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Philanthropy and Political Influence

*A case study on the link between symbolic capital, political access and  
public perception of Bill Gates*

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## **Abstract**

The influence wielded through private philanthropy has made a comeback to the academic and public discussion, as large foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) invest increasing amounts of money in national and international development efforts. This thesis researches one aspect of philanthropy that has received little attention in the debate on its implications for political equality: Firstly, the link of philanthropy and the accumulation of symbolic capital; and secondly, the resulting political influence of philanthropists. The theoretical basis for such a conceptualisation is derived from Bourdieu's theory of fields and the different forms of capital. The thesis focusses on the latest trend in philanthropic practices, namely entrepreneurial philanthropy. Using a case study approach, the prestige Bill Gates has accrued as a result of his charitable engagements with the BMGF, and the access to international high-level politicians this grants him as an individual are researched. Moreover, the public perception of his person is examined for changes that are related to his philanthropic work. To that end, data on awards and national honours Gates received from 2000 onwards, his meetings with high-level politicians since November 2014, and Google search term trends and correlations in the United States (US) since 2004 was analysed. Findings indicate that the symbolic rewards philanthropy brings are not to be underestimated, as both politicians and the general public seem to be influenced by his work with the BMGF. Development-related issues are discussed regularly with politicians, and philanthropy is increasingly reflected in Gates's public image.

*Keywords:* philanthropy, Bill Gates, Bourdieu, symbolic capital, political inequality, awards

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## List of Abbreviations

**BMGF** Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

**PM** Prime Minister

**US** United States

**WHO** World Health Organisation

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose of study

In recent times, philanthropy has received increasing attention, not only in the academic sphere but also in magazines and news outlets directed at the public, as pointed out by Shaw, Gordon, Harvey and Maclean (2013). Such attention has been aided by two major developments: the increasing levels of philanthropic spendings, which have caused some observers to speak of a “second golden age of American philanthropy” (Reich, 2013a; for levels of philanthropic spending see e.g. McGoey, 2012 and Hay & Muller, 2014), and the changing style and rhetoric surrounding philanthropic giving that is based on methods derived from business practice. This new style has been labelled in many different ways such as venture philanthropy (Letts, Ryan & Grossman, 1997; Schervish, 2003), philanthrocapitalism (Bishop and Green, 2006; 2010; McGoey, 2015a), entrepreneurial philanthropy (Harvey, Maclean, Gordon & Shaw, 2011; Shaw *et al.*, 2013) and others, demonstrating the academic interest in the topic. Certain events such as the announcement of the Giving Pledge whose signatories commit to give away at least half of their wealth to charity during their lifetime or as heritage have occasionally created an outright media hype (Shaw *et al.*, 2013). The pledge has been initiated by Bill Gates and Warren Buffett who are due to their record net worth and consequential celebrity status often used as the analogies to the big philanthropic figureheads from the first golden age: Andrew Carnegie and David Rockefeller (e.g. Levine, 2016; McGoey, 2015a; Reich, 2013a). In fact, Buffett's commitment to giving away \$30 billion to the BMGF amounts to the largest donation in US history and exceeds the total giving of Carnegie and Rockefeller combined, demonstrating the aptitude of speaking about a second golden age of philanthropy (McGoey, 2012).

Such economic power allows the foundation to significantly shape the development in areas of interest such as global health and education reform in the United States (US) (McGoey, 2015a). McCoy, Chand and Sridhar (2009, p. 410) for example found that “the entry of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation into the global health landscape [...] has taken private, philanthropic funding for international development, especially for health, to new and unprecedented heights”. The power of Gates wields over national politics and international development as chairman of the BMGF and, according to Forbes, richest man on earth is of much scientific interest, and has been criticised by various scholars (e.g. Levine, 2016; McGoey, 2015b; Morvaridi, 2012). The recognition prominent philanthropists receive however tends to be overlooked in such critiques, that all too often focus on

the economic aspects only despite evidence on the importance of access and social ties for the political influence of economic elites (e.g. Cook, Page and Moskowitz, 2014). Furthermore, public appreciation is gaining importance in the wake of grave economic inequalities (Keister, 2015). In this study, the power philanthropy generates on the basis of prestige among political elites and the US public is thus researched. The choice to study Bill Gates as an example case of contemporary philanthropy is motivated by his influence, popularity and common depiction as the epitome of the current philanthropic trends.

The philanthropic motive has been widely debated and reaches from the almost heroic interpretation of Bishop and Green (2010) to more cynical views of philanthropy as a mere strategy of economic reproduction (e.g. Morvaridi, 2012; Shaw *et al.*, 2013). As Aschoff (2015, Chapter 4, Creative Capitalism) puts it:

“One can never be sure why someone goes to the trouble of making billions of dollars only to turn around and give them away. Some say it’s the tax breaks, or perhaps a sense of civic duty. Others take a more ideological approach and argue that wealthy people want to decide what gets done with their money rather than leave it up to the state. Why Bill Gates decided to give his money away is anybody’s guess.”

The “essential ambivalence and plurality of motive” (Shaw *et al.*, 2013) makes exact scientific analysis extremely difficult and ultimately unverifiable. This thesis takes the stance that the question of motivation, while interesting, is not of primary importance in the debate about the societal value of philanthropy in either of its forms. On one hand, the best altruistic intentions do not guarantee a positive outcome, and on the other, as the famous contention of Adam Smith goes, individuals driven by self-interest can serve and improve society. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the *outcomes* of philanthropy, that may occur regardless of whether they are intended by its practitioners or not.

## **1.2 The research questions**

In this thesis, the link between entrepreneurial philanthropy and symbolic power will be systematically analysed through the lens of a Bourdieuan framework of symbolic capital and its use for reproduction in social space. Taking Bill Gates as a prominent example case of an influential entrepreneurial philanthropist, this thesis examines the implications for political equality that the symbolic capital accumulated by Gates through his entrepreneurial philanthropic engagement has in

regards to international political elites and public appreciation of Gates within the US. This is done using several sets of both quantitative and qualitative data. Two main research questions will be examined, the second split into two sub-questions. They are both informed by the research and theoretical conceptualisations of Bourdieu that will be elaborated later.

1. How does the engagement in entrepreneurial philanthropy of Bill Gates since 2000 influence his stock of institutionalised symbolic capital, operationalised as awards and national honours?

The thesis employs the hypothesis that there is indeed a connection between philanthropy and symbolic reward, as informed by previous research introduced in section three. Symbolic capital is operationalised as awards and other public honours Gates received since his first significant philanthropic investment in 2000, to create a measurable unit of this inherently non-material capital.

- 2.1 How does the symbolic capital Gates accumulated through entrepreneurial philanthropy influence his access to the international political field of power, operationalised as meetings with high-level politicians?
- 2.2 How does the symbolic capital Gates accumulated through entrepreneurial philanthropy influence the public perception of his image within US society, as derived from Google search term trends and correlations, and Gallup data on his popularity?

These questions refer to political influence, which is broadly defined as the opportunity to advance the individual's agenda regarding societal development. Public perception will be used interchangeably with public image, and here refers to the primary associations people have with the person of Bill Gates, as deduced from Google searches. This is of course only a rough approximation of the much broader concept; such a definition is however motivated by the necessity to operationalise public perception in a simplified manner for the purpose of this thesis.

### **1.3 Disposition of study**

In the following background section, the history of philanthropy in the US with its culmination in entrepreneurial philanthropy will be presented, alongside a brief discussion of contemporary critiques. An introduction of Gates's biography and his engagement with the BMGF round out the background part. Then, previous research about the link between philanthropy, symbolic capital and political influence will be reviewed. After a methodology section introducing the measurements and

discussing their strengths and limitations, the Bourdieuan theoretical framework will be motivated and explained. The following analytical part examines the research questions presented above on the basis of various sets of empirical data. The paper will be concluded by a final section synthesising the findings and discussing the implications of this paper.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Defining philanthropy

There are definitional problems characterising the academic research of elite giving practices. There have for example been several attempts to establish a distinction between charity and philanthropy, while many scholars are just using these terms interchangeably (Acs, 2014; Valverde, 1994). In this thesis philanthropy is understood as a *lifestyle* characterised by the “desire to promote the welfare of others”, as the Oxford Dictionary of English is defining it. A philanthropist is thus not anyone who gives money to welfare causes but who devotes time and energy to evaluate and shape her/his style of giving to how s/he sees fit. Charity on the other hand describes the *general act of giving*, be it money or time, to a cause of general welfare, which is not concerned about the medium and long-term consequences for the recipient. This conceptualisation is somewhat similar to that of historians who are analysing the modern history of giving such as Cunningham (2015) or Valverde (1994, p. 189) who puts it poignantly:

“While the charity giver does not care whether the beggar uses the money “wisely” or not, for giving is good in itself and the beggar will square his/her own accounts with God, the philanthropist is obsessed with getting social and moral returns.”

There is however the additional feature of business methods characterising modern philanthropy, which has no agreed-upon term or definition. Several discussions of this question have been conducted that all reach largely different conclusions and advocate different terminologies (Edwards, 2008; Schervish, 2003; Shaw *et al.*, 2013). Following Shaw *et al.* (2013) this thesis employs the term ‘entrepreneurial philanthropy’ which captures the essence of this recent trend towards a business approach to philanthropy. They conceptualise their term as an elite activity of wealthy individuals with a background as successful entrepreneurs who invest not only their money

but also other forms of capital they possess such as management expertise<sup>1</sup>, social networks and prestige to realise their conception of a contribution to public welfare. This notion includes the main novel aspect of modern philanthropy that others have identified such as the profit motive (Edwards, 2008) and increased managerial intervention (particularly Schervish, 2003). The concept of entrepreneurial philanthropy is central for a thesis focussing on Bill Gates as an individual wealth holder rather than more general conceptualisations of the field of philanthropy as a whole such as the venture philanthropy concept of Edwards (2008) or the influential yet vague philanthrocapitalism heralded by Bishop and Green (2010).

Nevertheless, entrepreneurial philanthropy is just an additional layer on top of the general subject of philanthropy, and not something entirely new. This thesis will therefore often refer to literature on 'generic' philanthropy, particularly in the United States with its specific history of inequality and private engagement (which will be elaborated in the background section).

