



“Helping to bridge the gap between knowledge and policy”

The mission of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) is to increase the profile, capacity and performance of think tanks at the national, regional and global levels so they can better serve policy makers and the public.

The TTCSP conducts research on the relationship between think tanks, politics and public policy, produces the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index, develops capacity-building resources and programs, manages and supports a global network of close to 7000 think tanks and trains future think tank scholars and executives. The TTCSP often is referred to as the “think tanks’ think tank”.

Introduction

The 2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index (GGTTI) marks the tenth year of continued efforts by the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania to acknowledge the important contributions and emerging global trends of think tanks worldwide. Our initial effort to generate a ranking of the world’s leading think tanks in 2006 was a response to a series of requests from donors, government officials, journalists, and scholars to produce regional and international rankings of the world’s preeminent think tanks. Since its inception, our ongoing objective for the GGTTI report is to gain understanding of the role think tanks play in governments and civil societies. Using this knowledge, we hope to assist in improving the capacity and performance of think tanks around the world.

Since 2006, the ranking process has been refined and streamlined, and the number and scope of the institutions and individuals involved has steadily grown. The process, as in past years, relies on a shared definition of public policy research, analysis, and engagement organizations, a detailed set of selection criteria, and an increasingly open and transparent nominations and selection process. As part of the nominations process, all 6,846 think tanks catalogued in the TTCSP’s Global Think Tank Database were contacted and encouraged to participate, in addition to over 4,750 journalists, policymakers, public and private donors, and functional and regional area specialists. This group of peers and experts was surveyed to both nominate and rank public policy research centers of distinction for 2015.

To refine and validate the generated ranking lists, TTCSP assembled Expert Panels comprised of hundreds of members from a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines. Additionally, new media – the website and social media presence – helped us communicate and disseminate information about criteria for this year’s Index to a wider audience (please see “Methodology and Timeline” for the complete set of nomination and ranking criteria, and “Appendices” for a detailed explication of the ranking process). Given the rigor and scope of the nomination and selection processes, the rankings produced thus far have been described as the insider’s guide to the global marketplace of ideas.

As a final note, we would like to remind you that the data collection, research, and analysis for this project, as in previous years, were conducted without the benefit of field research, a budget, or staff. We are confident that the peer nomination and selection process, as well as the work of the international Expert Panels, have enabled us to create the most authoritative list of high performance think tanks in the world. Still, efforts to streamline and perfect the process are ongoing. We are continually seeking ways to enhance the process and welcome your comments and suggestions. We further encourage you to provide the names and contact information for prospective expert panelists for functional and regional areas covered by the Index.

Thank you for your continued support of the TTCSP and of the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index. We hope our efforts to highlight the important contributions and emerging global trends of think tanks worldwide will foster insightful discussions and debates on the present and future roles of these vital institutions.

What is a Think Tank?

Think tanks are public-policy research analysis and engagement organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues, thereby enabling policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy. Think tanks may be affiliated or independent institutions that are structured as permanent bodies, not ad hoc commissions. These institutions often act as a bridge between the academic and policymaking communities and between states and civil society, serving in the public interest as independent voices that translate applied and basic research into a language that is understandable, reliable, and accessible for policymakers and the public (Think Tanks and Policy Advice in the US, Routledge 2007 and in *The Fifth Estate: The Role of Think Tanks in Domestic and Foreign Policy in the US* forthcoming University of Pennsylvania Press).

In an effort to bridge these conceptual problems and create a typology that takes into consideration the comparative differences in political systems and civil societies, we have developed a number of categories for think tanks. Think tanks may perform many roles in their host societies – there is, in fact, wide variation among think tanks in the work they do and the extent to which they do it. Over the last 87 years, several distinct organizational forms of think tanks have emerged that differentiate themselves in terms of their operating styles, patterns of recruitment, and aspirations to academic standards of objectivity and completeness in research. It

should be noted that alternate typologies of think tanks have been offered by other analysts.¹ In the global context, most think tanks tend to fall into the broad categories outlined below.

Figure 1: Categories of Think Tank Affiliations

CATEGORY	DEFINITION
AUTONOMOUS AND INDEPENDENT	Significant independence from any one interest group or donor and autonomous in its operation and funding from government.
QUASI INDEPENDENT	Autonomous from government but controlled by an interest group, donor, or contracting agency that provides a majority of the funding and has significant influence over operations of the think tank.
GOVERNMENT AFFILIATED	A part of the formal structure of government.
QUASI GOVERNMENTAL	Funded exclusively by government grants and contracts but not a part of the formal structure of government.
UNIVERSITY AFFILIATED	A policy research center at a university.
POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATED	Formally affiliated with a political party.
CORPORATE (FOR PROFIT)	A for-profit public policy research organization, affiliated with a corporation or merely operating on a for-profit basis

¹ Another typology distinguishes between three types of think tanks: “universities without students,” contract researchers and advocacy tanks. Weaver (1989).

