Sausages, evidence and policy making: The role for universities

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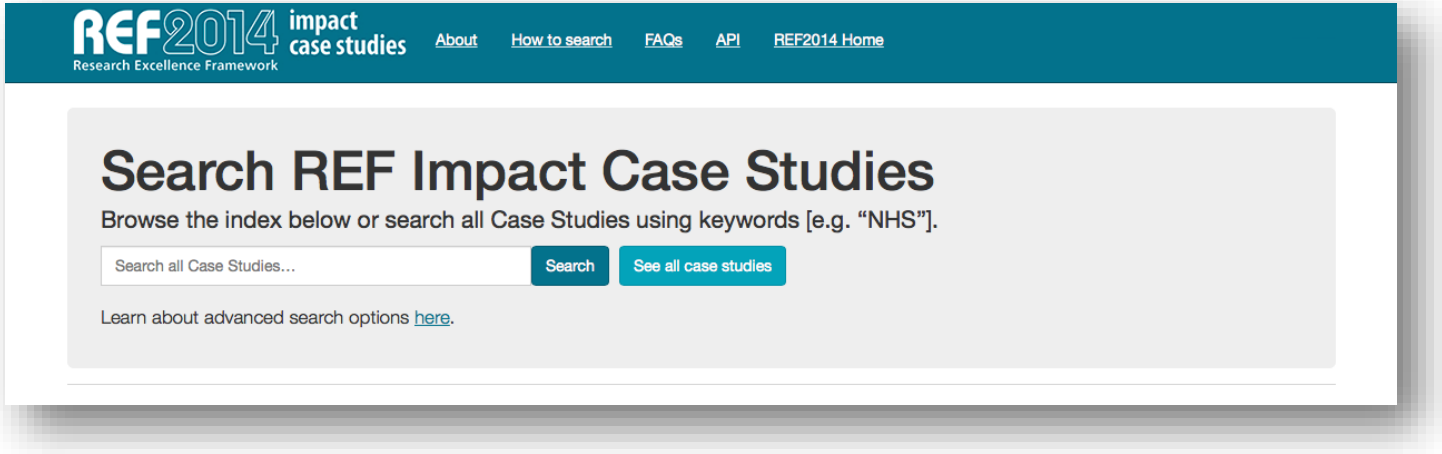
Key arguments

- Examine the role of universities in supporting better policy making
- Through the lens of ‘post-truth politics’
- Make case that the role of the university in society is under serious threat
  - We need to change what we do and how we do it
  - But we also need to defend why universities matter

Analysis of REF impact case studies

- REF is the Research Excellence Framework, the successor to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which has assessed the quality of research in UK universities every five years since 1986
- For the first time, REF assessed the impact of research
- Impact is defined as: "*any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia*"



KING'S College LONDON
DIGITAL science
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Digital Humanities
The Policy Institute at King's

