (2) shaping or amplifying public opinion; (3) subsidizing organizations working for policy change through the legislative, executive, or judicial branch; (4) intentionally providing models for new ways that government can deliver public services (e.g., K–12 education); or (5) partnering with government to reconfigure public spaces” (Goss 2016, 445).

Donors were coded as policy plutocrats “if they (1) identified one of those goals in their Giving Pledge; (2) gave at least one \$100,000 grant from their private foundation, in the most recent reporting year, to further a policy goal; (3) identified public-policy interests on their foundation or personal website; (4) contributed any amount to a campaign organization oriented to a specific policy issue (e.g., abortion rights) between 2010 and mid-2015; or (5) were publicly identified as having founded a policy-advocacy organization” (Goss 2016, 445). The list of donors is current as of May 2016.

For the present study, we reviewed public sources to assess the post-election activities of these 107 policy plutocrats. Heretofore, we refer to these people as “donors” with the understanding that, depending on their giving style, the unit of analysis may be an individual, a couple, or a family. We were interested in how these donors exercised their democratic voice and what interests they sought to represent or defend. We defined “voice” broadly to include philanthropic donations, associational activity, and public statements critical or supportive of the administration. Our data were compiled from media accounts and from Twitter feeds of donors and their foundations. Of the 107 donors, 48 had at least one twitter feed. Of those, 21 were individual only (i.e., the donor and/or the donor’s spouse); 15 were institutional only (i.e., the donor’s foundation); and 12 had both individual and institutional feeds. We considered all of these feeds to be expressing the voice of the donor. Further data collection, including a search of

donors and their associated websites, is ongoing. For this paper, the data collection effort covered January 20, 2017 (Inauguration Day) through June 15, 2017.

There was some overlap between the sample of 40 foundations and the sample of 107 donors: Eleven donors had a grantmaking entity included in the foundation sample. We handled this dual role as follows. Statements by the foundation and its staff were included in the foundation counts only; on the other hand, statements by the individual donor were included in both the individual and foundation counts. So, for example, if Bill Gates made a statement related to the administration, that statement would count in both the donor and foundation counts; if the Gates foundation made a statement, it would count in the foundation category only.

Our primary methodology makes a crucial assumption, one that certainly invites debate: by definition, the data on both foundations and donors reflect only the expressions of democratic voice that these institutional and individual donors have chosen to make public. We are not able to observe their private behavior, which might include donations, collective organizing, and interpersonal suasion; we assume that some, even many, of these donors are engaged in these activities. Only some of this private behavior inevitably will become public with time, namely any grants made through private foundations, which are required to file annual informational tax returns with the Internal Revenue Service.

Thus, it is important to state what the findings below are, and are not. They are not a complete inventory of elite donors' expressive and representative activities in the immediate post-election time frame. Formal statements of policy on a web site may not actually reflect what is going on in the foundation – for example, discussions about possible change of direction or the quiet distribution of grants to test the waters. And in fact, foundations' public silence would be predicted by theories of policy learning coupled with legal constraints. As noted earlier,

foundations are barred from direct policy advocacy (with narrow exceptions), and professional philanthropy's norms – traceable in part to congressional investigations in the 1960s – tend to discourage politically controversial speech. Beyond that, boards of directors may reflect a diverse array of political views, and because they believe that they are above politics, foundations may shy away from an appearance of redirecting money to fund the resistance to Trump, even if some have begun to do so. On the individual side, donors may avail themselves of anonymous giving vehicles (donor-advised funds, for example) and private methods of political suasion through networks or direct connection with policy makers. Because they have private avenues for articulating, amplifying, and representing interests, and because going public may carry reputational penalties or bring unwelcome controversy to their personal relationships or business interests, it is not surprising that individual patrons may opt to do their political work privately.