North America and Europe

- ♦ There are 1931 think tanks in North America (Mexico, Canada and US) of which 1835 are in the United States
- ♦ There are 1770 think tanks in Europe
- ♦ Close to 55 percent of all think tanks are in North America and Europe
- ♦ 90.5 percent of think tanks were created since 1951
- ♦ The number of think tanks in the US has more than doubled since 1980
- ♦ 31 percent of think tanks were created between 1981 to 1990
- ♦ The End of Post WWII consensus & Challenge to the Welfare State contributed to the growth of think tanks on the left and the right of the political spectrum
- ♦ Most of the think tanks that have come into existence in the United States since the 1970s are specialized for a particular regional or functional area
- ♦ About one quarter of U.S. think tanks (approximately 400 institutions) are located in Washington, DC
- ♦ More than half the think tanks are university affiliated
- ♦ The rate of establishment of think tanks has declined over the last 12 years in the United States and Europe

Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East

- ♦ Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa continue to see an expansion in the number and type of think tanks established
- ♦ Asia has experienced a dramatic growth in think tanks since the mid-2000's
- ♦ Many think tanks in these regions continue to be dependent on government funding along with gifts, grants, and contracts from international public and private donors
- ♦ University, government affiliated, or funded think tanks remain the dominate model for think tanks in these regions
- ♦ There is increasing diversity among think tanks in these regions with independent, political party affiliated, and corporate/business sector think tanks that are being created with greater frequency
- ♦ In an effort to diversify their funding base, think tanks have targeted businesses and wealthy individuals to support their core operations and programs

Reasons for the Growth of Think Tanks in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

- ♦ Information and technological revolution
- ♦ End of national governments' monopoly on information
- ♦ Increasing complexity and technical nature of policy problems
- ♦ Increasing size of government
- ♦ Crisis of confidence in governments and elected officials
- ♦ Globalization and the growth of state and non-state actors
- ♦ Need for timely and concise information and analysis that is "in the right form, in the right hands, at the right time"²

² McGann, James G., ed. *Think tanks and policy advice in the US: Academics, advisors and advocates*. Routledge, 2007.

Reasons for the Recent Decline in Number of Think Tanks Established Worldwide

- ♦ Political and regulatory environment growing hostile to think tanks and NGOs in many countries
- ♦ Decreasing funding for policy research by public and private donors
- ♦ Public and private donors tendency toward short-term, project-specific funding instead of investing in ideas and institutions
- ♦ Underdeveloped institutional capacity and the inability to adapt to change
- ♦ Increased competition from advocacy organizations, for-profit consulting firms, law firms, and 24/7 electronic media
- ♦ Institutions having served their purpose and discontinued their operations

When I helped organize the first international meeting of think tanks, one of the major debates at the meeting was the contention that the term “think tank” doesn’t travel well across borders and cultures. That is clearly no longer the case, as the term is now widely accepted around the globe to describe “public-policy research analysis and engagement organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues, which enable policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues.”³

And increasingly, think tanks are a global phenomenon because they play a critical role for governments and civil societies around the world by acting as bridges between knowledge (academia) and power (politicians and policymakers).

Governments and individual policymakers, throughout the developed and developing world, face the common problem of bringing expert knowledge to bear in government decision-making. Policymakers need understandable, reliable, accessible, and useful information about the societies they govern. They also need to know how current policies are working, as well as to set out possible alternatives and their likely costs and consequences. This expanding need has fostered the growth of independent public policy research organization: the think tank community, as we know it.

Think tanks have increased in number, but also the scope and impact of their work have expanded dramatically as well. Still, the potential of think tanks to support and sustain democratic governments and civil societies around the world is far from exhausted. The challenge for the new millennium is to harness the vast reservoir of knowledge, information, and associational energy that exist in public policy research organizations so that it supports self-sustaining economic, social, and political progress in every region of the world for public good.

Part of the goal of this report is to raise some of the critical threats and opportunities that face the think tank community globally. These threats are best expressed by what I call the “four mores”:

³ McGann, 2007.