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project
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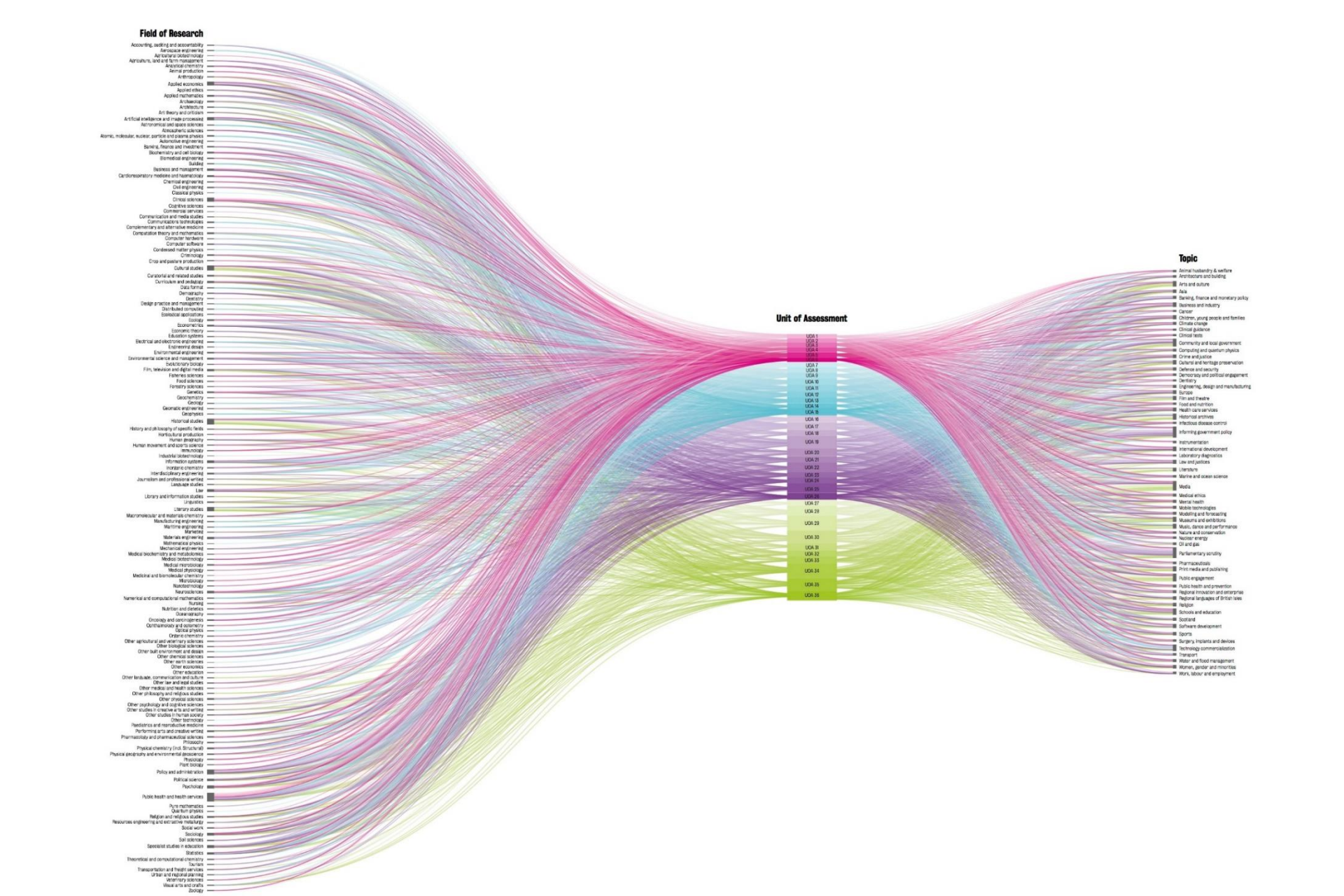
Field of Research
Accounting, auditing and accountability
Aerospace engineering
Agricultural biotechnology
Agriculture, land and farm management
Analytical chemistry
Animal production
Anthropology
Applied economics
Applied ethics
Applied mathematics
Archaeology
Architecture
Art theory and criticism
Artificial intelligence and image processing
Astronomical and spaces sciences
Atmospheric sciences
Atomic, molecular, nuclear, particle and plasma physics
Automotive engineering
Banking, finance and investment
Biochemistry and cell biology
Biomedical engineering
Building
Business and management
Cardiorespiratory medicine and haematology
Chemical engineering
Civil engineering
Classical physics
Clinical sciences
Cognitive sciences
Commercial services
Communication and media studies
Communications technologies
Complementary and alternative medicine
Computation theory and mathematics
Computer hardware
Computer software
Condensed matter physics
Criminology
Crop and pasture production
Cultural studies
Curatorial and related studies
Curriculum and pedagogy
Data format
Dermatology
Dentistry
Design practice and management
Distributed computing
Ecological applications
Ecology
Econometrics
Economic theory
Education systems
Electrical and electronic engineering
Engineering design
Environmental engineering
Environmental science and management
Evolutionary biology
Film, television and digital media
Fisheries sciences
Food sciences
Forestry sciences
Genetics
Geochemistry
Geology
Geomatic engineering
Geophysics
Historical studies
History and philosophy of specific fields
Horticultural production
Human geography
Human movement and sports science
Immunology
Industrial biotechnology
Information systems
Inorganic chemistry
Interdisciplinary engineering
Journalism and professional writing
Landscape studies
Law
Library and information studies
Linguistics
Literary studies
Macromolecular and materials chemistry
Manufacturing engineering
Maritime engineering
Marketing
Materials engineering
Mathematical physics
Mechanical engineering
Medical biochemistry and metabolomics
Medical biotechnology
Medical microbiology
Medical physiology
Medicinal and biomolecular chemistry
Microbiology
Nanotechnology
Neurosciences
Numerical and computational mathematics
Nursing
Nutrition and dietetics
Otorhinolaryngology
Oncology and carcinogenesis
Ophthalmology and optometry
Optical physics
Organic chemistry
Other agricultural and veterinary sciences
Other biological sciences
Other built environment and design
Other chemical sciences
Other earth sciences
Other economics
Other education
Other language, communication and culture
Other law and legal studies
Other medical and health sciences
Other philosophy and religious studies
Other physical sciences
Other psychology and cognitive sciences
Other studies in creative arts and writing
Other studies in human society
Other technology
Paediatrics and reproductive medicine
Performing arts and creative writing
Pharmacology and pharmaceutical sciences
Philosophy
Physical chemistry (incl. Structural)
Physical geography and environmental geoscience
Physiology
Plant biology
Policy and administration
Political science
Psychology
Public health and health services
Pure mathematics
Quantum physics
Religion and religious studies
Resources engineering and extractive metallurgy
Social work
Sociology
Soil sciences
Specialist studies in education
Statistics
Theoretical and computational chemistry
Tourism
Transportation and freight services
Urban and regional planning
Veterinary sciences
Visual arts and crafts
Zoology
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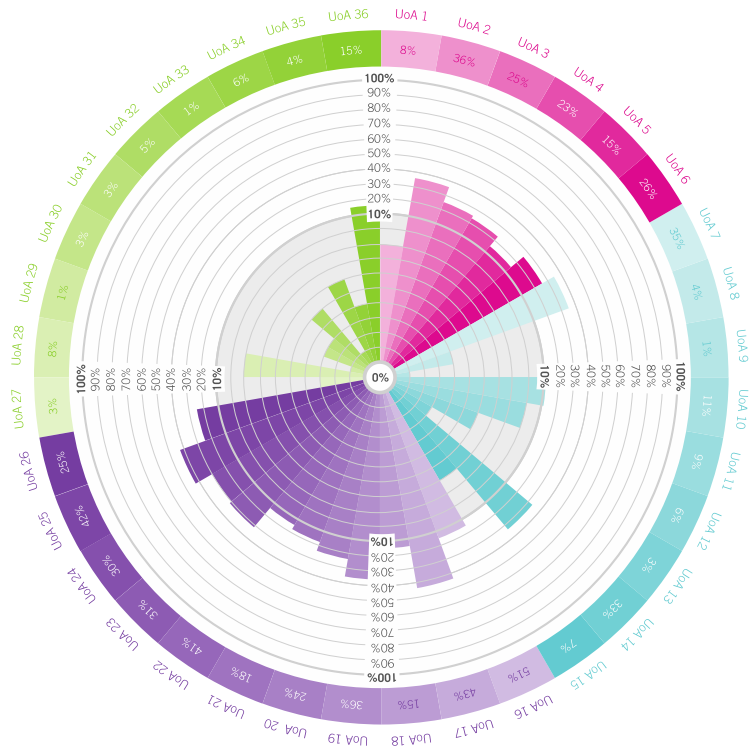
Topic
Animal husbandry & welfare
Architecture and building
Arts and culture
Asia
Banking, finance and monetary policy
Business and industry
Cancer
Children, young people and families
Climate change
Clinical guidance
Clinical tests
Community and local government
Computing and quantum physics
Crime and justice
Cultural and heritage preservation
Defence and security
Democracy and political engagement
Dentistry
Engineering, design and manufacturing
Europe
Film and theatre
Food and nutrition
Health care services
Historical archives
Infectious disease control
Informing government policy
Instrumentation
International development
Laboratory diagnostics
Law and justices
Literature
Marine and ocean science
Media
Medical ethics
Mental health
Mobile technologies
Modelling and forecasting
Museums and exhibitions
Music, dance and performance
Nature and conservation
Nuclear energy
Oil and gas
Parliamentary scrutiny
Pharmaceuticals
Print media and publishing
Public engagement
Public health and prevention
Regional innovation and enterprise
Regional languages of British Isles
Religion
Schools and education
Scotland
Software development
Sports
Surgery, implants and devices
Technology commercialisation
Transport
Water and flood management
Women, gender and minorities
Work, labour and employment

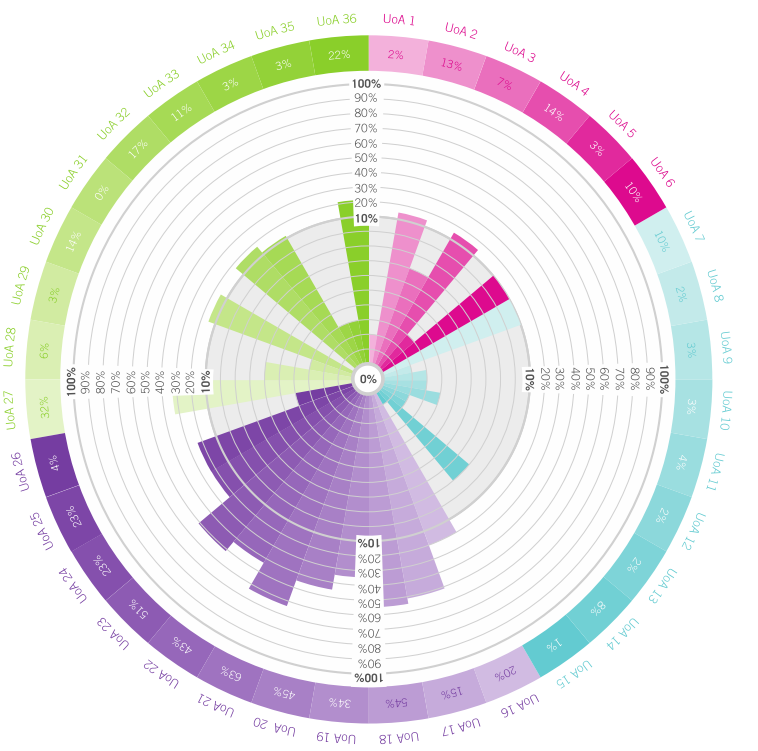
The most frequent impacts were on informing public policy and parliamentary scrutiny



‘Informing government policy’

(develop polici nation plan govern inform work strategi assess)

(n=1233)



‘Parliamentary scrutiny’

(polit elect parti democraci elector vote candid poll pd)

(n= 983)

Overlap between these two topics was 192 case studies (small in number, but this is largest overlap overall)

