

Figure 2.1 Number of new think tanks established per year

Note: The figure is based on preliminary data from the 2006 Global Think Tank Survey. The final data may diverge slightly from this data.

3 Think tanks defined

Think tanks or public policy research, analysis, and engagement institutions are organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues in an effort to enable policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues. Think tanks may be affiliated with political parties, governments, interest groups, or private corporations or constituted as independent nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These institutions often act as a bridge between the academic and policymaking communities, serving the public interest as an independent voice that translates applied and basic research into a language and form that is understandable, reliable, and accessible for policymakers and the public.

Structured as permanent bodies, in contrast with *ad hoc* commissions or research panels, think tanks devote a substantial portion of their financial and human resources to commissioning and publishing research and policy analysis in the social sciences: political science, economics, public administration, and international affairs. The major outputs of these organizations are books, monographs, reports, policy briefs, conferences, seminars, briefings and informal discussions with policymakers, government officials, and key stakeholders.

Classification

Attempts to define and/or categorize think tanks, raises a debate over the meaning of such basic terms as “public policy research,” “think tank,” and “advocacy.” The subtitle of this book is intended to capture the struggle that exists among think tanks concerning their role in the policy-making process: Are they academics, advisors, or advocates? Can a think tank be effective if it is not an advisor or advocate? This debate reflects the inherent tension between the world of ideas and

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world of politics or the clash of the academic and policy cultures. The categories provided below are designed to help bring these differences into focus so that a more informed debate can occur.

Think tanks in the United States can take one of three forms:

- 1 a traditional Think Tank, which concentrates its resources exclusively on scholarly policy research (Hoover Institution and Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars);
- 2 a Think-and-Do Tank, which conducts research, policy analysis, and public outreach (Brookings Institution, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Economic Policy Institute, American Enterprise Institute, and Heritage Foundation); and
- 3 Do Tanks, which focus all of their energies on the repackaging and disseminating of other think tanks' ideas and policy proposals (Demos, Capital Research Center, and Free Congress Foundation).

However, they vary in affiliation, organizational structure and culture, and political and philosophical orientation.

Type of affiliation

In many countries, think tanks have traditionally been formally affiliated with and/or funded entirely by the government, political parties, or corporations. Conversely, in the United States, the tendency is toward independent, non-partisan, nongovernmental think tanks. They thus enjoy intellectual, financial, and legal independence. Their ability to develop and promulgate positions free from governmental or corporate influence and interference is what makes these NGOs critical civil society actors and affords them greater credibility with the public. While there is a proclivity for independent think tanks in the United States, the majority of the think tanks throughout the rest of the world are affiliated with political parties, governments, or corporations. However, the number of independent think tanks worldwide is now growing as the benefits of truly independent public policy research and analysis are realized and as other civil society organizations grow in number and influence.

The independence, or lack thereof, of the think tank has a decisive role in determining its objectivity and ultimately its credibility. Party-affiliated think tanks are almost nonexistent in the United States, while they are the dominant model in Europe. Nevertheless, the United States does have think tanks that are affiliated with Congress, government

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agencies, universities, and corporations. Of these groups, this book considers only university-affiliated and independent, nonprofit US think tanks.

Organizational characteristics of independent think tanks

Independent think tanks are autonomous organizations that are supported by the public through private contributions. Independent think tanks may receive government grants, but the vast majority does not. Independent think tanks include four specific types of organizations:

- 1 academic-diversified and academic-specialized;
- 2 contract research organization;
- 3 advocacy; and
- 4 policy enterprise.

Academic-diversified

Academic-diversified think tanks tend to conduct research and analysis on a wide range of policy issues, including, but not limited to: economics, foreign policy, and the environment. In addition, they typically:

- engender the credibility, support, and influence of the academic community and are afforded the respect paid to scholars and scholarly research;
- resemble academic institutions but are “universities without students”;
- staffed by academics;
- characterized by an academic culture and organizational structure;
- follow established academic disciplines;
- conduct research on longer time horizons;
- embrace scientific-based analysis;
- have the same outputs and rewards as academic institutions such as tenure or what amounts to tenure;
- produce book-length studies, journal articles, and monographs rather than reports and policy briefs;
- follow a collegial, consensus-based model of management.

Examples include The Brookings Institution, The American Enterprise Institute (AEI), and The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). A researcher at The Brookings Institution stated, “We conduct research for policymakers that is only read by students and professors.