These data are, we argue, an incomplete yet illuminating set of examples of how elite donors interpret and project their roles as democratic actors. What foundations and individual patrons say about themselves matters, and their online sites constitute their primary means of defining who they are and what they do. If these patrons have initiated a new program, are changing their priorities, or want to emphasize key criteria in new awards they will be making, that information should be on their web sites. As for the speeches and interviews by CEOs, board chairs, and legacy founders, they are opportunities to shine a light on what their foundation is doing. If it's doing something new and important, it stands to reason that these leaders would want to describe it. The same logic holds for tweets. In short, while we may have missed discussions or trial runs of programs that came after Trump's first three months, our measuring

tools for foundations should otherwise have picked up changes intended to fight back against the administration.

Findings

Although our research covers only the first months of the Trump administration, the salient finding is that most elite donors, whether institutional or individual, chose not to exercise their democratic voice in a publicly visible way. By and large, these patrons did not initiate grant programs, forge new associational initiatives, or issue statements of support or concern about the administration's agenda. At first glance, we might conclude that patrons remain private actors in the civil society sphere. Although they clearly have policy and political interests – as investors in causes and constituency groups, as targets of public policy, and as holders of beliefs and values – most did not take the opportunity to publicly advance or defend these interests. Below we present these findings, but we also demonstrate that there were prominent exceptions. Using these anomalous institutions and individuals, we argue patrons can choose to organize themselves and assume roles that make them the functional equivalent of an interest group.

Finding 1: Mobilization of Resources

The patterns that emerge from our data could not be stronger. Most broadly, we asked if foundations and individual donors responded to the challenges to their programming and core values from Trump administration policies and proposals. We take these patrons in turn.

Almost all of the largest foundations in the United States are progressive in the sense that what they advocate requires a large and active government that uses its regulatory powers and its financial resources to solve large-scale problems. What Trump, his top aides, and Cabinet members have said on health care, climate change, race, civil liberties, income inequality and many other issues runs counter to the purpose of the grants these foundations distribute.⁵ Of the

23 largest foundations that yielded the 20 we could research, only the Richard F. Aster Foundation leans right. However, it has no web site so we have no real information on it.

Of the 20 largest foundations that were publicly researchable, only one (the California Endowment) said it was open now to receiving applications from nonprofits wanting to challenge the administration. (See Table 1.) However, the silence of the other foundations concerning the Trump administration was notable. It is not only their programs that are threatened by the new administration but also, in many cases, their *raison d'être* as well. No foundation is more identified with improving health care than is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, but there was no word on the threat to the Affordable Care Act on its web site. The Moore Foundation and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation emphasize environmental protection, but they projected no worries that their goals were fundamentally threatened by the new administration. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation works on racial divisions, but its website is silent in the face of the Trump administration's hostility toward government programs and policies aimed at protecting disadvantaged minorities. And so it goes.

[Table 1 Here]

Our findings were so stark that we wondered if there was something unusual about these very large foundations. We wondered if these behemoths were outliers, run by establishment boards inclined not to challenge the power structure now, or even down the road. Perhaps less prominent foundations would behave differently. Thus, we added a second set of 20 foundations, ranging from the 40th to the 500th largest by grantmaking. In profiling these organizations what stood out is, understandably, that they have a narrower focus in their grantmaking. Many emphasize a single issue area. The arts (Windgate, Luce), Jewish values (Arison), and AIDS (M.A.C. AIDS Fund) are some examples. Others focus on their geographic home area, such as

Mellon (Pittsburgh), Laurie M. Tisch (New York City), and Seedling (Austin). Only one of these second 20, the Barr Foundation, initiated a program to respond to Trump, designating \$2.4 million to support journalism in response "to dramatic shifts in the national context" (Canales 2017).

On the donor side, the findings are similar. Only a handful of donors – Bill and Melinda Gates, Amos and Barbara Hostetter, Pierre Omidyar, George Soros, and Tom Steyer – publicly indicated directly or through foundation leadership that they or their philanthropic organization would be dedicating new resources as a result of the election. Pierre Omidyar pledged \$100-million to shore up accountability journalism and fight fake news (Sullivan 2017), and, as noted above, the Hostetters' Barr Foundation pledged new money for similar goals. The financier George Soros pledged \$10-million to track hate crimes. Also as noted above, the Gates family, through their foundation, pledged to counter U.S. government cuts in reproductive health funding in developing countries. Meanwhile, the hedge fund billionaire Tom Steyer suggested that he was prepared to give large sums to combat the new administration, which he deemed "the most broad-based and dangerous attack on American values certainly that I have ever experienced in my lifetime and much more than I have ever imagined would happen while I'm alive" (McCormick and Allison 2017).