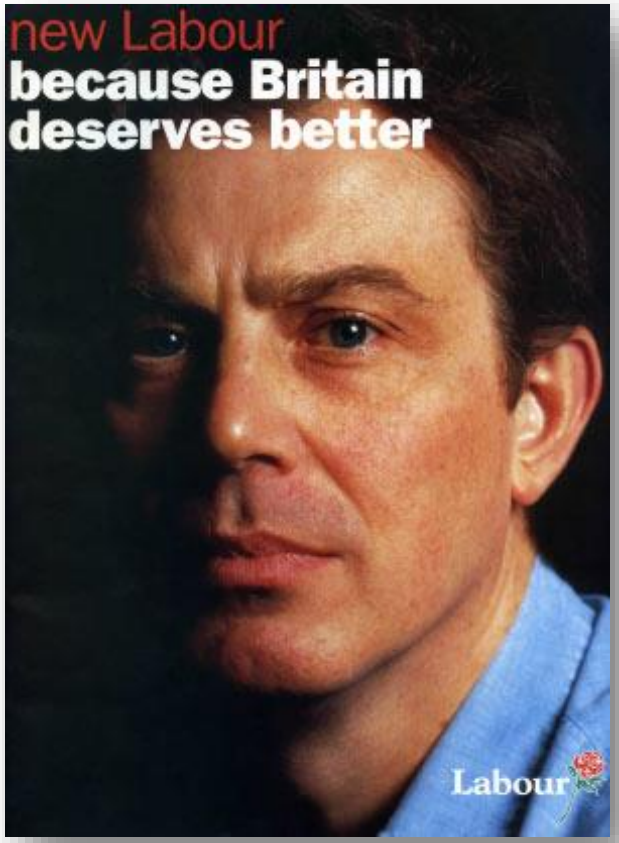
Take-home messages

1. Universities make a significant contribution to informing public policy and parliamentary scrutiny

2. That contribution arises from the majority of disciplines

(Suspect argument applicable to other impacts)

Political commitment to ‘evidence’ for nearly a generation



“New Labour is a party of ideas and ideals but not of outdated ideology. **What counts is what works**. The objectives are radical. The means will be modern.”

– New Labour election manifesto, 1997

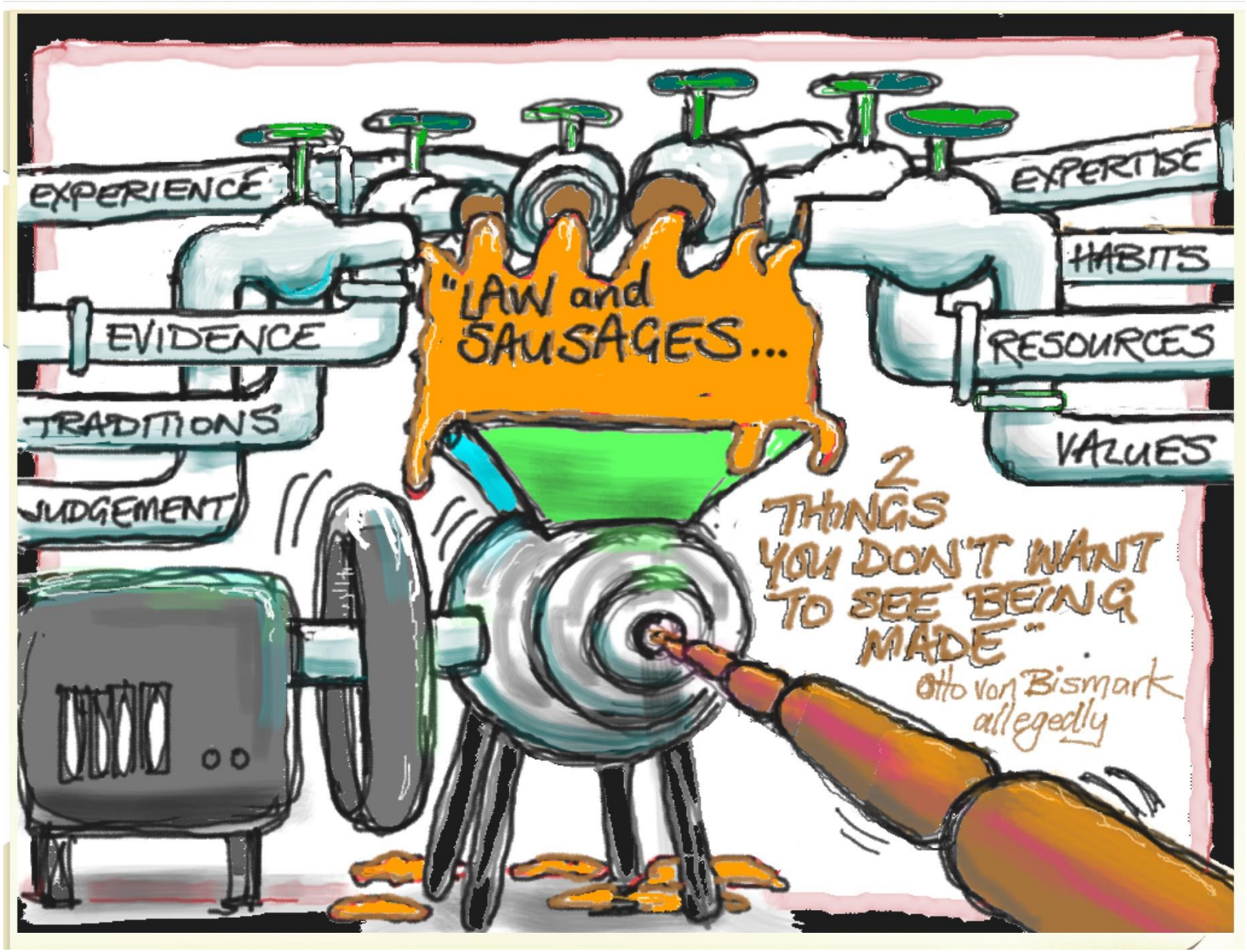
“We'll stop the health department endlessly measuring processes, and concentrate on outcomes – the 'what' not the 'how‘ … that means that **health policy can become evidence-based rather than target-driven** – delivering not only equity, but excellence and value for money too.”

– David Cameron, 2003

“**We will put evidence at the heart of what we do**. We will improve our data, analysis and research capability, so that we can give officials and frontline staff access to evidence about what works, helping to deliver the best outcomes for citizens.”

– UK Ministry of Justice Departmental Plan, 2016

Policy makers use multiple inputs …



… and have different notions of evidence

- Researchers' evidence
  - 'Scientific' (context-free)
  - Proven empirically
  - Theoretically driven
  - As long as it takes
  - Caveats and qualifications
- Policy makers' evidence
  - Colloquial
  - Anything that seems reasonable
  - Policy-relevant
  - Timely
  - Clear message

Source: Lomas, 2005

… which is used in different ways ...