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We are not slaves to the legislative agenda of Congress or the White House.”

Academic-specialized

Academic-specialized think tanks have many of the same features of academic-diversified think tanks; however, they differ by degrees of specialization. The former have more specialized and narrow research agendas and client bases, and generally focus on a single discipline such as economics or sub-discipline such as international economics.

These institutions also tend to focus on a single issue or area of public policy, such as international trade, law and economics, immigration, or welfare reform. While they are quite similar to academic-diversified think tanks, they:

- differ by degrees of specialization;
- have a specialized research agenda, funders, and client base;
- have a single issue, narrow research agenda.

Examples include The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), The Economic Strategy Institute, and The Institute for International Economics.

Contract research organizations/contract consulting

Contract Research Organizations, also known as Contract Consulting Institutions, perform the majority of their research and analysis for government agencies. They typically:

- are independent, nonprofit organizations that have a voluntary board of directors;
- have a policy-orientation and close working relationship with government agencies;
- rely on government contracts;
- serve as policy/program consultants;
- offer quantitative analysis;
- tend to produce policy analysis rather than research;
- allow researchers a limited degree of freedom to set project/research agendas, agendas often set by contracting agency;
- produce work that is largely but not exclusively for contracting government agencies and cannot be disseminated without the approval of that agency;

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- produce research and findings which are the property of the contracting agencies, not of the organizations or the researchers;
- reflect the research methodologies of contracting organizations;
- are often multi-disciplinary;
- have a consulting firm's culture and organizational structure;
- have reward systems, production schedules, and products that are determined by the contract.

Examples include RAND, an acronym for research and development (R&D), which was started as a defense think tank and now has a highly diversified set of government contracts, and The Urban Institute, which was established to help design and manage the Great Society social program.

Advocacy think tanks

Advocacy is often seen as one of the following:

- 1 arguing for specific position-based results as opposed to open-ended analysis;
- 2 using scientific methodology primarily to influence policy in ideologically preferred directions; or
- 3 focusing on marketing ideas rather than research.

Since scientific methodology generally provides think tanks with pre-supposed legitimacy, advocacy is often perceived to be in conflict with standards of objectivity. Consequently, credibility can be compromised if a think tank is viewed as advocacy-oriented, and thus it is necessary for think tanks to balance interaction in the policy system with scientific methodology.

However, advocacy can cause a think tank to gain specific legitimacy among devotees of the tank's ideological orientation. These approaches may be necessary to raise funds, but they can have distorting effect on an organization's research agenda and mission. Some of their more common characteristics are:

- a mission defined by an ideological, moral, or partisan worldview;
- active promotion of a point of view;
- a central goal of advancing a cause, constituency, ideology, or party;
- research and analysis that has a sharp partisan edge;
- driven by an issue, philosophy, or constituency;
- organized to promote their ideas;

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- rejection of both academic and technocratic approaches to policy analysis;
- rewarded based on their ability to advance their cause;
- ideological or political litmus test is used to evaluate staff rather than their publication records or academic credentials;
- output determined based upon how it will play with constituency or will advance a particular philosophy;
- a culture and organizational structure that resembles an advocacy organization.

Examples include The Cato Institute, Institute for Policy Studies, and Citizens for a Sound Economy.

Policy enterprise organizations

Policy enterprise organizations are groups that take an entrepreneurial approach to policy analysis and advice. Therefore, they are organized like a business whose purpose is to understand their market and develop and distribute their products to that market. I consciously separate this group from advocacy think tanks in order to draw attention to the management and marketing orientation of these organizations. These organizations view policymakers as consumers who have specific needs and preferences. Consequently, the policy enterprise is specially organized to produce, package, and promote policy ideas and proposals to this market or a segment of it. They typically:

- are organized with the effectiveness and the efficiency of a corporation;
- apply principles of management, marketing, and sales to public policy research;
- argue that the orientation of think tanks is wrong insofar as it is too academic and fails to recognize the needs of policymakers;
- digest and formulate research into a form that meets the needs of busy bureaucrats, politicians, and policymakers;
- produce short studies that focus on current legislation or policy concerns;
- publications have a journalistic quality;
- follow a tight production schedule for outputs/products;
- have a culture and organizational culture that resembles a marketing organization;
- reward those who can operate on a tight timeline and can produce action-oriented policy briefs.