Finding 2: Expression of Voice

Both foundations and donors were generally reluctant to publicly challenge the new administration, or even to speak out approvingly. However, expressions of voice were more common than the public announcement of new resources. A non-trivial fraction of foundations and donors chose to publicly challenge the direction of the Trump administration and to raise larger questions about the broader political situation.

Regarding the large foundations, 20 percent posted to their websites some statement of opposition to Trump, as Table 2 shows. However, as noted above, none indicated a change in foundation programming (although the California Foundation was open to doing so).

[Table 2 Here]

Among the statements posted on foundation websites was one by the Simons Foundation, which stated that it opposed the Administration's proposed ban on travel from certain Muslim countries. In looking at tweets—admittedly a shallow measure of commitment—we also saw a different picture than what is reflected in the foundations' programs. Leaders (CEOs, board chairs, legacy founders) of 35 percent of the large foundations tweeted in some fashion opposition to Trump actions. Bill Gates, for example, tweeted a link to an article he had written opposing cuts in foreign aid. In the secondary sample of foundations, 20 percent sent out negative tweets.

When we looked at policy positions articulated outside the foundation web site (interviews, articles about the foundations, etc.) for the leaders of the 20 largest foundations, we also saw a modest amount of anti-Trump position taking, as Table 3 shows.

[Table 3 Here]

In short, all the evidence we have gathered for these 40 foundations points toward their holding strongly progressive values. When their leaders vocalize their own positions, they reflect the same political orientation. Yet the foundations themselves have stood back and have failed to mobilize resources in a way that defends those values, which are under attack by a new administration in Washington.

On the individual donor side, the results are similar. Thus far, we have assessed public statements promulgated through the Twitter feeds of those elite donors who maintained a personal or institutional feed, or both. Of the 107 donors in our sample, 48 had at least one of these types of feeds. Of those 48, half made no statement relating to the Trump agenda or the larger post-election political situation. Of those who did make a statement (n=24), most (n=17) were critical of the Trump administration, as we discuss below. The remaining donors were either supportive of the administration (n=5) or attempted to play their reaction down the middle (n=2). As Table 4 shows, the critical statements fell into a number of categories.

[Table 4 Here]

In addition to the tweets, several donors posted op-eds that were critical of the administration. Nicolas Berggruen co-authored a piece in the Washington Post rejecting right-wing populism (Gardels and Berggruen 2017). Michael Bloomberg published op-eds on the need for reaching bipartisan consensus on health care reform and for honoring the Paris Agreement on climate change (Bloomberg 2017a; Bloomberg 2017b). George Soros criticized the administration's immigration policies for encouraging hate crimes (Soros 2017). Bill Gates made the case for foreign aid amid the administration's plan to slash its budget (Gates 2017). Finally, although not in the form of an op-ed, Elon Musk indicated via Twitter that he had "done all I can

to advise directly to POTUS, through others in WH & via councils, that we remain” in the Paris Agreement (Musk 2017).

In the narrowest sense, these tweets and op-eds constitute nothing more than the political expression of an individual’s policy views. However, we view these statements as fulfilling two roles of interest groups: representation and education. In each of these cases, the patron purports to represent interests beyond his own, whether they be specific constituency groups (immigrants, those in need of health care), the national interest (foreign aid), or democracy itself (pluralism, bipartisan consensus). What makes these acts representational is that each of these individuals brings to the public square key political resources typically associated with interest groups: money, staff, networks, and reputational clout. Michael Bloomberg is not you, and Elon Musk is not me. They have more power to speak for others. The second interest group function observed in these tweets and op-eds is education. Op-eds constitute an especially effective public method of educating elected officials and the citizenry about policy concerns. As our data collection effort shows, some patrons are also using private channels to conduct their educative function.