- Enlightenment model
  - Gradual ‘sedimentation’ of ideas
- Political model
  - Research used as ammunition in an adversarial system
- Tactical model
  - Research is response for action by policy maker
- Knowledge-driven
  - Research generates knowledge that impels action
- Policy-driven
  - Identification of problem ‘customer’ who requests solutions from research
- Social interaction
  - Iterative interactions between researcher and policy maker; exposed to each other’s worlds

Source: Hanney et al 2002

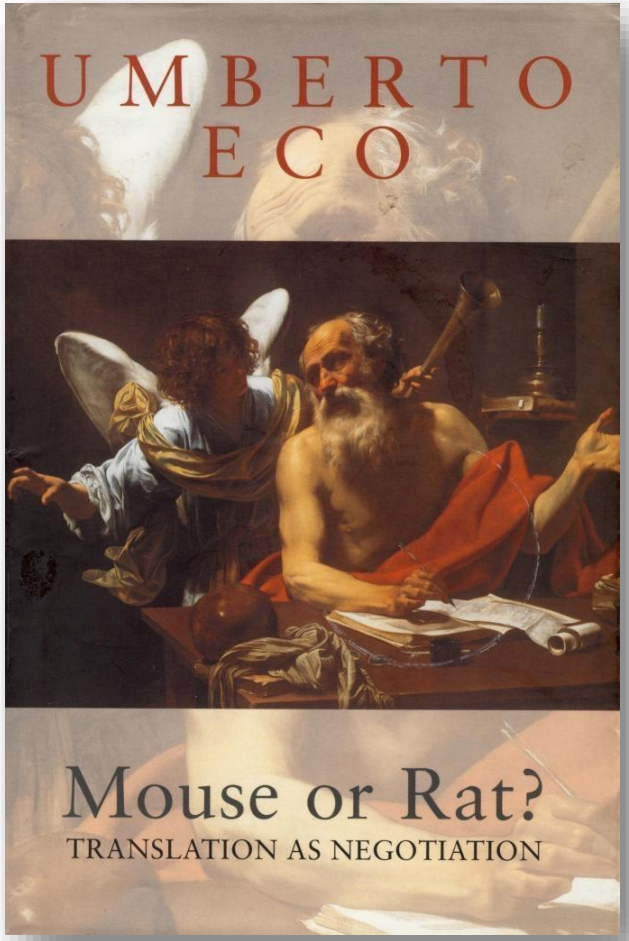
… with different consequences

Top 5 barriers to use of evidence	Top 5 facilitators of evidence use
• Availability and access to research/improved dissemination (n = 63)	• Availability and access to research/improved dissemination (n = 65)
• Clarity/relevance/reliability of research findings (n = 54)	• Collaboration (n = 49)
• Timing/opportunity (n = 42)	• Clarity/relevance/reliability of research findings (n = 46)
• Policymaker research skills (n = 26)	• Relationship with policymakers (n = 39)
• Costs (n = 25)	• Relationship with researchers/info staff (n = 37)

Translation • Trust • Timing

Source: Oliver (2014)

Knowledge needs to be ‘localised’ into the language and context of the policy maker



“Translation is always a shift, not between two languages but between two cultures – or two encyclopaedias. A translator must take into account rules that are not strictly linguistic but, broadly speaking, cultural.”

… with different consequences

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The Policy Institute at King's

Mission:
Improving evidence-informed policy & practice by facilitating engagement between academic, business and policy communities around current and future policy needs in the UK and globally

achieved by

Delivering policy analysis

Building partnerships

Mobilising policy impact

Take-home messages

1. Universities make a significant contribution to informing public policy and parliamentary scrutiny

2. That contribution arises from the majority of disciplines

3. The translation of research to policy is messy and complicated, requiring skills that are not valued or abundant in universities

The existential threat to universities

- ‘Nothing works’ fatalism
- Political opportunism of anti-intellectualism, ie Brexit and Trump
- ... In the context of ‘instrumental’ view of a universitiy

Observed in the US through ‘Trumpism’

Donald Trump, US Presidential Candidate, 2016

“I think a lot of us are simply dumfounded that we’ve seen the support that’s been evidenced for Mr Trump ... On the core issue of the role of ideas, of facts, and whether they matter in contemporary political discourse, we are observing something that is deeply unsettling.”

– Robert Daniels, President of Johns Hopkins University
Source: THES (2016)

Observed in the US through 'Trumpism'

Donald Trump, US Presidential Candidate, 2016

"Have universities in the United States and indeed internationally been successful in mustering up analysis [and] policy recommendations that are able to infiltrate the political process and bring our practical ideas to bear? … Have we been effective as institutions … in [producing a] comprehensive package that could respond to these issues?"

– Robert Daniels, President of Johns Hopkins University
Source: THES (2016)

And in the UK through Brexit

Michael Gove, former UK Secretary of State for Education, 2010-2014, Secretary of State for Justice, 2015-2016. Key campaigner to leave EU

"People in this country have had enough of experts".

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– UK Ministry of Justice Departmental Plan, 2016

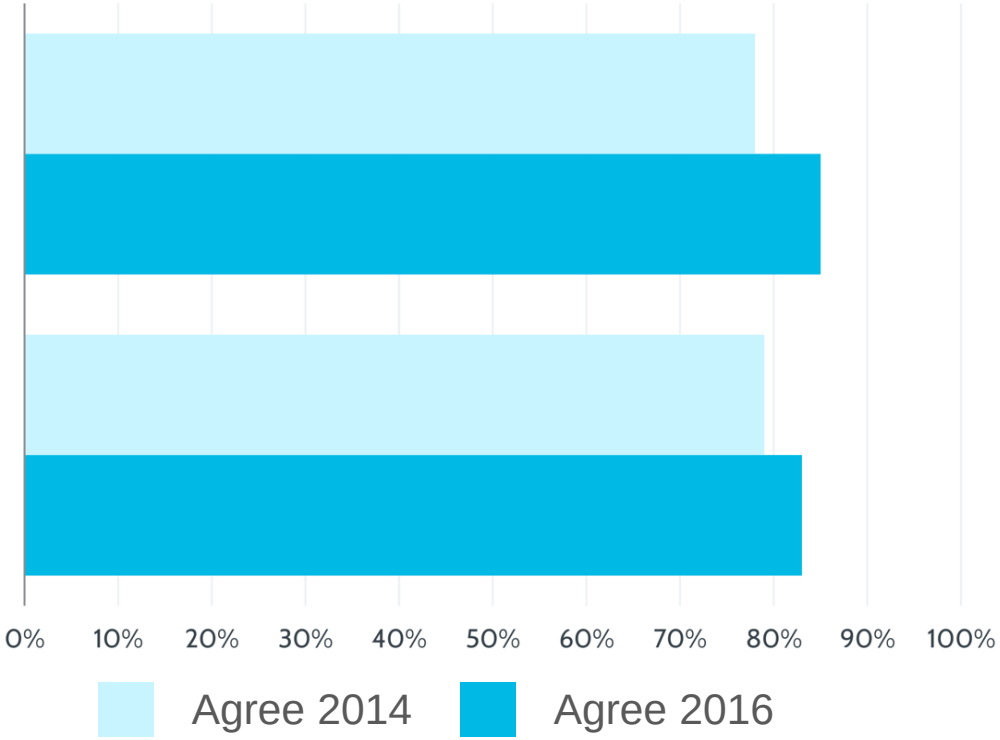
Playing the blame game

But citizens want experts involved in decision-making

"Thinking about how politicians make [difficult decisions about new infrastructure projects], to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

It is important to me that when making difficult decisions politicians consult a wide range of professionals and experts

It is important to me that when making difficult decisions politicians demonstrate that the decision is based on objective evidence



Source: Institute for Government (2016)