## **2.2 The history of philanthropy in the United States**

Private initiative in the economic sphere, a feeling of responsibility for oneself, and a certain amount of suspicion of the state and 'big government' are traditionally anchored in the mindsets of many US citizens, although the degree to which it is portrayed in media accounts might be exaggerated (Page and Jacobs, 2009). In the early years of independence, a strong egalitarian mindset persisted among society and indeed, economic capital was distributed relatively equal as industrialisation was only slowly arriving to the North East. Coupled with a high social mobility and a degree of political equality and participation unseen in Europe, it provided the perfect backdrop to de Tocqueville's depiction of the United States as a democratic vanguard (Phillips, 2003, Part I, One; Van Heerikhuizen, 2016. pp. 40-48).

The first golden age of philanthropy is commonly described as a result of the Gilded Age which saw soaring inequalities and the increasing domination of key industries. The Gilded Age was a haven for political corruption, seeing an alliance of the political and the economic elite, whereas the latter would finance the former and in turn left to conduct their business largely unregulated (Garfinkle, 2007, p. 62). The electoral success of politicians such as William Jennings Bryan endorsing trust-busting and popular democracy however made it clear that the social position of the economic elites

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<sup>1</sup> This includes the oft-held belief that the sustainability of even a non-profit organisation hinges on a good business model. Beyond that it is the driver of new legislation allowing for low-profit corporations (L3Cs) that would allow foundations to more easily award grants to profit-making entities without losing tax exemption (Bishop, 2010).

was not secure. In the face of economic fortune and a dismal public image, Andrew Carnegie (1889) was the first to advocate philanthropy as measure to pre-empt political redistribution and social upheaval alongside its moral worth. He argued from a social Darwinist perspective that philanthropists had the obligation to use their superior abilities to foster social mobility for those poor individuals who were deserving of it but disadvantaged for example by the inequality of opportunity in education.

Nonetheless, more liberal policies were introduced, notably the New Deal, and the share of the top one percent of wealth holders declined from 1913 with some increase in the 1920s until the late 1970s. Then, economic inequalities started skyrocketing again, resulting in wealth and income concentration that are nowadays about as high as in the 1920s (Keister, 2014; Piketty & Saez, 2003; Saez & Zucman, 2014). Changes in the late seventies are commonly attributed to a political paradigm shift towards more private initiative (Hall, 1993), largely leading to lower taxes for business entities in the Global North and the infamous structural adjustment programmes in many poorer countries (Williamson, 2009). The ideology of successful entrepreneurs carrying the development of society from the beginnings of social Darwinism returned and was increasingly accepted in politics; Garfinkle (2007) describes this as new 'New Gospel of Wealth'. With rising inequalities, new big philanthropic players emerged on the scene, as these two forces have historically been strongly correlated (Cunningham, 2015). The latest wave of new fortunes has its origins in two in many ways interconnected areas: finance, and internet/computer technology (Keister, 2015; Phillips, 2003, Part II, Six). Within international development cooperation, the trends towards a bigger role for private initiatives and collaboration of public and private entities continue as well, mimicking the development within the US (Moran, 2009). Philanthropy thus continues to grow in importance, nationally and internationally.

### **2.3 Critiques of contemporary philanthropy**

The necessity to discuss critiques of a restrengthening philanthropic sector has been relatively widely recognised in the academic and even the professional field (Reich, 2013b), although opinions on the matter differ greatly—from proposals to increase government support of foundations and keep regulation low (e.g. Bishop & Green, 2010; Coyne, 2013) to calls for diminishing the power and operational freedom of foundations through government intervention (e.g. Katz, 2013; McGoey, 2015a; 2015b; Roelofs, 2015).

The general problem many however identify is the role of large-scale charity, often using foundations as their main vessels (Gordon, 2011, p. 125), in a democratic environment. One pillar of democracy, and indeed of human development itself according to the influential philosopher and economist Amartya Sen (2000), is political equality, the equal opportunity of people from different societal strata to participate in the political process. The centrality of this point has been indicated by the findings of Page and Jacobs (2009) that US citizens value political equality, and a general equality of opportunity, considerably higher than economic equality, which is seen by many as the natural outcome of differing talent and drive. Scholars have proposed two main arguments indicating a degree of conflict between large-scale philanthropy and democracy: the lack of accountability in case of project failure or unpopular grant-making focus, as neither public discontent nor legal responsibility for misbehaviour of grantees have the power to challenge their operation (McGoey, 2015a, Chapter 5; Reich, 2013a); and the lack of political influence over the granting process, which seems particularly questionable in the face of tax incentives to these very organisations (McGoey, 2015a, Introduction; Reich, 2013a).<sup>2</sup> Academics such as Reich (2013a) have expressed the fear that unregulated foundations with high endowments represent the “the voice of plutocracy”, untouchable by common citizens either directly by public appeal nor indirectly through their political representatives. This thesis investigates one way in which philanthropy might increase political inequality by providing economic elites with a tool to increase their political influence.

## 2.4 A brief introduction to life and work of Bill Gates

William Henry Gates III, commonly known as Bill Gates, grew up in Seattle, son to a well-known lawyer and the grand-daughter of an influential national banker who after graduation from Washington University worked as public teacher and chose to devote her time to community work after the birth of their children (Strother, 2007, p. 16). Bill Gates witnessed early how philanthropy can bolster social capital, as “Bill Jr. [Gates's father] and Mary [Gates's mother] regularly invited the governor and other important business and civic people to dinner” (Ibid., p. 21); his mother reportedly helped Microsoft get their first big contract through contacts with an IBM chairman she made during her philanthropic activities (The New York Times, 1994; Wallace & Erickson, 1993, p. 189). Himself enrolled in a private upper-class preparatory school “that catered to Seattle's wealthiest citizens” (Ibid., p. 30) and an alumnus to Harvard University, Gates might be considered

<sup>2</sup> The US in fact scores second place in the Philanthropy Index 2015 examining government support for charitable giving of private entities The section on financial incentives even has the country rated with a five out of five possible points (Hudson Institute, 2015), making this argument particularly relevant in the US American context.

self-made billionaire, but he is certainly no newcomer to the ruling class; in fact, he fits the image that C. Wright Mills painted in his famous depiction of the American *Power Elite* (1956/1999) perfectly. While Gates was still at Harvard, he and his prep school friend Allen programmed the first language for the personal computer 'Altair' and founded Microsoft in 1975; Gates was only 19 years old at that point. The company started growing quickly and began developing an operating system for IBM, whose later versions became the standard operating system globally. Microsoft started dominating the software market, which ultimately led to numerous legal investigations into a potential monopolistic market position of the company in the US and abroad, with Microsoft barely avoiding a split-up in 1999 (Strother, pp. 88-89; Chan, 2011).

It was in the face of increasing legal tension over Microsoft and the building-up of a negative public image that Gates started his philanthropic activities in 1994.<sup>3</sup> First mimicking Carnegie's efforts by setting up internet in public libraries, he broadened his focus to global health and finally merged his two earlier foundations renamed them as Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2000. The global health engagement for which the foundation is probably most famed nowadays was conceived and started off with grants for vaccination initiatives (Gates Foundation, n.d., History). The pledge by Warren Buffett to gradually donate parts of his fortune to the Gates Foundation in 2006 further increased the immense endowments that now stand at about \$40 billion (Ibid., Foundation Fact Sheet), which makes it the largest charitable foundation worldwide. Shortly before, Gates had announced his decision to leave Microsoft and work full time at the BMGF. Its four divisions reveal the global focus, differentiating it from the philanthropists that coined the Gilded Age (e.g. Harvey *et al.*, 2011): Global Development Program, Global Health Program, Global Policy and Advocacy, and the United States Program. As mentioned above, the foundation has furthermore been hailed as the vanguard of modern philanthropy due to its impact measurements and encouragement of private initiative and public-private partnerships (Bishop, 2006; 2010; McGoey, 2015b). He sees the role of his foundation as a financier of technological innovation, complementary to government efforts which are described as inherently risk-averse (Gates, 2003).

In the first major assessment of the foundation's impact, McGoey (2015a) finds many problematic issues, particularly in the realm of improving education in the US, where focus has switched quickly driven by disappointing results. These and other mistakes such as a naive focus on technological solutions have largely been accepted by Gates himself (Strauss, 2015). The massive contributions to global health, are however held in high esteem by many observers; especially Gates's fight against

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<sup>3</sup> First federal investigations were picked up in 1990.

certain sicknesses such as polio and malaria is emphasised here. There have been criticisms that the majority of grants are not directed towards entities from the Global South, but rather benefit research in 'developed' countries (McCoy, Kembhavi, Patel & Luintel, 2009). Nonetheless, the implications for international development are high due to the sheer magnitude of the grants: Of the 4 largest grants, worth about \$3.7 billion, awarded by the BMGF, three grants totalling about \$2.3 billion went to global health issues (Gates Foundation, n.d., Foundation Fact Sheet).<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Previous Research

#### 3.1 Corporate Philanthropy

Academic research on the link between philanthropy, symbolic capital and political influence, has been conducted from various angles. Much existing literature originated in science of business, management and economics. Particularly corporate philanthropy, “tax deductible gifts from corporations to charitable activities” (Burt, 1983, p. 419), has therefore been studied in detail compared to individual philanthropy. It can however be connected to the broader literature on political representation which is concerned about lobbying through financial (campaign) contributions and the symbolic impact of corporate philanthropy on public perception of companies. For Hansen and Mitchell (2000) corporate philanthropy represents merely an addition to other forms of corporate political activity such as lobbying and campaign contributions; the mix of these measures is thought to be determined by the uncertainty of the market and the political regulation of the industry. Indeed, much evidence has been presented in the business literature that corporate philanthropy is a calculated effort to win public appreciation, also among company stakeholders, and advance their political influence over legislators (Burt, 1983; Fooks & Gilmore, 2013; Hadani & Coombes, 2012; Walker & Rea, 2014; Wang & Qian, 2011). Porter and Kramer (2002, p. 5) for example report how the tobacco company Philip Morris “spent \$75 million on its charitable contributions in 1999 and then launched a \$100 million advertising campaign to publicize them”, reflecting a finding of Bourdieu that “the exhibition of symbolic capital (which is always very expensive in material terms) is one of the mechanisms which (no doubt universally) make capital go to capital” (1990, p. 120). It has furthermore been demonstrated that corporate philanthropy does indeed facilitate political access (Wang & Qian, 2011). The fact that companies continue to spend

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<sup>4</sup> The foundation distinguishes in their divisions between global health and global development. Common notions of development, such as the human development espoused famously by Sen (e.g. 2000) however see global health as an integral part of the international development efforts.

amounts on philanthropy that vastly outnumber those of direct lobbying indicates that they certainly see benefits accrue; this argument is particularly valuable in the light of shareholders and the legal framework often pressing companies to focus narrowly on profit-maximisation (Banerjee, 2008).