Finding 3: Collective Action

Patrons’ exercise of public voice – whether through money or conventional speech – arguably constitutes acts of interest representation. These acts may bear the name of an individual, but often they carry the clout of an organization. In this sense, they constitute a thin form of collective action. However, patrons may engage in a thicker form of collective action by organizing among themselves to promote their conception of the public good. For example, foundations have long worked through “affinity groups” oriented around shared concerns, and these affinity groups have grown in number and become more institutionalized in their function. On the individual donor side, we see the proliferation of networks that allow philanthropists to

coordinate and focus their giving around shared ideological goals (Callahan 2017; Mayer 2016; Vogel 2014). The consolidation of foundations and individuals into formalized networks buttresses the argument that patrons are increasingly coming to resemble interest groups.

Our foundation and donor samples uncovered a small number of examples of collective action. On the foundation side, dozens of organized philanthropies and affinity groups signed a public letter opposing the administration's policies on immigration and refugees (Joint Foundation Statement 2017). On the individual donor side, Michael Bloomberg has helped assemble and fund a coalition of leaders from the corporate, government, and nonprofit sectors to continue to fulfill pledges made under the Paris Agreement, from which the Trump Administration withdrew (Volcovici 2017). Also recognizing the power of collective action, another donor, Elon Musk, publicly quit White House advisory councils to protest the administration's withdrawal from the accord (Ferris 2017).

Beyond Our Sample

We undertook this inquiry in part because the philanthropy press was reporting that philanthropies and their leaders were joining the “resistance.” Our goal was to systematically assess this claim, to determine if foundations (as well as individual donors) in fact were mobilizing in significant ways to support causes dear to them. After conducting our systematic search, we returned to press accounts, especially in specialized publications that focus on the nonprofit sector (particularly *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, *Inside Philanthropy*, and *Nonprofit Quarterly*'s daily news aggregate).

This broader sweep of the nonprofit media reveals “resistance” funding that our data collection did not include. But the more inclusive view nonetheless reinforces the gist of our findings. The philanthropy press found cases of quick mobilization of resources to counter the

administration by some foundations. Most conspicuous have been community foundations, such as the San Francisco Foundation, the Brooklyn Community Foundation, and the New York Community Trust (Dorfman et al. 2017). Other mobilizing foundations include the Ms. Foundation for Women, the Harnisch Foundation, and the Colorado Women’s Foundation (Berry 2017; Marek 2016). Overall, what our review finds is that those foundations designating additional funding for resisting Trump are relatively small and grants are largely being doled out in modest sums to community nonprofits. We do not doubt the utility of supporting grassroots groups—all politics may not be local, but community activism is vital to changing the national dialogue. Still, in terms of trying to track what is going on nationally, the sums being spent by these groups are modest, and their contribution to capacity building within recipient nonprofits remains open to question. A methodological question also arises: How much of the newly announced money is truly *new* money? Redirecting fixed sums from existing programs that support similar nonprofits may diminish the true value of the grants.

There are some large foundations that have jumped in, though we’re not sure percentage-wise it’s much more than what we have found for the period ending in late April 2017. After our research was completed, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation increased its commitment by \$63 million to some of the program areas threatened by Trump (Dorfman et al. 2017). The Rockefeller Brothers Fund said it was upping its funding by 12 percent in an effort “to protect and strengthen the vitality of our democracy” (Dorfman et al. 2017). Again, these amounts might be taken with a grain of salt as surely there is some category shifting among program areas within each organization.

Finally, we note another study that has tried to systematically measure changing foundation priorities. The Center for Effective Philanthropy surveyed 162 foundations with a

minimum grantmaking of \$5 million annually (Buchanan and Buteau 2017). Taken in February and March of 2017, the survey found that 28 percent of respondents said they were modifying or planning to modify programmatic goals in light of the new administration.⁶ If we aggregate the responses of leaders to the more immediate responses of the foundations themselves, we come out near the same figure. There also seems to be a bit more movement by foundations that emerged after our examination of the first months of the Trump administration. The *Chronicle of Philanthropy* concluded in early March 2017 that “despite their alarm, few grant makers have taken immediate steps to modify or reallocate their giving” (Preston 2017); however, by mid-August, the Chronicle reported that major foundations had pledged “\$700-million and counting” in response to the election (Daniels 2017).