And expertise is equally important to Remainers and Leavers

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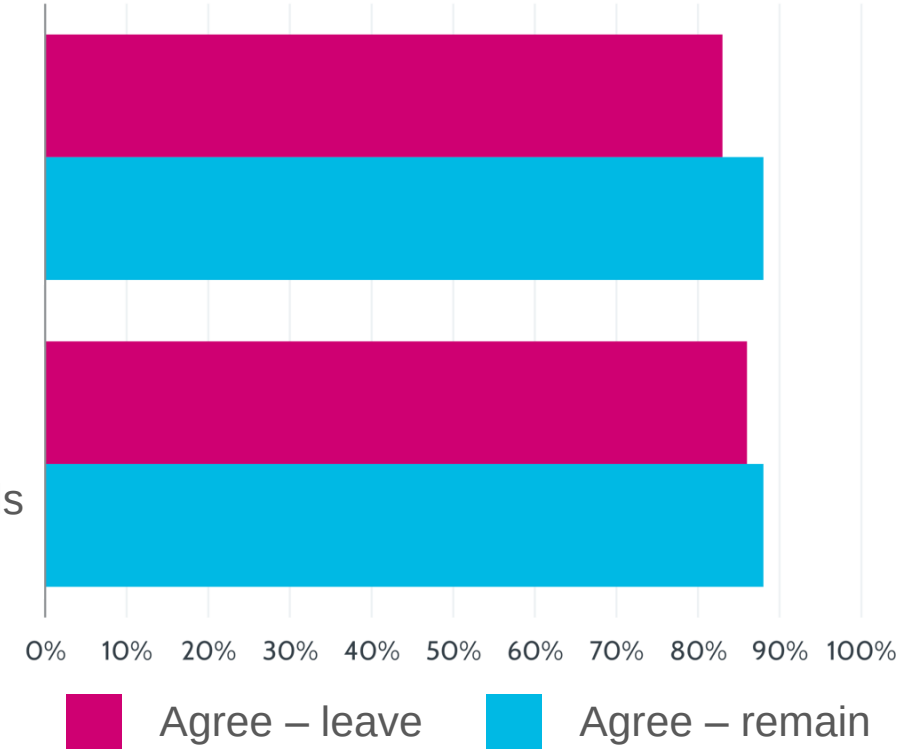

Source: Institute for Government (2016)

Take-home messages

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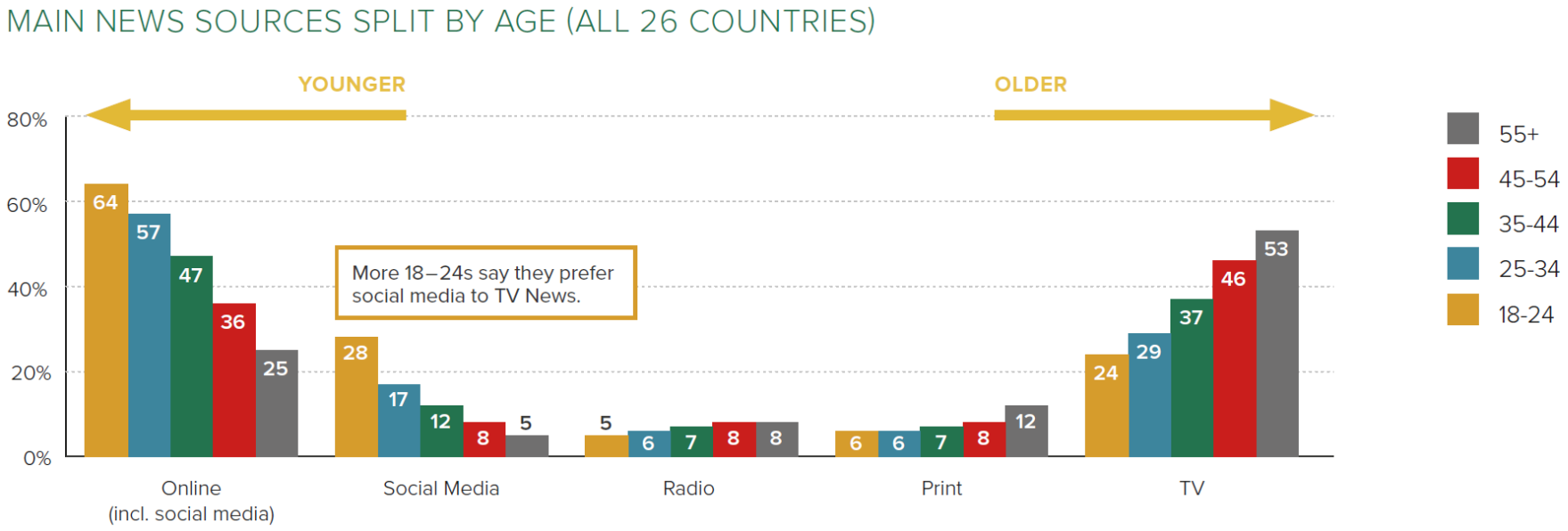
2. That contribution arises from the majority of disciplines
3. The translation of research to policy is messy and complicated, requiring skills that are not valued or abundant in universities
4. People have not had enough of experts

But ‘post-truth politics’ is a challenge to universities

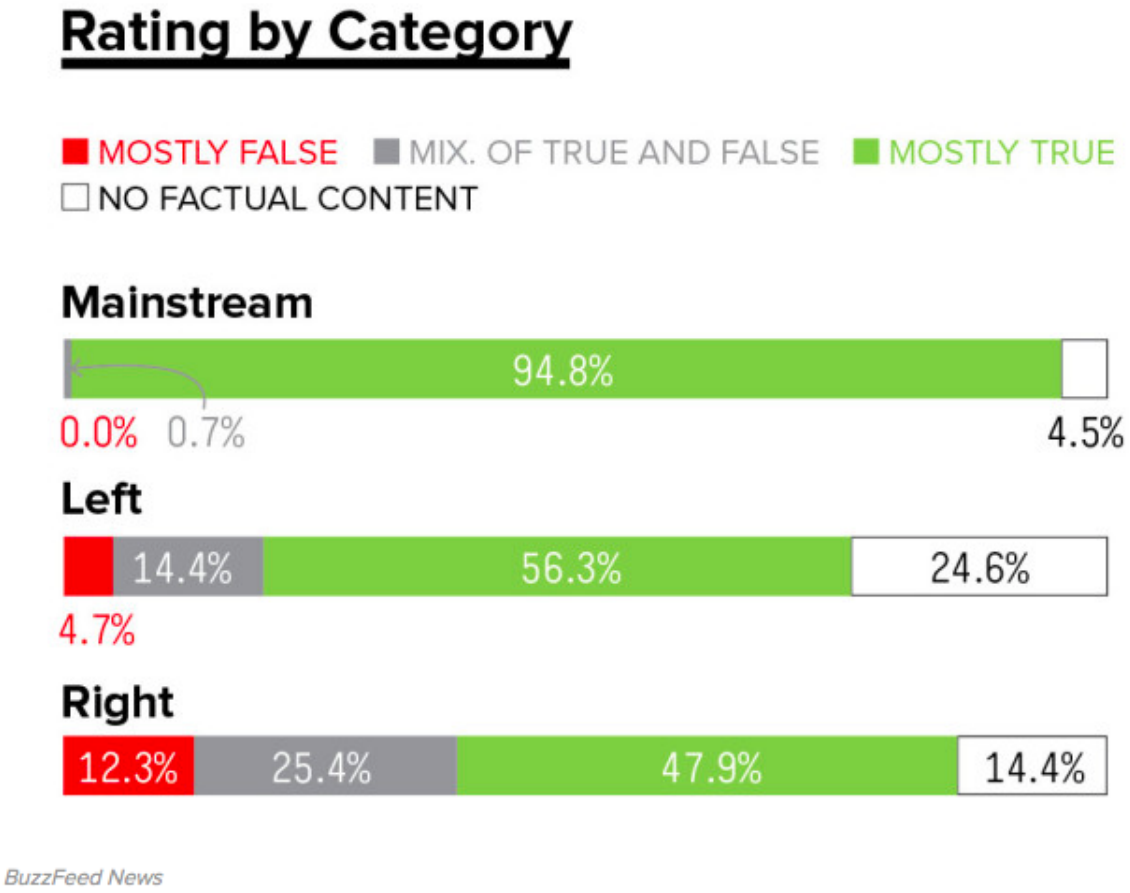
Growth of social media as the main source of ‘evidence’