Although many studies have not conceptualised their research according to a Bourdieuan framework, the role of symbolic capital for public perception among society and the political elite is often implicitly acknowledged. Fooks and Gilbert (2013, p. 6) for example describe in their study of the political influence of the tobacco industry how managers are actively “creating a sense of indebtedness amongst political élites” and improving the “reputation as a reliable provider of policy relevant information” through philanthropic investment. While these aims of the tobacco companies pertain to political elite circles, they identify building constituencies and improving the industry’s standing within civil society as the second major role for corporate philanthropy, which can be interpreted as a broader-based intervention in social space. Connected to this notion, they speak of charitable donations as a “form of symbolic communication which have the potential to change perceptions through the associations they create” (Ibid.). This finding is closely related to the inquiry in this thesis about the public perception of Bill Gates within US society.

### **3.2 Individual Philanthropy**

Research about individual philanthropy has seldom looked at the symbolic benefits accrued by the individual donor. Some emphasis has been on foundations and their influence in disseminating free market ideology (Savage, 2015). For the US, Garfinkle (2007) presents a historical perspective on how such ideology has developed and discusses the role of individuals such as Andrew Carnegie in its creation and proliferation. Harvey *et al.* (2011) who did a case study on Carnegie similar to that of this thesis found that the personal benefits he reaped as a result of his philanthropic engagement can be traced back to the accumulation of symbolic capital. They emphasise the access to media in the face of potentially deteriorating public reputation Carnegie's philanthropy gave him increased access to. On the political level, they find that his prestige opened further doors as well, allowing him to advance his personal political agenda: “Few entrepreneurs have enjoyed the opportunity to lecture elevated political leaders on pressing topics – for example, Gladstone on political organisation, McKinley on imperialism, and Roosevelt on international peace – as Carnegie did” (Ibid., p. 441).

Shapely (1999) has researched the connection of charity, symbolic power and political influence in Victorian Manchester, looking at the fields of philanthropy and parliamentary elections. He demonstrates how philanthropy was successfully used as a means of obtaining public support in elections. Shapely argues that the use of philanthropy followed a certain logic within that field itself and served as an argument to vote for a certain politician. When the rules appropriate to the specific context of the philanthropic field were followed, the charitable donations functioned as proof for the understanding and value of Christian ethics and local commitment of the political candidate in question.

In relation to Gates, almost no works focus on the symbolic rewards his philanthropy yields. Boje and Smith (2000) use discourse analysis to examine the story-telling by Microsoft on Gates and find that “In the Microsoft website official storytelling, most recently Gates is resituated from software impresario to social entrepreneur” (Ibid., p. 24). Examining philanthropic engagement in agricultural projects in Africa, Moravaridi (2012) furthermore finds that the work of the BMGF serves to proliferate market-focussed ideology, and thereby contributes to the upholding of economic doctrines that solidify the social and economic status of economic elites. While he is mentioning Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, his analysis concentrates on granting decisions and thus the financial power the foundation wields.

### **3.3 Political inequality and the role of economic elites**

The access to political decisionmaking the wealthy enjoy is not available to the median voter which is particularly true in the economically unequal 21<sup>st</sup> century US. Phillips describes this development of the intertwined realms of private wealth and public politics in modern times as such: “by 2000 the United States could be said to have a plutocracy, when back in 1990 the resemblance to the previous plutocracy of the Gilded Age had not yet fully matured” (2003, Introduction, para. 25). Such statements seemingly resonate within civil society, as Occupy Wall Street and the 99% movement illustrate. Even among the accused one percent, voices have been raised to indicate that political change is needed to fend off the potential of social upheaval (Hanauer, 2013), similar to the worries Carnegie uttered in his famous essay on *Wealth* (1889) and the obligation he saw for the wealthy to give away their fortunes. In the meantime, economic inequalities, particularly in terms of wealth, seem to have quickly recovered from blows of the financial crisis in 2007/2008 (Keister, 2015; Saez & Zucman, 2014), indicating that despite public discontent the political course is largely held.

The excessive increases in income inequalities since the 1980s that have mainly caused current wealth inequality highs (Keister, 2015, Saez & Zucman, 2014) can be interpreted as a reorientation of political focus towards the 'supply side' and successful entrepreneurs. Indeed, the outcomes of the political process as of late that cannot be explained by pluralistic models but appears skewed in favour of economic elites (Gilens & Page, 2014). As Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo and Snyder (2003) however argue, direct financial contributions have become less important in the lobbying of politicians. In fact, research on lobbying in congress has generally shown that the conceptualisation of campaign contribution and other forms of lobbying as simple vote-buying does not hold (Hall & Wayman, 1990). Instead, models have been proposed that explain it as buying *access* to politicians, influencing the legislative process more indirectly (Ibid.; Kalla & Broockmann, 2014; Mayer & Mujumdar, 2014; Wright, 1990). Research on the top earners in the US has found a strong positive correlation between political engagement (also by financial means) and income (Cook, Page & Moskowitz, 2014). Cook *et al.* report frequent personal contact between the extremely wealthy and influential politicians, even reaching into the White House. Such discussions inspired this thesis to examine another indirect means of exerting influence: philanthropy, symbolic capital and its potential two-pronged role in increasing access to the political process and gaining public appreciation amidst economic and political inequalities

## **4. Theoretical Framework**

### **4.1 Existing research**

The theoretical framework of this thesis is inspired by papers from a group of British researchers who are driven by a similar interest of assessing the broader ramifications of philanthropy and philanthrocapitalism. In particular Harvey and Maclean (2008), come to the conclusion that a Bourdieuan framework, constructed around his capital theory and the larger theoretical body related to his *Theory of Practice* (1990) is a valuable tool for comprehensive analysis of power and reproduction of social status; the follow-up papers researching the philanthropy of Carnegie (Harvey *et al.*, 2011) and contemporary entrepreneurial philanthropy (Shaw *et al.*, 2013) demonstrate the applicability of this idea. While they give a broad assessment of how philanthropy reproduces the social position of practitioners, they remain shallow in regards to the specific forms of capital and

how they are affected by (entrepreneurial) philanthropy. This thesis can thus be seen as expanding on their theoretical framework, zooming in on the workings of symbolic capital.

## 4.2 The theoretical body of Bourdieu

The theoretical framework of this analysis utilises Bourdieu's theory on the different forms of capital and also draws on his concept of fields. These two notions are inseparably connected, as for Bourdieu "capital is a social relation, i.e., an energy which only exists and only produces its effects in the field in which it is produced and reproduced" (1984, p. 113). Both will be introduced in the following two sections.

### 4.2.1 Social space and fields

Every social interaction between people of a single society with its particular institutions occurs within *social space*. Bourdieu writes (1985, p. 736):

"[S]ocial space is a multi-dimensional space, an open set of fields that are relatively autonomous, i.e., more or less strongly and directly subordinated, in their functioning and their transformations, to the field of economic production. Within each of these sub-spaces, the occupants of the dominated positions are constantly engaged in struggles of different forms."

These struggles follow a particular logic, the 'rules of the game' which describe which kinds of capital can be invested in the 'arena', and in which ways, to be most successful, i.e. accumulating a maximum amount of profit. It is a purely theoretical structure which helps to conceptualise struggles for certain objects tacitly agreed to be valuable by the players who are objectively related mainly through their stock of capital relevant to the field. Within each field, the (meta-)field of power can be identified, in which the dominant players with the largest stocks of capital negotiate the fluid logic inherent to the struggle at hand (Swartz, 1997, pp. 117-143).

Fields do not exist in isolation, as they overlap with others in social space and influence each other. This can be exemplified by those important to this paper: the field of philanthropy, the field of tech business, and the political field. The latter has been examined by Bourdieu himself at length and has been described as central to the reproduction of symbolic space (2001). What determines the action of professional politicians runs *homologous* to their position in social space. Dominant actors such as Bill Gates who accumulated various forms of capital through the fields of philanthropy and

that of tech business are prone to be represented by those dominant in the political field as well (or were dominant themselves if they chose to enter) (Bourdieu, 1985). This construction is contrary to pluralistic notions of politics, as in this Bourdieuan model the possession of capital is most important for adequate representation. The conceptualisation of the philanthropic field on the other hand is informed by Shapely's analysis of the symbolic profits from philanthropy reaped by the 19<sup>th</sup> century 'Manchester men' (1999). Characteristics include the internal struggle for which philanthropic practices yield the greatest symbolic rewards, such as that between practitioners of traditional charity and more philanthropic actors such as Gates (c.f. Valverde, 1994). This thesis furthermore distinguishes the sub-field of tech business from the general economic field to account specifically for the logic of innovation and technological advancement as the key to dominance in this social struggle.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Three main forms of capital

In the following, the forms of capital he identified will be outlined briefly, followed by a discussion of specificities important to their application in this thesis. The source throughout is Bourdieu's essay on *The Forms of Capital* (1986).

Economic capital describes the material goods a person possesses, which can typically be easily converted into money. It corresponds to traditional conceptualisations as those by Weber and, particularly, Marx (Smart, 1993). Cultural capital was in the focus of much of Bourdieu's empirical studies which were often concerned with various aspects of the educational system and its role in the reproduction of capital over generations. There are three forms it can assume:

1. Embodied cultural capital is inseparable from the body of a person and describes their knowledge through education, awareness of social codes and ability to use cultural goods. In particular the understanding of the 'value' of cultural goods that allows for a distinction from lower classes who pay more attention to function rather than form is important for reproduction of social status (c.f. 1984)
2. Objectified cultural capital refers to cultural goods such as paintings or instruments, which often require embodied cultural capital to consume them (for example violin skills that are needed to make use or at least enhance the profits of owning a Stradivari).

<sup>5</sup> This point has been excellently proven by Gates himself who was among the first Americans to become deeply acquainted with computers and remained at the forefront of software development for many years with Microsoft, allowing him to amass his fortune: the profit for successful participation in the field.

3. Institutionalised cultural capital denotes forms of cultural capital with guaranteed recognition. The oft-cited example is a university diploma which certifies a person's abilities, so they will be recognised without the need of constant demonstration, as they are vouched for by the university which is in turn controlled by the state. This eliminates the potential vagaries of returns to investments into education.