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Examples include The Heritage Foundation and The Center for American Progress. Table 3.1 provides examples of affiliated think tanks, the dates in which they were established, and the major organizational models in America.

Organizational characteristics of affiliated think tanks

Affiliated think tanks are public policy research organizations that are administratively, financially, and/or legally connected to an organization. Within the "affiliated" category, fall four specific types of organizations:

- 1 party-affiliated
- 2 government sponsored
- 3 private, for-profit
- 4 university-based.

Party-affiliated think tanks

Party-affiliated think tanks are formally affiliated with a political party. Political parties often have teams of researchers and analysts whose job it is to come up with ideas, policies, and programs that can be translated into a party's political agenda during a campaign or when the party is in power. These think tanks are often well connected to the party leadership. They typically:

- are responsible for developing the ideas, policies, and programs that become the platform of a political party;
- are more commonly found in Europe, where all the major political parties have a think tank that serves the interest of the party;

Table 3.1 Independent public policy think tanks' organizational structure and culture

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Date established</i>	<i>Organizational type</i>
Brookings Institution	1916	Academic/diversified
National Bureau of Economic Research	1920	Academic/specialized
Rand Corporation	1948	Consulting/contracting
Institute for Policy Studies	1963	Advocacy
Heritage Foundation	1973	Policy enterprise

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- have research agendas which are often constrained by the interests and philosophy of the party and its leadership.

The only real example of a party-affiliated think tank in the United States is The Progressive Policy Institute (PPI). Founded in 1989, PPI serves as the research arm of the Democratic Leadership Council, a centrist democratic group that provided the intellectual and policy framework for the Clinton campaign and later the "Clinton Agenda." Leading Democrats such as Bill Clinton and Al Gore have been active in the Institute since its inception.

Government sponsored think tanks

Government think tanks are a part of the formal governmental apparatus. These think tanks are internal policy research groups that provide the executive and legislative branches of government with information, analysis, and research on a range of topics. Their research is usually related to current legislation or policy issues. Think tanks in the executive branch serve a single master – the president, or "the administration" – whereas for the legislative branches they serve the varied interests and agendas of all the members of the legislative branch. Typically they are:

- organized to serve government;
- support the day-to-day policymaking apparatus;
- constrained by the government's interest and agenda.

An example of a government-sponsored think tank is The Congressional Research Service. Founded in 1914, CRS represents a government-sponsored think tank in that it is a direct arm of government (part of the Library of Congress), and provides independent, nonpartisan research services to Congress and other agencies.

Private, for-profit think tanks

Private, for-profit think tanks provide policy analysis, program evaluation, and research for a fee. The fundamental difference between these organizations and nonprofit think tanks, like RAND, is that nonprofit think tanks are governed by an independent board and are publicly supported institutions. Specifically, they are required by law to have a broad base of private contributions in order to maintain their tax-exempt status with the USs government. They are typically:

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- organized and staffed like nonprofit think tanks and often provide many of the same services, but on a fee-for-service basis;
- many of the leading accounting firms in the United States provide consulting services to the government under contract to help manage and evaluate major programs and policies.

An example of a private, for-profit think tank is The Stanford Research Institute. Founded in 1946, it conducts research and analysis for a fee, and is a for-profit consulting firm that specializes in research, analysis, and program evaluation.

University-based think tanks

University-based think tanks are formally affiliated with a university or college and usually appear as centers or institutes concentrating in the social sciences. They typically:

- are attached to one of the academic departments, although some are independent units within the university that draw their personnel from one or more departments;
- are most commonly found in departments of political science, international affairs, economics, history, and public policy;
- have outputs which tend to be less concerned with analyzing policy problems than pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake;
- struggle with the primary but conflicting demands of teaching and tenure, which tend to distract from the type of policy analysis that most decision makers require.

An example of a university-based think tank is The Asia Pacific Research Center (APRC), founded in 1977 at Stanford University. The APRC focuses on producing research of "lasting significance" on economic, political, technological, strategic, and social issues. The Center is organized within Stanford University's Institute for International Studies (IIS). Its research agenda is directed toward an academic audience, but has potential residual downstream benefits for policymakers.

Table 3.2 provides examples of affiliated think tanks, the dates in which they were established, and the major organizational models in America.