Q4. You say you’ve used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news? *Base:* All 18-24s/25-34s/35-44s/45-54s/55+ who have used a news source in the last week: All countries = 5598/9187/9686/9383/18371

Source: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2016)

Analysis by BuzzFeed illustrates the level of false information on social media



Source: Silverman et al. (2016)

With risk of misinformation amplified through ‘echo chambers’

Conspiracy theories
32 public Facebook pages about conspiracy theories

V

Scientific information
35 public Facebook pages about science news

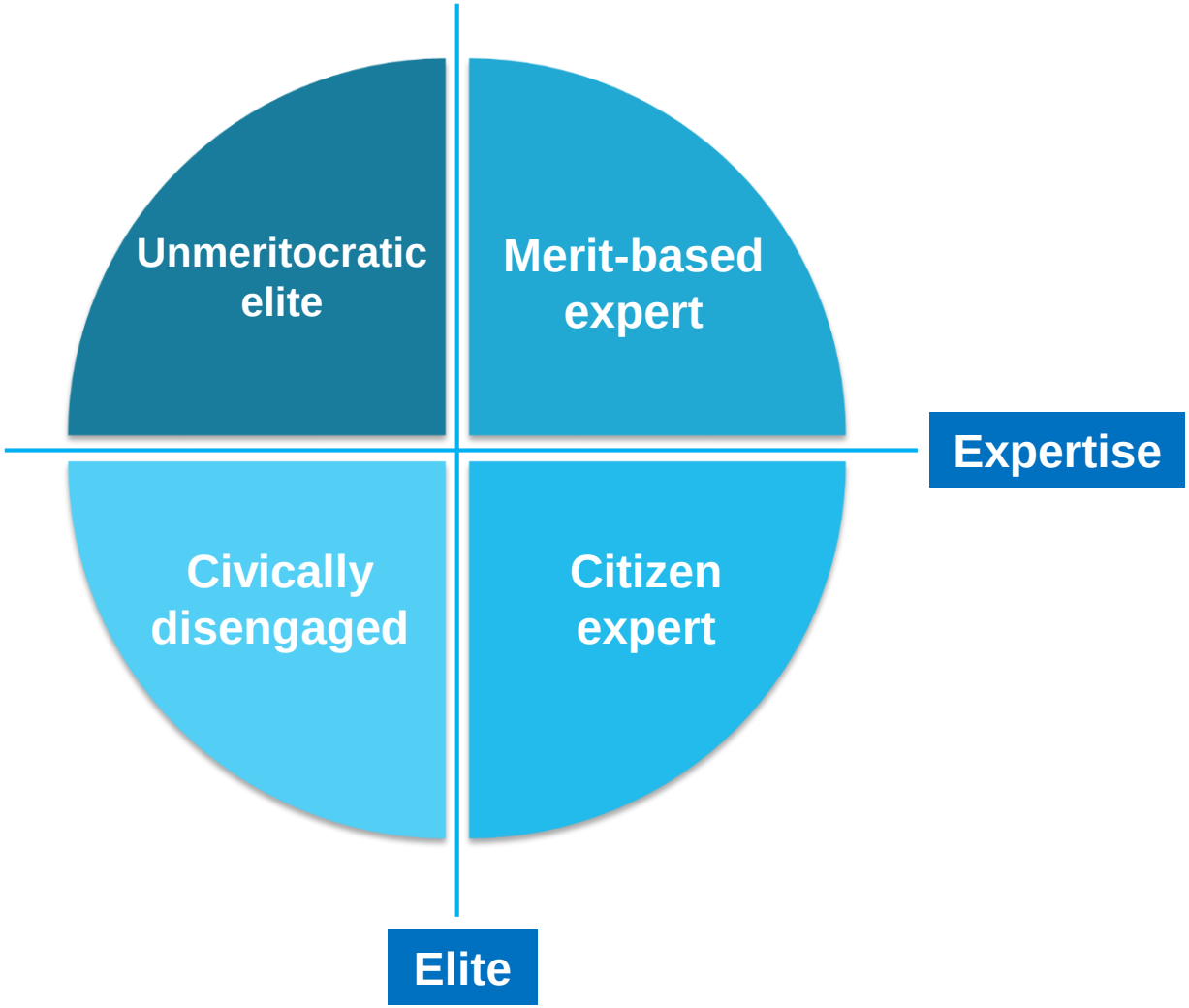
- Downloaded all posts and interactions across a five-year time span (2010-14)
- Examined differences in how pages are shared
- Showed that information related to distinct narratives generates homogeneous and polarised communities (ie echo chambers) but have similar information consumption patterns

Source: Del Vicario et al. (2014)

education

"It is the economy, stupid"

Which suggests a more nuanced understanding of ‘experts’ is needed



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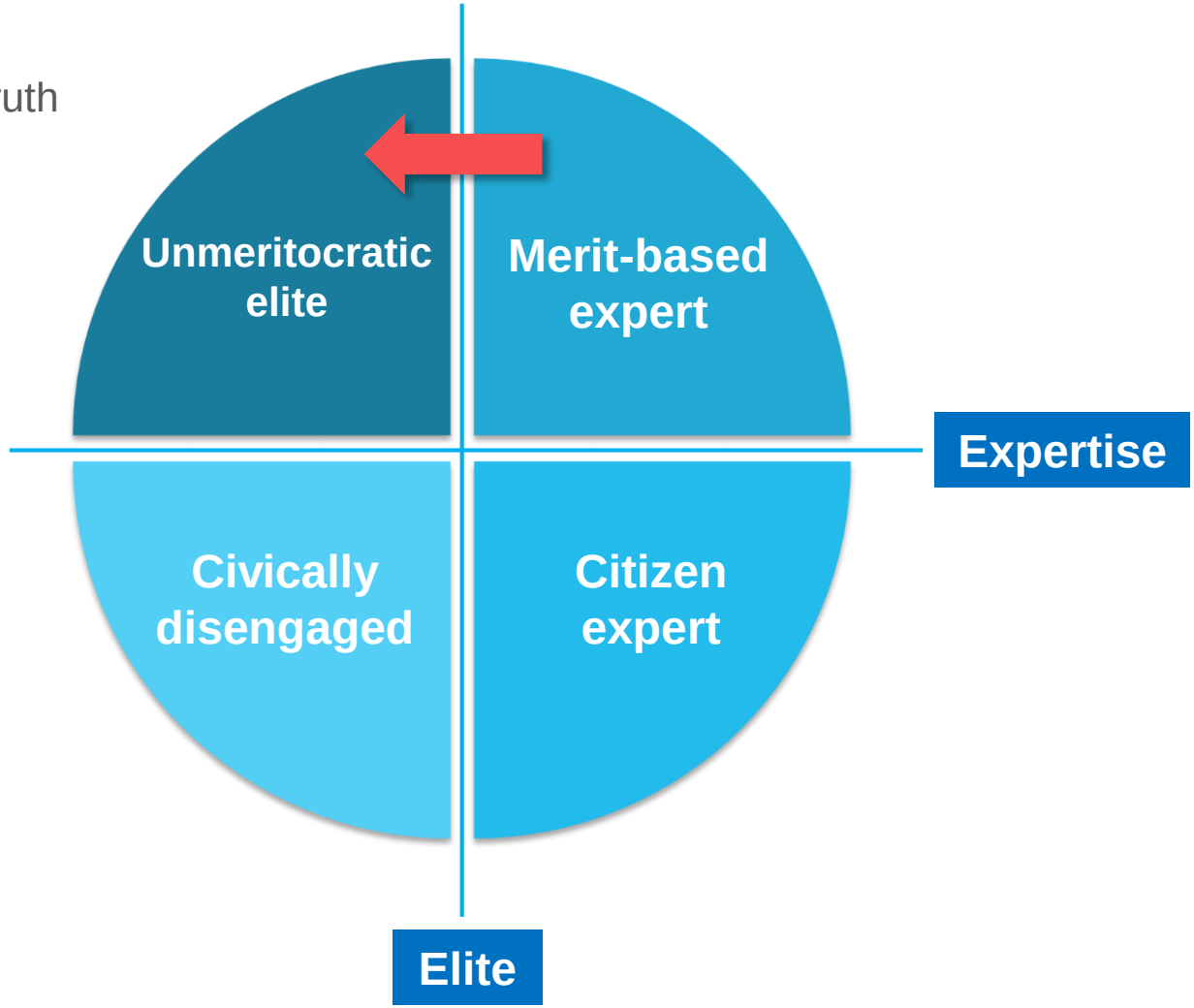
- Attack lies, and advocate truth