We started by asking whether philanthropy and its patrons operate as interest groups, advocating for issues and constituencies in the policy process. We used the resistance movement as a test case. When the movement arose, would donors show up, or stand down? Our conclusion is mixed. If we look systematically at leading foundations, and to some extent at leading individual donors, we find that the response was small and slow. Most donors did not show up, at least immediately. However, if we look at the philanthropic landscape overall, we see a considerable effort – whether measured by the expression of money or voice. The philanthropic sector is large and diverse, and plenty of bellwether donors pledged new resources and expressed their voice when their issues and constituencies were threatened. Our findings are consistent with both views of philanthropy: that it is fundamentally conservative institution unwilling to wade into politically treacherous waters *and* that it can be a forum for challenging the state and ensuring democratic pluralism.

Are Patrons More Than ATMs?

Foundations and individual donors provide an important support system for civil society organizations. As such, they buttress the pluralistic traditions that underlie American democracy. But do these patrons do more than simply shore up grant-receiving organizations? Are patrons themselves interest groups in the modern sense? By that we mean, do these patrons – as memberless organizations or plutocratic networks – seek to organize and represent interests beyond their own in the public policy sphere?

We have used a natural experiment to evaluate these questions: an unexpected election result whose consequences asked patrons to show their hand. With American democratic norms and institutions under strain, and with many policy commitments under assault, patrons faced an inevitable decision: What should we do? Do we do support these moves; do we do nothing; or do we resist? Investigating these questions allows us to examine a larger question: To what extent will patrons, overlooked in the interest group literature, leverage individual and institutional power in response to a radically new policy environment?

Our findings are mixed. A few patrons publicly expressed their voice, expended their resources, and mobilized their coalitions; the majority did not do so, at least immediately and in a visible way. If we focus on these publicly identifiable outliers – the patrons seeking to represent and mobilize interests – we inevitably bump up against a definitional question. If foundations, individual donors, and their networks are more than patrons, are they interest groups? What is the threshold? Where is the line?

With this article, we hope to begin this discussion. For now, we assert that several foundations and donors in our sample have crossed whatever threshold or line might exist. We base this argument on several propositions. First, we offer a structural argument. The interest group system has evolved such that there it is much more about interests than about groups.

Interest groups today can be member-less nonprofit corporations run by a policy entrepreneur and a paid staff. The foundations and other philanthropic organizations in our sample fit this description. Second, we offer a functional argument. Interest groups seek to represent interests, organize political participation, and educate elite and public audiences on issues. Although most patrons in our sample did not fill these roles with respect to the election and its aftermath, a fair number of them did. Foundation leaders and individual plutocrats spoke out on behalf of the public and specific group interests, and backed those commitments with large financial contributions. Some donors joined or even organized coalitions to reject or circumvent administration directives. Yet others sought to educate the administration about various issues, such as global climate change.

As the interest group universe becomes more oligarchical, we suggest that elite patrons need to be taken more seriously as political actors. They can and do act like interest groups from time to time. That said, we caution against drawing the boundaries of the “interest group” universe too broadly. In the main, interest groups are different from patrons insofar as most interest groups are formally accountable to constituencies of some sort – whether engaged members, boards of directors, or “checkbook” contributors. Interest groups speak *on behalf of* constituencies, often with their input and consent, as opposed to merely articulating someone’s idea of those interests. By contrast, patrons develop their own conceptions of others’ interests and project those interests through their public work. To the extent that patrons act like interest groups, they are oligarchical more than they are truly representative.

TABLE 1

Foundations' Response to the Trump Administration

Web site statements, program descriptions and foundation tweets.