Social capital has been used less in Bourdieu's own empirical studies than the other forms and as Smart (1993) argues is only vaguely defined.<sup>6</sup> It describes the possibility to mobilise capital through the social relations a person cultivated in a long-term process of symbolic gift-exchange. The accumulation of social capital often requires investment of economic capital (for gifts) and a long-term perspective of accumulation, and thus time. Smart argues that social capital is inherently immeasurable, as it just describes the non-enforceable *potentiality* of profits, dependent on a particular social relationship. When Bourdieu defines it as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition [...] a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (1986, p. 89), the network in question is one that consists of particular relationships between people that each invested in the bond thus connecting them.

### 4.2.3 Symbolic capital

Symbolic capital then builds on top of these three main forms of capital. Although some analyses do not distinguish between the nature of symbolic capital and the other forms (e.g. Harvey *et al.*, 2011; Shaw *et al.*, 2013; Smart, 1993), Bourdieu clearly distinguishes it from the other forms. He sets it up as a meta-capital describing the (mis-)recognition of the capital holder's main capital by other people in society. In his own words, symbolic capital is the "form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 17). In more common language, it is the perception people have of one's stock of economic, social and, particularly, cultural capital, and corresponds to what is commonly called 'prestige'. Shapely (1999) for example uses it to describe the electorate's perception of a group of aspiring politicians' moral values. By donating they exhibited their understanding (and valuing) of the Christian doctrine, which was perceived as prerequisite for an apt political candidate for a certain period of time. In more theoretical terms, the practice of philanthropy demonstrated their cultural capital (as

<sup>6</sup> This notion of vagueness refers to Bourdieu only. Authors such as Putnam (1993) and Portes (1998) have conceptualised the concept more clearly, often on the base of Granovetter's extensive work on social networks.

understanding of moral codes), thus increasing their symbolic capital. The perceived legitimacy of capital is another prerequisite for it to take symbolic effect. The claims to profit capital brings with it must thus be accepted by others; one example could be people with an alternative value set, who do not recognise Christian values and thus charitable donations as something to be admired.

Similar to cultural capital, symbolic capital can be sub-divided. Bourdieu seldom made use of this, and to my knowledge only used the term ‘objectified symbolic capital’ to describe symbols of power such as the sceptre (1979). In this thesis, institutionalised symbolic capital will be a major focus. It is constructed in parallel to institutionalised cultural capital, and describes the guaranteed symbolic excellence of a person.<sup>7</sup> The awarding institution vouches for a specific quality of an individual. In the case of national honours the state functions as such guarantor and thereby allows the awardee to expand her/his recognition to other members of society who value the state as a trustworthy institution to judge such qualities. Such a conceptualisation allows for a simple operationalisation of symbolic capital, as awards can be counted and the circumstances of their awarding researched. This thesis therefore provides more concrete empirical data than for example Shapely (1999) who relies on rather vague notions of prestige and public opinion expressed in newspapers which are open to interpretation and do not allow for quantification.

Symbolic capital has been described in Bourdieu’s earlier work as a kind of credit, similar to social capital which is criticised by Smart for the high potential of misunderstandings. Bourdieu writes: “symbolic capital is always credit, in the widest sense of the word, i.e. a sort of advance which the group alone can grant those who give it the best material and symbolic guarantees” (1990, p. 181), after describing how the exhibition of symbolic capital by particularly prestigious members of the Kabyle society serve to proliferate their symbolic influence. This demonstrates that Smart (1993, p. 393) is right in concluding that social and symbolic capital yield a similar kind of power, that is based on non-enforceable obligations characterising just two different kinds of social relationships:

“Thus, the distinction between symbolic and social capital is based on the difference between resources that are part of dyadic, specific social ties and resources that are generalized as the attribution to individuals of particular characteristics by society as a whole or subgroups within it.”

Symbolic capital means credit, power to *induce* (though not enforce) action, over others in society that is not based on *personal* relationships; instead, it brings the potential to influence behaviour of everyone who knows and (mis-)recognises one’s abilities. Such relationships are thus not mutual,

<sup>7</sup> A guarantee is here understood as somebody's vouching for, or publicly acknowledging another person's symbolic capital.

and the dominant holder of symbolic capital does not need to engage in reciprocal action to hold sway over a large group of people. Bourdieu further pointed out the possibility of symbolic power manifesting in ideology formation and, penetrating the most basic functions of human interaction, in language and the personal perception and categorisation of the outside world (1979).

As Kraemer (2002) points out however, Bourdieu actively deviates from the similar Weberian concept of charismatic leadership. He finds that Bourdieu's conceptualisation of symbolic power does not only come into effect in situations of exceptional political revulsions, but indeed influences everyday practices through a *charismatic habitus*, just as the power granted by the forms of capital. A prestigious person reaps the profits of her/his symbolic capital on various levels: that of the social leader, who is able to instigate subordinate strangers by her/his perceived excellence (and impose modes of thought et cetera onto them); and the trustworthy friend who can mentor through his perceived outstanding power, abilities and moral pre-eminence.

From Kraemer's notion of the charismatic habitus and the broader notions of influence over the symbolic space of society at large, this thesis constructs a two-pronged approach to the symbolic power of Bill Gates. The influence of philanthropic engagement on both the level of the political field of power (or the power elite as Mills would call it), and the US American society as a whole, social space, is thus examined.

## **5. Methodology and Data**

### **5.1 General methodological considerations**

General methodological considerations are presented first to allow for structural clarity of the later methodological parts, which correspond directly to the research questions.

The thesis employs a mixed-method approach to explore the realms of symbolic recognition and public perception of Bill Gates. However, as Sudweeks and Simoff (1999) argue, in Internet research the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods is often blurred. There are two main reasons for not concentrating on one side of the qualitative/quantitative divide: As Johnson and Onwuegbusie (2004) argue, methodological pragmatism in the collection of data often leads to superior research, especially in a field of scarce material as that of the symbolic realm of subjective perceptions. Furthermore, the different levels of analysis which reach from individual awards to aggregated frequency of Google search terms invite detailed qualitative analysis of the former to be

supported by statistical analysis, thus combining the strengths of both approaches, as proposed by Punch (2014, p. 304). Due to this approach, the methodology and analysis parts are relatively extensive, resulting in a longer-than-normal bachelor thesis; this is however justified by the ensuing clarity about the data collection process and the relatively large amount of data (and background information) necessary to capture a difficult and complex concept such as symbolic capital.

Bryman (2012, p. 629) presents “the idea that research methods carry epistemological commitments” as a counterargument to using mixed methods used by researchers during the 'paradigm wars'. The argument is that different epistemologies are irreconcilable and quantitative and qualitative methods thus incompatible. While Bryman himself argues that such an argument is difficult to hold as neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are confined to one epistemology, this paper puts itself further in the tradition of Bourdieu; in fact, the concept of symbolic capital almost necessitates an approach merging the ontological assumptions Bourdieu calls subjectivism and objectivism (1989), as the symbolic realm simultaneously creates and is created by both mind and 'objective reality' (1979). Absolute epistemological commitments are thus hard to make as the importance of both constructivist and realist approaches is acknowledged, which are assumed to be ultimately mutually beneficial in scientific research.

Further methodological motivation for assigning that big a role to a broad social theory such as Bourdieu's has its origins in Charles Wright Mills writings about *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). He famously argued that it was the paramount task of sociologists to reveal the connections between individual struggles and social issues on a larger scale, allowing for people to have a share in decision-making. In this tradition, the thesis relates the debate on philanthropy to societal power structures, attempting to shed light on mechanisms of social domination and its reproduction.

As this is a case study of one individual, the question of external validity arises. Choosing Bill Gates as study subject reflects the intention to get a clear picture of the examined link between philanthropy and symbolic and political influence; Gates serves as an extreme case as his (literal and figurative) investments set him apart from other contemporary and historical philanthropists. The other methodology-related reason to choose Gates however is the exemplifying character he holds for entrepreneurial philanthropists as previous research suggests that he “epitomize[s] a broader category of cases [which] provide a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered” (Bryman, 2012, p. 70). The case of Bill Gates thus has “the capacity [...] to illuminate the links” (Ibid.) presumably representative, although in weaker form, of entrepreneurial philanthropists in

general. The uniqueness of the case is thus assumed to significantly affect the generalisability in terms of quantity of his influence, but less so in terms of quality.

## 5.2 Data collection and its imitations

The measurements used in this thesis were predominantly gathered by internet research using Google and Startpage to ensure a broad coverage of events and general information academic databases do not provide (Brophy & Bawden, 2005). This results in several caveats such as search engine personalisation bias. Google for example displays search results based on personalised search history, and thus produces at times vastly different results from person to person. To circumvent this problem, the alternative engine Startpage which is based on Google but eliminates the personalisation has been used as a check on the empirical data researched via Google itself. Search results were however not significantly different. Furthermore, not everything happening in the 'offline world' will appear on the internet. This is where the extreme case of Bill Gates however comes in handy, as the relatively large public interest in him as a person is likely to ensure that a majority of information on him actually leaves an electronic trace detectable on the internet. While the data for awards and meetings cannot be guaranteed to be utterly accurate, it will thus likely provide a satisfactorily comprehensive picture nonetheless. There are furthermore no indications that he or the Foundation hold stock in Google or have other such connections that might influence this research.<sup>8</sup> Further strengths and limitations specific to the measurements will be discussed in their respective section. The following three sections directly correspond to research questions 1, 2.1 and 2.2.

### 5.2.1 Measuring symbolic recognition

The empirical data about Bill Gates's symbolic recognition, was gathered by internet research as described above. As motivated in the theoretical framework section, institutionalised symbolic capital is operationalised as awards, including medals, titles and honorary doctorates for measurability. This creates certain limitations: Awards in themselves for example do not guarantee any wide-spread recognition; this issue particularly concerns particularistic and little renowned awards that might only be cherished in small circles. While the absolute distinction between an

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<sup>8</sup> Building up the platform Researchgate which provided articles used in this paper is the only possibly conceivable connection I am aware of. This exception is not assumed to have any influence on the data or findings presented here.

honorary knighthood from the British Queen and awards from regional newspaper becomes clear in an individual juxtaposition, a precise measurement of relative importance of all gathered awards seems impossible. This problem is counteracted by discussing the relevance of the awards where important, and analysing particularly prestigious national honours separately.