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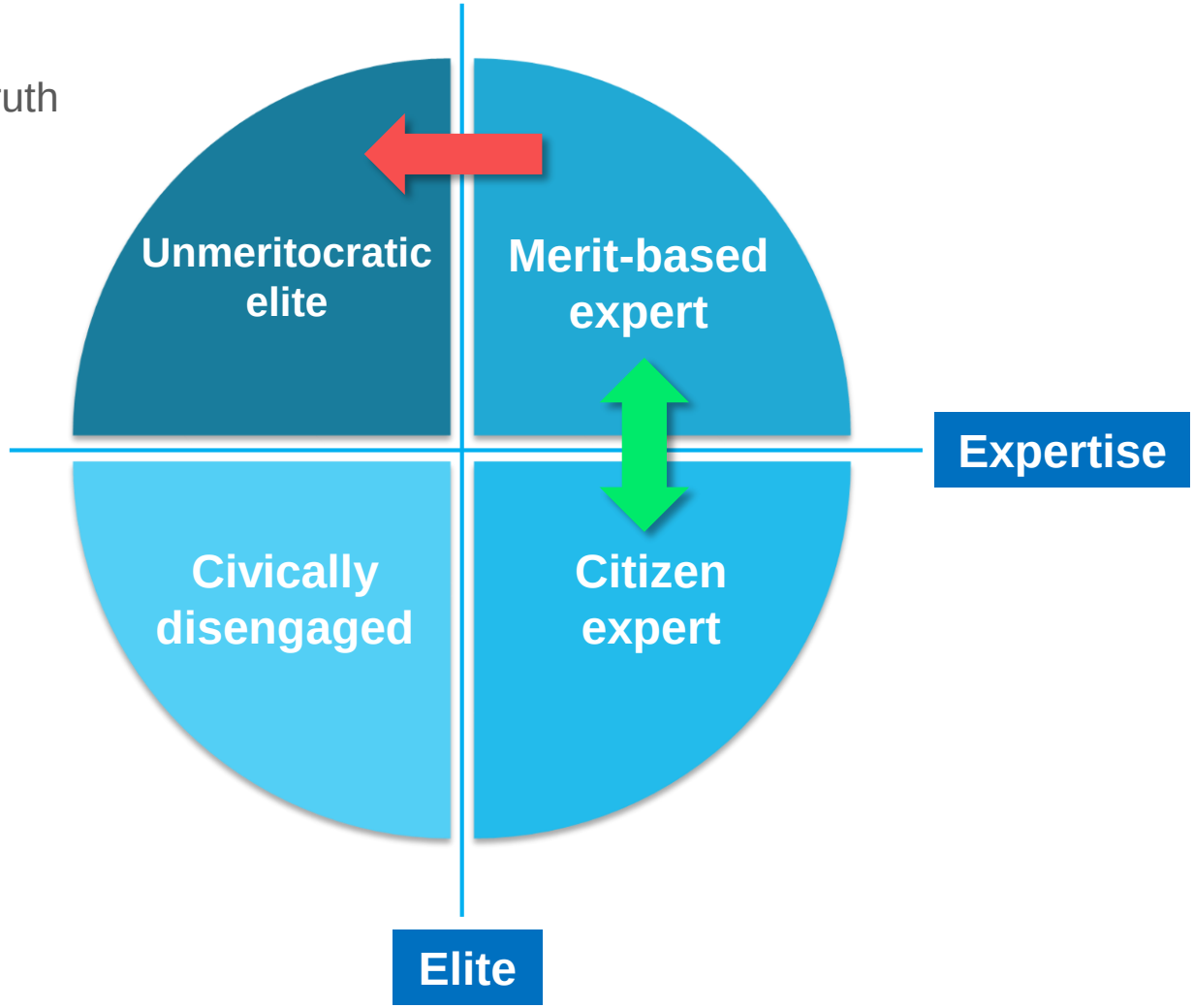
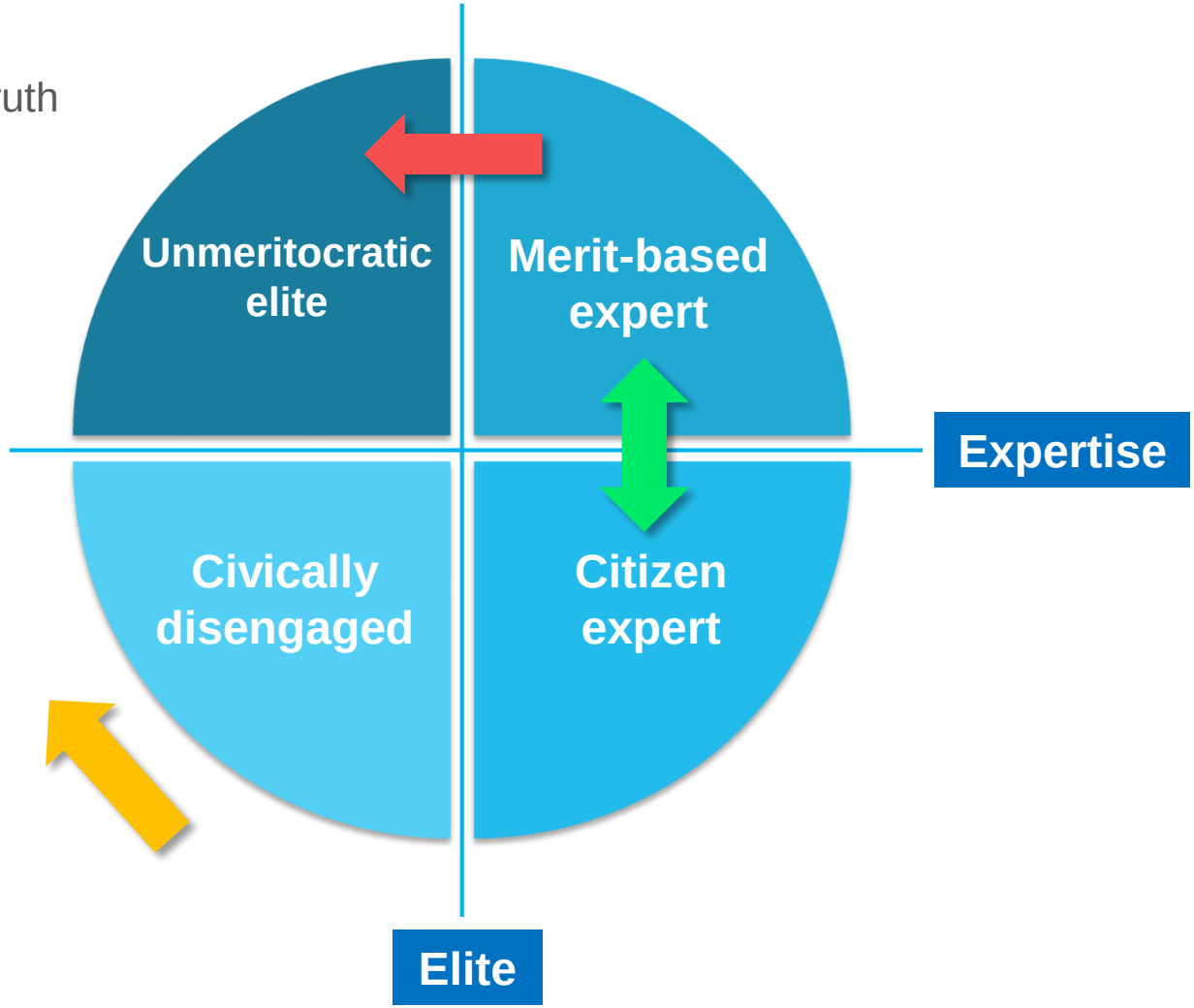
- Attack lies, and advocate truth
- Increased porosity, social mobility and openness