	Anti- <u>Trump</u>	Supportive <u>Trump</u>	Anti-Trump <u>Tweets</u>	Supportive Trump <u>Tweets</u>
Largest 20	5%	0%	35%	0%
Stratified 20	5%	0%	20%	0%

“Anti-Trump” and “Supportive Trump” are measures of any article, posting, or program announcement that makes reference to the Trump administration and indicates that the foundation is acting at least in part to counteract the administration’s policies or, conversely, to support administration policies. These counts exclude statements by leadership articulating their views—see Table 2 for those. The figures in columns 1 and 2 are coded only from content referencing foundation programming, current or planned. The calculation is binary: either yes or no. For tweets, the accounts reviewed for the calculations here belong to those of the foundation itself (i.e., @Gatesfoundation). The same binary scoring is used for tweets.

TABLE 2

Foundation Leaders' Response to the Trump Administration

Largest 20 foundations only. Foundation web site.

Leadership response

on foundation web site (4/20 foundations) 20%

Of these responses, percent

critical of administration (4/4 foundations) 100%

Of these responses, percent

where tone is hostile (3/4 foundations) 75%

Of these foundations with

critical response, percent with

programs in place or planned

to combat Trump policies (0/4 foundations) 0%

Measurements derive from foundation web site for statements by leadership. Statements can be from CEO, board chair, or legacy founder but coding is only for each foundation overall. There were no cases of a foundation leader having a different point of view than other leaders of the same foundation. Overall tone was measured by calculating the percentage of paragraphs that were critical (or supportive) of the administration. "Hostile" was defined as content where more than half of the paragraphs were "clearly critical" of the administration. In turn, "clearly critical" was "language that is unmistakable in asserting that what the administration is doing is both wrong and damaging."

TABLE 3

Foundation Leaders' Response to the Trump Administration

Largest 20 foundations only. Statements outside of the foundation web site (n=40 leaders).

Statement made elsewhere
beyond foundation web site (n=9/40 leaders) 23%

Of these leaders, percent
critical of administration (n=7/9 leaders) 78%

Of these leaders, percent
favorable toward administration (n=0/9) 0%

Of these foundations, percent indicating
foundation will start program soon to move
against a Trump policy (n=1/20 foundations) 5%

A statement can take a variety of forms: a blog post, an article published under the leader's name, an interview, a journalistic article about the leader or one that is about the foundation and mentions the leader. The statement must address Trump policies or programs at least in part.

TABLE 4

Policy Plutocrats' Critiques of Trump Administration

Individual and institutional Twitter feeds (n=48 donors), Jan 20, 2017-June 15, 2017

% 's don't sum to 100 because feeds often contained more than one critique

<u>Critique</u>	<u>% Donors Articulating Critique</u>
Democracy/pluralism/liberty	33%
Climate change	25%
Immigrants/travel ban	21%
Governing competence	15%
Foreign policy/aid	13%
Presidential temperament/character	6%
Education	6%
Health care	4%
Criminal justice	2%
<hr/>	
<i>Support for Trump</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Middle ground</i>	<i>4%</i>

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ENDNOTES

¹ This discussion is adapted from Berry and Wilcox 2009, pp. 7-8.

² We will be continuing our own research from the first three months through the end of the first year of the Trump presidency.

³ The Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation was excluded as it is strictly a scholarship fund and has no significant web presence. The Richard F. Aster Foundation was also excluded as it does not have an active web site. We substituted the next two largest foundations, The Rockefeller Foundation and the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation, to maintain this group at 20. Atlantic Philanthropies, which was among the top 20 in 2014 spend down its endowment and was no longer in existence when we began our research.

⁴ Not all these foundations had web sites and if they did not operate one, that entry was discarded and another draw was made. In the end, 14 in this second group were without a functioning web site and, thus, we drew a total of 34 names to meet our goal of 20 valid cases.

⁵ Education is a partial exception to this as some foundations have been proponents of school choice. From our reading of these foundations programs in education, however, goals tend to be broader than simply providing choice.

⁶ The response rate was only 34 percent of foundations surveyed and it is not clear to what degree this is representative of the larger population (Buchanan and Buteau 2017).