The time frame that is analysed in this thesis spans from the year of Gates's first major grant of \$1 billion to the Gates Foundation in 2000, up until the date of this research, April 2016. In doing so, the earlier recognition Gates received for his business success is filtered out to some extent, as motivated by the focus on his recognition as philanthropist. To clearly connect the recognition to his philanthropic engagement, the explanatory statements for awarding Gates were categorised using the preselected codes 1) philanthropy only, 2) business only and 3) both. The background of these awards was furthermore evaluated qualitatively to understand the interweavings of these different spheres. It is possible that smaller awards, especially from the earlier time periods were not discovered in this research as the prevalence of internet news has grown rapidly. The numbers stated are therefore potentially underestimated. There is the possibility to make further distinctions, utilising the difference of origin of the symbolic capital obtained through these awards. While honorary doctorates indicate a recognition of more narrow cultural capital in the sense of academic knowledge, civilian awards point more towards recognition of ethical excellence that is recognised throughout society; this becomes particularly clear in the case of national awards guaranteed by some state institution. While the point can be made, as Shapely (1999) does, that the latter can be understood as recognition of cultural capital as well, in the sense of an understanding of societally accepted moral values and behaviour, the focus is wider. These awards thus advance symbolic recognition not only in a narrow field such as academia but beyond that, and thus solidify symbolic dominance in social space as a whole.

### **5.2.2 Measuring individual political influence**

The time span that is applied to the research of Gates's political connections spans only one and a half years, reaching from November 2014 to April 2016 to be able to keep the amount of data manageable for the scope of this thesis. Political connections are measured as meetings with high-level politicians, which are defined as ministers, vice ministers and national leaders in office at the moment of the meeting. As these are the international political elites, they constitute what will be called the political field of power; this is informed by the Bourdieuan meta-concept of the field of

power which dominates the actors of a particular field. As discussed above, meetings do not necessarily leave traces, which is only mitigated by the high level of public interest in Gates, and that in most influential politicians; in particular meetings that are supposed to be kept secret can however not be accounted for. This measurement of direct political access is used as a proxy for political influence. There are other connections that are lost using this measurement, such as the meetings with politicians of employees of the Gates Foundation and the power of economic capital the Gates Foundation uses to drive what policies are implemented. As Gates is one of the foundation's four chairmen, the clout of the foundation clearly mirrors the personal clout of Gates to some extent. This thesis however focusses on the personal influence of Bill Gates. I argue therefore that using the BMGF as measurement brings too much noise into the analysis, as it blurs the symbolic capital/economic capital distinction even further and would require further scrutiny to how much influence over the everyday workings of the organisation Gates actually yields.<sup>9</sup>

A positive aspect of using meetings with high-level and thus highly visible politicians is the common notification about causes for and topic of the conversations. The broad topics of the talks were categorised using the preselected code 'global health' whereas other topics and the more narrow talking points were distilled using open coding. These politicians that are to a higher or lesser degree dependent on popular appreciation and re-election are assumed to be more likely to meet persons with high popularity and symbolic power themselves. The argument can be made that through such publicised meetings the politicians actually gain in symbolic power themselves, something that is particularly important to what they can invest in the political game (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 52). By meeting people that are recognised for their understanding of moral discourses and technological development, these politicians demonstrate their own cultural and social capital. As a result, the symbolic power they yield increases in contexts where philanthropy is seen as a feature of positive distinction.

Empirical data as of now is insufficient to make the claim that access to politicians necessarily translates into passed bills. The research presented in section three of this paper on the close connection of economic elites and politicians, and the political decision-making favouring this class indicates however points in that direction. This paper argues that access is vital from a theoretical point of view: being granted the time to have a conversation with an influential politician and getting her/him to think about one's standpoints surely must be understood as political influence regardless

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<sup>9</sup> Feasibility plays a role as well of course, as a comprehensive account of how often Gates Foundation staff meets with politicians would be difficult to obtain.

of the political outcomes, as it provides the pivotal element in instilling arguments into somebody else's view. Access of some sort is essential in the first place if the arguments involved are not so commonplace that the conversation partner is aware and has already formed an opinion. The extent to which any decision-making has been influenced by Gates's being in contact with politicians is not measured; the meetings rather indicate an element of *potentiality* here, as characteristic of symbolic and social capital (see section four). This thesis thus argues that meetings with high-level politicians show the linkage between symbolic capital and political influence of Bill Gates most clearly. One caveat of the employed method of measurement is that the relation to the *symbolic* capital of Gates cannot be ensured, as politicians might be inclined to meet him, at least partially, to elicit donations for the country they represent. The prominence of Gates in political circles as opposed to that of for example his BMGF co-chair and, in economic terms, larger donor Buffett seems to indicate that his symbolic capital does however play a significant role. The point made earlier about generalisability further applies here in particular. While this paper provides a detailed picture of the symbolic power Gates yields as a result of philanthropy, broad statistical analysis similar to that of Gilens and Page (2014) is needed to determine whether such power generally skews the political process in any significant way. One limitation is therefore that the effectiveness of Gates's symbolic power cannot be measured.

### **5.2.3 Measuring public perception**

Measuring the image and public awareness of a person is a difficult task that can only be approximately measured in this thesis, if not beyond. Public perception is rather narrowly operationalised innovatively here as associations people have using Google to inquire about the person of Bill Gates. This delimits the internal validity of the second sub-question somewhat, but appears to be a necessary compromise between practicability and methodological exactness. Google Trends and Google Correlate provide researchers with the means to check for recognition of a particular subject or person, collecting data from general user searches. There are certain problems with these tools, such as the opacity of data. The fact that Google censors search results and correlation results by what they deem inappropriate without notification surely makes it difficult to use it as standard academic tools. Nevertheless, they can be used to shed some light on the public perception of relatively popular individuals among national and global civil society, which is so

difficult to explore in a broad-based fashion. Complete data is however available only from January 2004 onwards and through April 2016.

Google Trends is a tool showing the popularity of a specific search term over time and can thus be used to see the interest of people in a particular subject, filtered by country or worldwide. It displays the popularity in relative terms to the highest search volume. A score of 50 at a specific date for a specific term thus indicates that the total search volume for the term in question is at half the amount of where it has been at the peak over the whole data series. The results are not weighed against the totality of search terms used on Google. Google Correlate uses the data on popularity as well, but develops the idea further. The pattern characterising the popularity of a specific search term over time is correlated with the patterns of other search terms to identify which searches tend to rise and fall in popularity in similar rhythms. The database was developed for market research to determine at which time in the year a specific product might be most wanted; in this thesis that data is however used to examine the associations people in the US have with Bill Gates (no worldwide data is available for Correlate). If there is a high correlation of the term 'bill Gates's' with the term 'bill gates microsoft', this means that people look for these terms at similar points in time. The idea is that such a correlation can be used as an approximation of why people are interested in the subject, what they associate with it at the point of their searches.

This data will be complemented with the results of Gallup's annual poll on who Americans admire most, anywhere in the world. Their data provides a basic insight into the development of Bill Gates' popularity over time. It covers the whole time span for which Google data is available and even reaches back to 1995 when Gates entered the list for the first time, thus providing an indication for whether the changing perception of his personality during the time of his work reorientation towards philanthropy affected his overall popularity.

## **6. Analysis**

The analysis section will describe the findings in an order that directly reflects the research questions. Insights the data provides will be pointed out in the respective sections of this section; the synthesis and interpretation of these smaller findings is performed in the conclusion section, where the research question are also answered directly; lastly, implications of this research and possible starting points for further studies will be discussed.

## 6.1 Symbolic recognition

Award	Type	Date	Reason
Padma Bushan, third highest civilian award of the Indian state	National award	2015	Philanthropy
Placard of the Order of the Aztec Eagle, highest Mexican Order to foreign businessmen	National award	2007	Philanthropy
Order of Infante Dom Henrique 'Grã Cruz', highest Portuguese civilian order	National award	2006	Philanthropy
Honorary Knight Commander of the most Excellent Order of the British Empire	National award	2005	Both
Louis Braille Gold Medal, Canadian National Institute for the Blind	National social award	2002	Philanthropy
Special ITU 150 Award, telecommunication union	International (UN) award	2015	Both
WFPUSA George McGovern Leadership Award	International (UN) award	2011	Philanthropy
United Nations Population Award	International (UN) award	2010	Philanthropy
Dr. Bob Scott Award, rotary award for advancing global health	Private social award	2015	Philanthropy
The Spirit of Helen Keller Award	Private social award	2015	Philanthropy
Sheikh Salem Al-Ali AISabah Informatics Award	Private award	2015	Both – business focus
MDG Award, awarded by the Nigerian Global Magazine	Private award	2015	Philanthropy
Bambi Millennium Award	Private media award	2013	Philanthropy
Lasker-Bloomberg Public Service Award	Private social award	2013	Philanthropy
Klingenstein Leadership Award, supporting education	Private social award	2012	Philanthropy
amfAR's Award of Courage	Private social award	2012	Philanthropy
Global Health Leadership Award	Private social award	2011	Philanthropy
Silver Buffalo Award, American boy scout award	Private award	2010	Both
Bower Award for Business Leadership	Private business award	2010	Both – business focus
Goi Peace Award	Private social award	2008	Philanthropy
Hebrew University's Einstein Award	Private award	2008	Both – philanthropy focus
Industry Digital Patriot Award	Private industry award	2006	Business
James C. Morgan Global Humanitarian Award	Private social award	2006	Philanthropy
Jefferson Award for Greatest Public Service Benefiting the Disadvantaged	Private social award	2002	Philanthropy

University	Honorary Degree	Date	Reason
Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia	Honorary doctorate	2014	Philanthropy
Cambridge University, UK	Honorary doctorate in law	2009	Both – philanthropy focus
Karolinska University, Sweden	Honorary doctorate of medicine	2008	Philanthropy
Harvard University, USA	Honorary doctorate in law	2007	
Tsinghua University, China	Honorary doctorate	2007	
Edinburgh University	Honorary doctorate	2006/07	
Waseda University, Japan	Honorary science doctorate	2005	
Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden	Honorary doctorate	2002	
Nyenrode Business University, Netherlands	Honorary doctorate	2000	
Rikkyo University, Japan	Honorary doctorate in humanities	2000	

*Table 1: Awards Gates received from 2000 to April 2016. Own data collected as described in section five on methodology.*