Which suggests a more nuanced understanding of ‘experts’ is needed

- Attack lies, and advocate truth
- Increased porosity, social mobility and openness
- Work with and respect multiple truths through co-creation and co-production of policy



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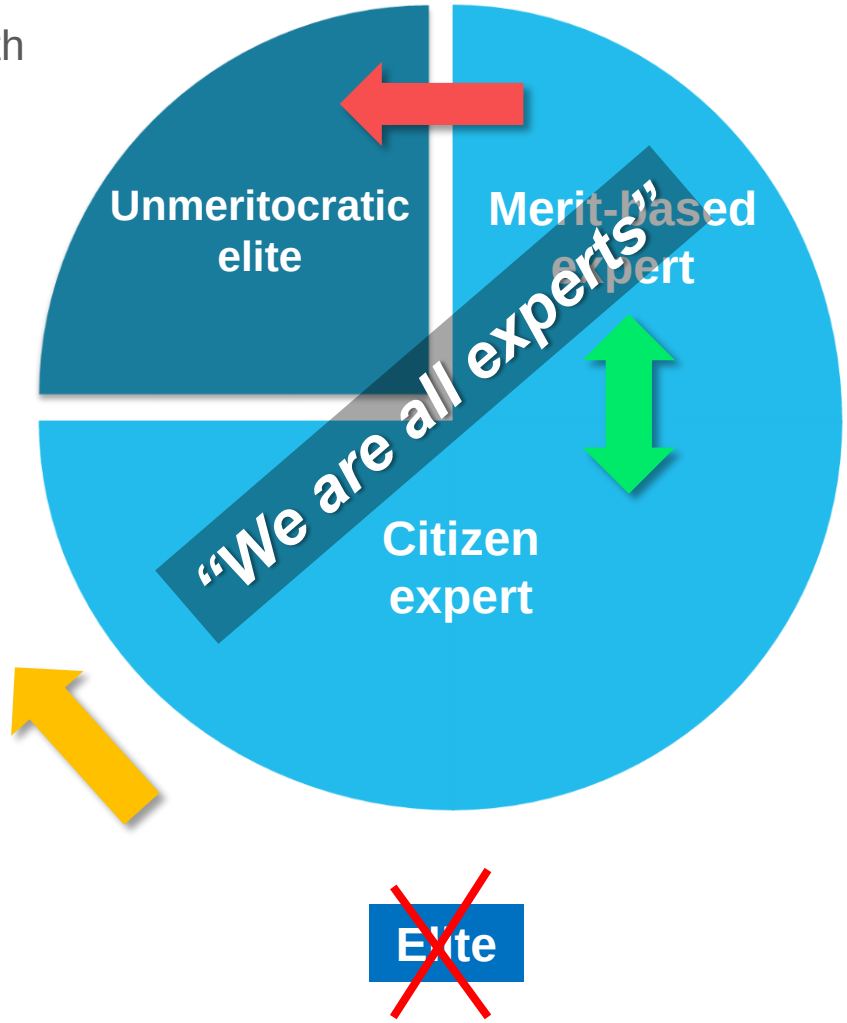

MAPPING PATHWAYS

Developing **evidence-based, people-centred** strategies for the use of **antiretrovirals as prevention**

Mapping Pathways is a community-led initiative to synthesise evidence and views on the social, economic and clinical impacts of four prevention strategies based on antiretrovial (ARV) drugs in South Africa, India and the United States.

LITERATURE

520 relevant articles reviewed

What does the literature say?

- Clinical trial results play dominant role in shaping current policy
- Strong focus on efficacy, limited evidence on effectiveness
- Behaviour central to success
- Further research needed to clarify implementation

POLICY

38 interviews with 'grasstops' stakeholders

What do policymakers say?

- Limited evidence available for policymakers to make decisions on ARV-based prevention
- Reluctance to make determinations from one study
- Generally positive, but science interpreted, framed and perceived differently based on local context:
  - **India** – most scepticism that efficacy would translate to effectiveness
  - **South Africa** – concerned about resource allocation, need for trade-offs
  - **U.S.** – most optimistic, willing to accept science at face value

New approaches to prevention are needed

2 million deaths each year

2.5 million new HIV infections in 2011

34 million people living with HIV worldwide

'All science is local'

Report's foreword by Archbishop Desmond Tutu

COMMUNITY

1069 survey responses from community representatives

What are the 'grassroots' perspectives?

- More info needed to make decisions how/whether to adapt ARV-based approaches locally
- General support for ARVs as prevention
- Concerns include drug resistance, adherence, resource allocation, cost trade-offs, need for improved education, systems capacity
- Weight given to different concerns varied by country/context

EXPERT LENS

32 multidisciplinary experts engaged

What do the experts say?

- Online discussion forum harnessed group wisdom to explore faultlines in evidence
- Strong agreement science justifies more funding for earlier treatment
- Agreement on importance of adherence, biological reliability of ARVs; disagreement on importance of potential risk behaviour increase
- Little consensus on essential delivery conditions

Key insights on ARV-based prevention:

- **Structural factors** such as cost and access are as important as individual behaviours
- Policymakers and communities need **more information** to develop successful local strategies
- **Local context** shapes perception: the same scientific data are viewed and interpreted differently by stakeholders in different countries and groups

The science is dynamic and fast-changing. Providing insight from diverse communities and stakeholders will enrich policies to ensure that ARVs can reach their prevention potential at local and global levels.

www.randeurope.org/mappingpathways

www.mappingpathways.blogspot.com

KING'S College LONDON

Source: Morgan Jones et al. (2013)

The Policy Institute at King's

Take home messages

1. Universities make a significant contribution to informing public policy and parliamentary scrutiny
2. That contribution arises from the majority of disciplines
3. The translation of research to policy is messy and complicated, requiring skills that are not valued or abundant in universities
4. People have not had enough of experts
5. Universities have a lot to offer in this ‘multiple-truth’ world, but need to adapt in vision, structure, process and incentives to a new, challenging reality, otherwise risk becoming irrelevant

What does this mean for universities

- Advocate the contribution we are already making
  - Have confidence in what we do and be better at making that case
- Don't 'blame' others for the anti-intellectualism – reflect on what we do and how we do it
  - New or improved skills, incentives and rewards
- Reflect on our role in diversifying our educational offerings
- 'Multi-truth politics' is about multiple disciplines bringing different perspectives to a 'problem'. It is about working together
  - Focus on interdisciplinary structures and incentives
- Understand, take seriously and fulfill (a new) social contract
  - Universities are social institutions

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