Extensive research on the internet resulted in a small database containing 34 awards Gates received personally from January 2000 until April 2016.<sup>10</sup> Ten of those are honorary doctorates from universities located in as much as four different continents. The awards reach from rather obscure ones such as the MDG Award 2015 given out by a small Nigerian magazine to a prestigious honorary knighthood awarded by the British Queen in 2005. Most awards were received either by

<sup>10</sup> Awards for the Gates Foundation are thus excluded, although the motivation statements for awarding Gates often mention the foundation. Awards Gates received together with his wife Melinda Gates are all included.

him or Melinda Gates which underscores the importance these awards hold for Gates, and thus the necessity of research providing an insight into the circumstances surrounding their awarding.<sup>11</sup>

17 of the 24 awards (excluding honorary degrees for which motivation was often not obtainable) were motivated exclusively or dominantly by Gates's philanthropic work. Six further awards stated the importance of both his background as successful businessman and his current work with the Gates Foundation. Some emphasised either side more thoroughly, but the focus was on his commitment to both those parts of his life. Only in one case, that of the 'Industry Digital Patriot Award', the organisations choice was predominantly motivated by his engagement with Microsoft. This is however not to say that Gates did not receive much credit for his business career: For once, he received awards and much media attention for his success earlier in his life, particularly when he became billionaire only 31 years of age (Wallace & Erickson, 1993). Secondly, the research clearly shows how the fields of philanthropy and tech business are connected. While it is speculation if he had received a similar amount of symbolic recognition were he not among the richest people in the world due to his financial success with Microsoft stocks, many awards are designed specifically for business people. The 'James C. Morgan Global Humanitarian Award' of the Tech Museum of Innovation is one such example. Being sponsored by Microsoft among others, it has almost exclusively been awarded to individuals who have (co-)founded businesses and gained influence through introducing new technology to the industry. The focus is thus less on philanthropy in isolation but really in the connection of innovative solutions to problems of development, parallel to the essentials in the tech industry.

The spirit of many of the awards is captured in this phrase from the motivation for the 'Bower Award For Business Leadership' Gates received in 2010: "There is no doubt that Bill Gates is a successful businessman—but he is much more than that" (The Franklin Institute, 2010). Building on the (necessary) foundation of business success with Microsoft, Gates was able to expand his influence to the field of philanthropy—and be recognised within the business field he originally dominated. This is a clear example for the interconnection of position within different fields; it demonstrates how the philanthropic engagement does not only yield (symbolic) rewards within the philanthropic field itself but beyond.

This spillover of business success into other fields affects the political field as well. While Gates has not (yet) received national honours in the US, unlike his fellow Gates BMGF chairman Warren Buffett (Bull, 2010), his symbolic capital in the political sphere has been increasing as well.

<sup>11</sup> For some awards, internet sources could not verify whether it was actually received.

National honours, often awarded directly by the political leader of the country in question, include his prestigious British honorary knighthood, but also honours received by the Mexican and Portuguese government and finally his 2015 Padma Bushan, the third-highest civilian award of India. Three of these four national awards were motivated predominantly by his philanthropic work, while the British knighthood focused its praise on Gates involvement with Microsoft and their “profound impact on the British economy” (Eesterbrook, 2004). His “significant contributions to poverty reduction in parts of the Commonwealth and elsewhere in the developing world” (Ibid.) were however part of the reason for bestowing this honour to Gates as well. While this point will be discussed in detail later on, it seems noteworthy that these symbolic awards enable Gates to get into personal contact with influential national political leaders such as the Queen of Great Britain and the Portuguese Prime Minister. In international politics Gates has received three further awards, albeit from rather marginal UN-affiliated organisations. Nonetheless, this demonstrates how the symbolic capital formation includes not only the national political realm but also that of international development cooperation itself. Overall it can be concluded that the role of philanthropy in Gates's gaining symbolic capital within the field of politics, advancing his position therein, is clearly positive.

The motivation for awarding Gates could not be found in seven out of ten cases, which renders a deeper analysis impossible. Receiving ten doctorate degrees from such prestigious universities as Harvard (US), Cambridge and Edinburgh (both UK), but also universities from Ethiopia, China and Japan reveals a both deep and wide-spread acknowledgement of his activities. All three awarding universities where the motivation for the honouring could be determined (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Cambridge, UK; and Karolinska University, Sweden) refer to Gates's role as philanthropist.<sup>12</sup> The case of Swedish Karolinska University is thereby of particular interest as it awarded Gates with an honorary doctorate in medicine “for their contributions to global health, especially healthcare in developing countries.” As elaborated in the next section, such institutionalised recognition of cultural capital for foundation work, despite actual lay status, is one of the major instruments granting Gates access to political decision-makers.

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<sup>12</sup> Cambridge mentions his business success as reason as well.

## 6.2 Influence in the political field of power

Meeting with	Date	Stated Topic	Points of Discussion
Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, Minister of Defense of Saudi Arabia	03/04/16	Global development coordination	
George Osborne, finance minister of Great Britain	25/01/16	Global health, development cooperation	Fighting malaria, spending money in a concerted effort
Lilliane Ploumen, Minister of Development Cooperation of the Netherlands	26/01/16	Development	Poverty Reduction
Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands	26/01/16	Development	Refugee crisis, employment opportunities for asylum seekers
<b>Amina Mohammed, Nigeria's Minister of Environment</b>	<b>22/01/16</b>		
Fumio Kishida, Foreign Minister of Japan	17/12/15	Global Health	Implications of Japan's hosting G7 for its global health engagement
<b>Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan</b>	<b>16/12/15</b>	<b>Global Health</b>	<b>Japans global health and gender equality engagement</b>
Narendra Modi, Indian Prime Minister Francois Hollande, French President	28/09/15	Global health	Toilets, vaccines, bank accounts and health clinics in India
Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of Pakistan	26/09/15	Global health	Eradicating polio in Pakistan
Muhammadu Buhari, President of Nigeria	25/09/15	Global health	Fight against polio and malaria in Nigeria
Xi Jinping, Chinese Prime Minister	23/09/15	Talk about tech industry	
Francois Hollande, President of France	25/06/15	Climate change and development	Technological innovation as topic at COP21
Mohammed Al Gergaw, UAE Minister of Cabinet Affairs	12/06/15	Development in the Middle East	Setting up media project to cover ME, awareness about development
Xi Jinping, Chinese Prime Minister	28/03/15	Global health and poverty reduction	Global epidemics, China's public health system
Wang Yi, China's Foreign Minister	28/03/15	International cooperation	Cooperation between US and China in trade, health care, innovation
Co-Operation Minister of Canada, Christian Paradis	25/02/15	Global health	Anti-malaria vaccines
Stephen Harper, then Canadian Prime Minister	25/02/15	Global health	Maternal and children's health; importance of data and civic registration
Jakaya Kikwete, then President of Tanzania	04/02/15		
Wan Gang, China's minister of science and technology	02/15	Development, technology	Development and technological cooperation
<b>Jean-Claude Juncker, Head of European Commission</b>	<b>22/01/15</b>		
Angela Merkel, German Chancellor	11/11/14	Global health	Ebola, health care in developing countries
<b>Big Meetings</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Stated Topic</b>	<b>Points of Discussion</b>
<b>World Economic Forum 2016 Davos (Invitation only)</b>	<b>20-23/1/2016</b>		
<b>International Conference on Universal Health Coverage in Japan</b>	<b>16/12/15</b>	<b>Global Health</b>	<b>Universal health care</b>
COP21 Mission Innovation Initiative	30/11/15	Climate	
Clinton Global Initiative 2015 Annual Meeting	26-29/9/2015	Global health	
High Level Week of the UN General Assembly, Side Event	26/09/15	Global health	Preventing the outbreak of diseases such as Ebola
GAVI vaccine summit 2015	27/01/15	Global health	Raising money for vaccination initiative
<b>World Economic Forum 2015 Davos (Invitation only)</b>	<b>21-24/1/2015</b>		

*Table 2: Meetings Gates held with high-level politicians from November 2014 until April 2016. Coloured markings indicate the cases where personal meetings that took place during a bigger meeting or conference could be determined. Own data collected as described in section five on methodology.*

The data gathered on Gates's meeting with high-level politicians shows that there is a significant amount of exchange between national leaders, and in particular those of influential countries, and Gates. The data collection reveals that Gates met with the leaders of the US, China, Germany, India, Canada, France, Nigeria, Tanzania, Pakistan, Japan and the Netherlands, notwithstanding other high public officials such as China's Foreign Minister or Great Britain's Finance Minister. In total, this study finds 21 instances when Bill Gates met with high-level politicians directly and seven conferences or meetings he attended together with high-level politicians. In the context of these larger events, data about who exactly Gates met and what the points of discussion were could rarely be determined; when there were particular reports about such meetings, they are listed as direct contacts. The only two events that are not necessarily related to issues of development are the World Economic Forum meetings in Davos, although development cooperation and issues such as global health are discussed there as well.

Of those direct meetings for which such data is available, all but one with Xi Jinping, which occurred in the context of his visit of Microsoft, and one with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi are predominantly connected to issues revolving around Gates's philanthropic work. In those meetings concerning philanthropy issues, global health was by far the most often mentioned topic of discussion (14 out of 22), followed by global development cooperation in general (7 out of 22).<sup>13</sup> More specific mentions subsumed under development issues are agricultural innovation as for example discussed in his meeting with Wan Gang, China's Minister of Science and Technology, and the environment, as demonstrated by the participation of Gates in the Paris Climate Conference with a climate initiative of him and other economic elites. The other important pillar of the Gates Foundation, education reform, was almost not mentioned at all; only one invitation of Dutch State Secretary Education, Culture and Science (together with the Minister of Development Cooperation) indicates recognition in that respect. Overall the data demonstrates that philanthropy, especially concerning global health and development, symbolic power and Gates's business background reportedly play a role in nearly all of these political contacts of his.

There is a similar trend towards a coalescence of business and philanthropy to be witnessed, albeit less pronounced than in the space of institutionalised symbolic capital presented above. The visit of China's prime minister Xi Jinping to Microsoft (where Gates was present) and later Gates personal home for dinner is one example mentioned already above. At the former event Microsoft officials brought up a discussion of "new technology and the role technology can play in advancing health, education and business" (Ho, 2015). In other meetings such as that with Indian Prime Minister Modi or at one side-event of the 2015 Climate Conference in Paris, technological innovation, and Gates's expertise in it, played a role as well. One Spokesman of Modi is quoted as saying: "With people like him [Gates] getting involved, there is a real possibility of there being private-sector partnerships on the technology side" (Reuters, 2015). One of the topics discussed with Chinese Minister of Science and Technology Wan Gang is described as "innovative development". This demonstrates how the business background still coins the image of Gates as knowledgeable about technological innovation, which may aid him in advancing his political influence. Such a connection can be interpreted in terms of the interconnectedness of fields and the circular nature of capital in general: economic and symbolic capital accumulated through his successful engagement in the tech business field is bolstering Gates's standing in the political arena which in turn creates social capital that can

<sup>13</sup> This might in part be a flaw of the data. For some meetings the points of discussion mentioned in news articles and press releases were so broad that the exact content could not be distinguished. Thus, those talks categorised here as 'development' might as well have concerned global health issues. Some articles mention both global health and other development-related topics. Those talks are counted for both categories.

be invested where Gates sees fit. Using it as a leverage for his philanthropic ambitions and thus advancing the influence of his personal views in relation to those with less capital seems a likely outcome. This interpretation is supported by the findings of Cook *et al.* (2014) on political engagement of economic elites, who seem to advocate a broad variety of issues with legislators.

The most striking point indicated by the analysis of the talking points is the immense recognition of cultural capital on behalf of Bill Gates made visible by these talks. It cannot be ruled out that many of these meetings were, at least in part, based on the politicians' hope of gaining profits for the countries they represent. The Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi for example "expressed his hope that the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation] will continue to make positive contributions to enhancing economic and trade cooperation between China and the US and friendship between the two peoples" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 2015). Especially the economic power Gates represents might fuel such hopes. Many of these meetings however indicate that the symbolic capital Gates has acquired through his philanthropic work makes him a popular partner of exchange due to his assumed expertise in development issues.

The fact that most talks had Bill Gates, who holds no institutionalised cultural capital in the medical field (except for his honorary degree from Swedish Karolinska University), explain his views on global health to leading members of the political power elite, reveals that he is perceived as an expert with valuable opinions despite being little more than a layman.<sup>14</sup> The connection between his philanthropic engagement in the BMGF and the expert role Gates takes on for the politicians is revealed by the prevalence of topics related to the operating areas of the BMGF. The eradication of polio and malaria is one of the main focus areas of the foundation and probably one of its most visible projects (e.g. McGoey, 2015a, Chapter 5) as mentioned in section two of this paper. In nine out of 19 meetings or conferences for which the actual talking points could be determined more clearly either vaccination or spreads of global diseases were brought up. In fact, Gates has been described as "global health leader" in an article authored by WHO staff about the International Conference on Universal Health Coverage Gates attended with figures such as Japanese PM Abe and World Bank head Jim Kim (World Health Organisation, 2015). The data thus seems to indicate that Gates's political influence is increased due to the perceptions shaped by his engagement with the BMGF which particularly operates within global health. The connection between the Gates Foundation's working areas and the discussion points with his political contacts demonstrates that

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<sup>14</sup> Gates has oftentimes been described as extremely knowledgeable in terms of global health. The point remains however that other, less prominent autodidacts are unlikely invited to speak their mind with politicians.

his philanthropic engagement is a major contributor to his symbolic capital, which is in this regard mainly based on the recognition of cultural capital.

Wang's hope that Gates shall promote "friendship between the two peoples [of China and the US]" furthermore indicates that there is another mechanism at work. The Chinese foreign minister seems to assume that Bill Gates has the backing and approval of a majority of the US population. The visibility and positive image of Gates, which are less academic words for symbolic power, thus facilitate his access to politicians who want to profit from such perceptions even further. The public perception of Gates not only as a technically astute person, but also as someone popular among the US American population will be examined in detail in the following section.

### 6.3 Changing perceptions

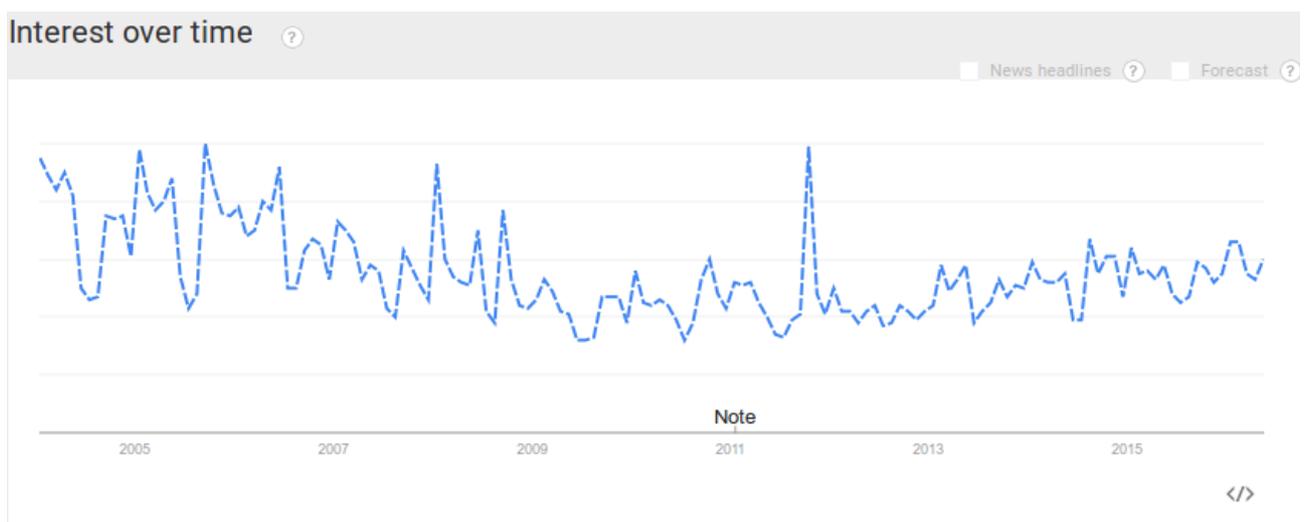


Figure 1: Google Trends data on Bill Gates. Data collected and figure created on [google.com/trends/explore](https://www.google.com/trends/explore)

The data from Google Trends and Google Correlate need to be taken with a grain of salt, as indicated in section five. Nonetheless, they seem to support such assumptions about a high degree of public interest Gates assumes within the US. Foremost, however, they indicate a transition of his public image. A trend is visible in Google searches for both his name and the topic 'Bill Gates Business Magnate' as compiled by Google which exhibits two characteristics: Firstly, taking the topic data, there was a relatively steep decrease in searches since the first data point available, January 2004 (95), with a low in June and July 2009 (32), from which onwards it has been slowly rising again. They never fully recovered however and stay at 53, at less than half of the search

volume of June 2006<sup>15</sup> (which is 100) (Figure 1). Total searches for both 'microsoft' and the topic 'Microsoft Corporation', as gathered by Google Trends have steadily declined since the beginning of data collection in 2004. 'bill gates microsoft' has similarly dropped although it is slowly recovering since its low point in July 2011. Hints can thus be made out to an overall declining interest in Microsoft in general and their connection with Gates since 2004. The increases since 2009 more explanation though.

There are more ambiguous trends for searches indicating a connection of Gates's image with philanthropy. One example is the topic 'Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation' which has continuously dropped since June 2006, although it seems to have stabilised at a low level (of about 7). 'bill gates charity' has however risen since its nadir in August 2009 at 8 to 20. Similar but less pronounced trends are visible for 'bill gates donations' and 'bill gates philanthropy'. It seems that this new set of related association might have contributed to Bill Gates's re-popularisation.

More evidence pointing in that direction is provided by Google Correlate. The correlation between the search terms 'bill gates' and 'bill gates microsoft' within the United States has decreased throughout the time period. In the period of January 2004 through July 2009, the search terms with the highest relevant correlation to 'bill gates' were 'bill gates microsoft', 'gates microsoft' and 'bill gates net worth', ranging from 0.87 to 0.88. The highest relevant correlation from January 2004 to the latest data point, January 2016, after 'bill gates family' is in fact still 'bill gates microsoft' with 0.80. As the attention for Microsoft overall has however steadily declined while that of Bill Gates is showing the opposite trend since around July 2009, it seems useful to take a closer look at the correlation in the more recent years in which the philanthropic engagement has become more intense and supposedly more noticed as well.

Indeed, within the period which searches for the person Bill Gates have slowly increased again, July 2009 through January 2016, the correlations between 'bill gates' and 'bill gates donations', 'bill gates charity', and 'bill gates philanthropy' have in fact been the highest after the misspelling 'bills gates' and 'about bill gates', ranging from 0.68 to 0.71.<sup>16</sup> The search terms 'first apple' and 'who started apple', which seems to refer to the introduction of the first Apple computer, when Steve Jobs and Gates and their companies were collaborating, rank similarly high. While this might speak of a

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<sup>15</sup> June 2006 is an outlier for all relevant searches, such as 'bill gates charity' or the topic of the BMGF, likely because it was then that Warren Buffett announced his commitment to donate a large amount of his wealth to the foundation and Bill Gates his departure from Microsoft.

<sup>16</sup> That is, disregarding the random non-related correlations such as, the highest, 'inchoate' or, the third-highest 'strep throat bacteria'. The data is taken from the monthly time series.

continuous association with the business realm and his history with personal computers, the detachment from the direct association with the company Microsoft is clear. This seems to suggest that Bill Gates has been increasingly recognised beyond his image as a businessman, and as a practising philanthropist instead. The data complements the findings of Boje and Smith (2010, p. 29) who assert that “Gates can be considered to have successfully re-storied [his entrepreneurial identity] through eco-philanthropy on a gargantuan level”. Or, as The Telegraph puts it poignantly: “The sheer scale of his philanthropy has caused a radical shift in Gates's public persona, from capitalist villain to charitable hero” (Thomas, 2007). Nonetheless, philanthropic recognition has not been able to counter the declining overall interest of people due to the lack of association with Microsoft. Moreover, the associations with philanthropy are not as pronounced as the previous connection with Microsoft. The findings thus indicate that over the course of the last twelve years Gates is receiving significantly less attention overall as the decline in perceived importance of, and association with, Microsoft is not completely offset by his philanthropic engagement; the attention he is however receiving stems significantly more from his workings within the philanthropic field.

### The popularity of Gates

Data from Gallup's annual poll on the most admired man alive according to US citizens

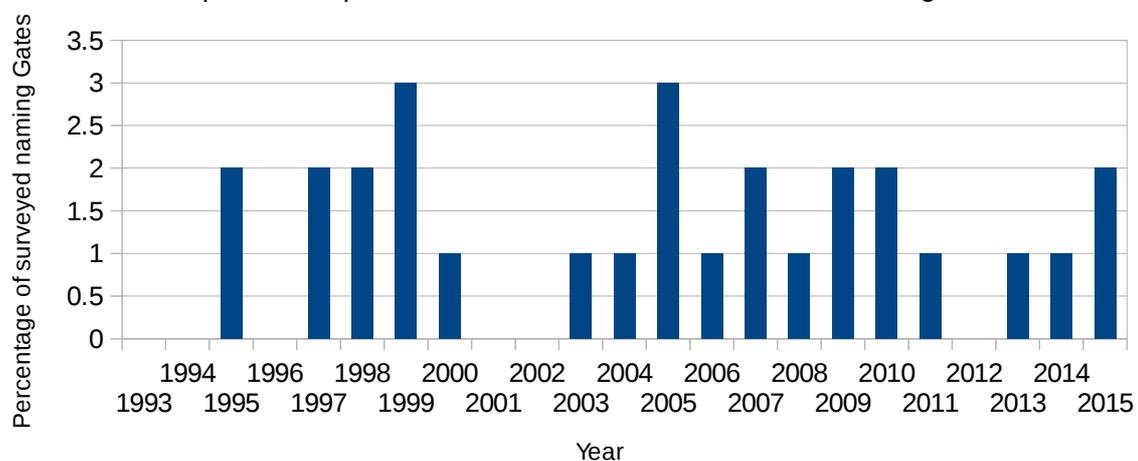


Figure 2: The popularity of Bill Gates within US society. Data collected from [gallup.com](http://gallup.com).

This reorientation seems to have contributed to, or at least stabilised his popularity among US citizens as well. In the latest of Gallup's annual surveys about who Americans admire the most, Bill Gates scored place five in the men's category.<sup>17</sup> Two percent of Americans named him as their

<sup>17</sup> The table of Gallup data which also constitutes the basis for the above graph can be found in the appendix.

choice, up from one percent last year. He seems to have stabilised as a constant in the perception of Americans, being among the top ten every year since 2003, except for 2012. Before that, he missed the list in 2001 and 2002 (which might be related to the near breaking-up of Microsoft due to government worries about stifling competition in the software market, and him abandoning his full-time employment at the company in 2000, when his popularity already declined from three to one percent) after he made it on from 1995, interestingly one year after his first philanthropic engagement, to 2000 with the exception of 1996 when he was mentioned but scored below 0.5 percent. He scored three percent twice: 1999 and 2005 when he was also named Person of the Year by Times Magazine for his philanthropy together with U2's Bono and was awarded the honorary knighthood by the British Queen. His continuous mentioning underscores that Gates is assuming a popularity similar to other revered modern figureheads such as Bill Clinton or even the Dalai Lama who were both trailing him in the latest poll of December 2015.

One consequence of this extraordinary popularity which seems to be at least in part due to Gates's philanthropy could be that it further increases his access to political decision-makers. Further studies are needed to establish such a point; the hopes expressed by the Chinese Foreign Minister (see the previous section) to find a popular voice in Gates that is appreciated among his fellow countrymen seem to indicate a role of public opinion in granting individuals access to politicians. The more such logic is employed by politicians, the more Gates's access to them will presumably increase, enabling him to bring forth his own agenda in the political field of power.

## **7. Concluding Discussion**

To recap, this study examined 1) the link between Bill Gates's entrepreneurial philanthropy and his stock of symbolic capital, and 2) the linkage between the symbolic capital specific to Bill Gates and its influence 2.1) within the international political field of power, and 2.2) on the public perception of Gates in US society at large. To present conclusive answers to both research questions is a difficult task to make due to the intangible nature of symbolic capital. The link between philanthropy and accumulation of symbolic capital has however been evident in the case of Bill Gates. The overwhelming majority of awards and honours Gates received since his serious entrance in the field of philanthropy in 2000 were motivated by references to his philanthropic engagement. His institutionalised symbolic capital thus largely rests on the work the BMGF does. As the

foundation operates globally, his symbolic capital is also acknowledged across several continents, but still prevalent in his home country, the US as well.

The data gathered on political meetings also seems to suggest that symbolic capital, mainly from recognised cultural capital, indeed increases the access of Bill Gates to top-level political decision-makers. This influence, again, does not only pertain to US politics but also to political leaders of European, African and Asian countries. In fact, the relation to Chinese officials seems particularly pronounced. Gates also has access to conferences of the global power elite but attends those more closely related to his foundation work as well. This access seems to be at least partly based on his perceived expert status in global health and other development issues. Such recognition is clearly related to the workings of his foundation, as the topics of political meetings and conferences Gates is invited to largely correspond to the Gates Foundation's most visible areas of operation such as vaccination efforts and related containment of global epidemics. This indicates that engaging in entrepreneurial philanthropy facilitates access, albeit indirectly, that is through the increased recognition of cultural capital. His personal wealth and earlier *economic* success must however not go unmentioned, as they presumably contribute substantially to his political access as well. This thesis does furthermore not examine, and thus cannot show how symbolic power might translate into social action, or measure changes Gates might have effected in political decision-making. It does however provide evidence that there is a certain non-monetary power Gates is increasingly appropriating which grants him influence in the political field of power; he thus holds a *potential* to drive social change through state institutions which other US citizens do not enjoy.

The data this thesis presents on influence of Gates philanthropic engagement on his public image and popularity in the US is less clear. Assessing the matter cautiously, the data provided by Google and Gallup indicates that a transformation of Gates's public image has taken place since at least 2004. Google data further suggests that public interest in Gates has declined rather drastically, which is however somewhat compensated for by an increasing recognition of Gates as a philanthropist rather than a businessman since mid 2009. His popularity seems to have somewhat stabilised at a high level in the last years, keeping him on the list of the most admired people in every year but one since 2003. Causation can however not be established, as Google data alone cannot provide such in-depth analysis. Developments of his image since Gates returned to Microsoft as technological adviser in 2014 moreover require analysis after more time has passed. Further research is thus needed to strengthen the empirical link proposed here: that the symbolic power acquired by Gates through entrepreneurial philanthropy has likely contributed to a positive change in public perception

of his person. Research is moreover needed to establish how and if such popularity actually alters the behaviour of people that come in contact with the foundation's projects.

There are three ways in which an enhanced public image might increase political inequality in favour of Gates beyond his facilitated access through symbolic capital: Especially from a constructivist, but also from a more Bourdieuan perspective it seems likely that the local resistance the BMGF is facing with to their relatively unpopular education reform plans were stronger if Gates did not enjoy such a positive overall recognition. Deferential behaviour and a more benign interpretation of the foundation's actions are thus expected; as Swartz (1997, pp. 92-93) puts it, philanthropy means that “dominant groups secure esteem in public opinion for their actions.”

More broadly speaking, public discontent with the staggering economic inequalities might be kept in check by the representation of people like Gates as 'good capitalists', people who give back to the community (Aschoff, 2015). This interpretation resonates with Morvaridi (2012, p. 1208) who states that philanthropy is only pursued “so long as it diverts attention away from [the philanthropists'] own assets and income and does not threaten the hegemonic structure through which they gain”. Such an interpretation is based on the idea of Gates as a figurehead of modern philanthropists, but really also as the example case of the new economic elites, as he and Buffett represent the two fields in which new individual wealth has originated: (internet) technology and finance (Phillips, 2003, Part II, Six). Bourdieu argues that “a return to modes of accumulation based on the conversion of economic capital into symbolic capital [...] which seems to owe nothing to the logic of exploitation” is one result of increasing contesting of the “reproduction of the relations of domination” (1992, p. 133).

Lastly, as illustrated by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang, a positive public perception of Gates might feed back into the political field of power, as politicians might be more likely to meet with prestigious individuals to enhance their own public image.

Again, the data might provide some evidence for such interpretations but is far from being conclusive. Particularly assumptions about the broader ramifications of philanthropy as altering people's perception of capitalism and facilitating reproduction of social status, as proposed by Bourdieu himself, require larger studies with more empirical data than a bachelor thesis can muster. Another caveat is the exceptionally public nature of Bill Gates which has arisen from his becoming a billionaire at an early age and ultimately estimated as the richest man alive with Microsoft. It is not clear if a less extreme case of an entrepreneurial philanthropist would provide similar data, and

whether the problem of political inequality as a result of philanthropy is a general one. Nonetheless, this study indicates that critics of philanthropy might reconsider their arguments about political inequality, and include the symbolic power foundations can bring about, rather than merely looking at the economic aspects. Any attempts at regulation of foundations, nationally or internationally, might be equally well-advised to look beyond the economic power they exercise directly, and consider the symbolic capital the individuals associated with the organisation are able to accumulate.

As last observation to be taken from this thesis, the background of many awards (mainly private ones, but not exclusively) indicates that the shift in perception has not generally replaced the image of the successful business person, but moved beyond that, towards that of a well-intentioned entrepreneurial philanthropist with the means and technical expertise to 'make the world a better place'. The fields of philanthropy and tech business are thus intricately connected in the case of Bill Gates. The link between symbolic capital and increased political influence presented in this thesis is thus likely specific to entrepreneurial philanthropists. These findings about the connection between the different fields demonstrate that entrepreneurial philanthropy must be assessed differently than other forms of philanthropy whose practitioners do not have the specific advantage of prestige already accumulated in another field. One example would be heirs to old fortunes heading the 'traditional foundations' in the US, who lead a different lifestyle and make their philanthropy work in different ways (one example of such research would be Coupe & Monteiro, 2014). Pointing out the distinctions between different philanthropic groups is thus likely to contribute to a more clear-cut debate.

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## 9. Appendices

### 9.1 Gallup data on most admired living male by US citizens

Collected from reports on [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com).

Year	Percentage of surveyed naming Gates
1993	0
1994	0
1995	2
1996	<0.5
1997	2
1998	2
1999	3
2000	1
2001	0
2002	0
2003	1
2004	1
2005	3
2006	1
2007	2
2008	1
2009	2
2010	2
2011	1
2012	0
2013	1
2014	1
2015	2