The hybrids

The United States has the most diverse array of independent think tanks in the world. A number of institutions are hybrids that combine one or

Table 3.2 Affiliated public policy think tanks' organizational structure and culture

Organization	Date established	Organizational type
Progressive Policy Institute	1989	Political party
Congressional Research Service	1914	Government
Stanford Research Institute	1946	Private for-profit
Asia Pacific Research Center, Stanford University	1977	University-based

more of the above organizational types. Two that are worth noting are vanity tanks and state-based think tanks. Vanity, or legacy-based, think tanks were created by wealthy individuals, aspiring office holders, or former elected officials who wish to advance their political and ideological beliefs after leaving office. State-based think tanks require a lengthier explanation and will be discussed further in a subsequent chapter.

Organization and staffing

In the United States, the norm for a large think tank is to be headed by a president or CEO, either of which is the public face of the organization and in this capacity is the chief spokesperson, fundraiser, and strategist for the organization. To be successful this individual must have an extraordinary range of talents, as well as solid academic credentials, management and public relations experience, and political acumen. The president reports directly to a Board of Trustee or Board of Directors. Given the amount of time most think tank presidents spend outside the organization making speeches and raising funds, they often turn the day-to-day management of research projects, external relations, personnel, and operations to other senior staff. He or she is supported by one or more vice presidents and/or research directors.

The Board of Directors is comprised, for the most part, of leading figures from the fields of business, finance and academia, former members of the White House and Congress, and in some cases members of other think tanks. These board members serve on a voluntary basis and are responsible for appointing the president, approving the budget, developing long-range plans, and ensuring that programs conform to the mission of the organization and that the independence of the institution is maintained. Furthermore, one of the most important jobs of the Board of Directors is that of fundraising – a task ever more

Table 3.3 Comparative characteristics of independent and affiliated think tanks

Type of think tank	Culture	Objective	Limitations	Interest served	Example institutions
Academic "university without students"	Scholarly-academic	Bring knowledge to bear on public policy	Theoretical approach to problems, not always directly conducive (relevant) to policy-making	Academics and policymakers	Brookings Institution
Contracting/consulting	Technocratic	Serve government	Systems and quantitative approach to policy analysis does not apply to all policy problems and client interest priorities	Government agencies and bureaucrats	Rand Corporation
Advocacy	Ideological	Promote ideology expression of opinions	Ideology restricts research topics and narrow interest group	Ideologues and Studies	Institute for Policy
Policy enterprise	Marketing	Package and promote ideas for market and market segment	Orient their research toward the interests of the market (selected donors and policy makers)	Individual market segments	Heritage Foundation
For-profit	Business	Expand client base	Client's interest. Business approach to policy analysis may ignore political dimension of public policy	Private	Stanford Research Institute
Political party	Political	Get party elected	Party platform, party members limits range of policy options	Party	Progressive Policy Institute
Governmental	Bureaucratic	Provide information for policy production	Bureaucratic culture. Agenda set by branches of the government. Bureaucratic politics and turf issues constrains analysis and policy choices	Executive and legislative branches of government	Congressional Research Service
University	Academic	Advance knowledge	Education and knowledge creation are top priorities not politics or public policy	Academia	Asia Pacific Research Center – Stanford University

critical in the current think tank environment. Since many board members are also donors and have other affiliations, many institutions establish policies to ensure that all decision and financials are insulated from a conflict of interest. Many think tanks also have a Board of Advisors as well. At The American Enterprise Institute, The Hoover Institution, and The Brookings Institution for example, this body is made up almost exclusively of scholars from some of the leading universities in the United States, whereas elsewhere it can also consist of high-ranking figures from business and politics, including members of Congress. The size of the board varies from institution to institution, but the average number of board members is 25.¹

Within the United States' think tank community, there is a highly complex system of categorization for the various types of full-time employees and associates from think tank to think tank. Despite this wide range, the research staff is generally referred to as scholars, senior fellows, policy analysts, senior researchers, etc. A distinction is made between resident fellows/scholars, associates, and nonresident/visiting fellows or adjunct scholars (Table 3.4 provides a breakdown of resident, adjunct, and visiting scholars for the leading think tanks in the United States). Resident fellows or scholars are part of the think tank staff, have an office, and are generally employed on a fulltime basis, usually with a fixed-term contract. Nonresident fellows, on the other hand, are, as a rule, employed on a part-time or fixed-fee basis and work from elsewhere, usually at their place of principal employment (i.e. a university) or increasingly from a home office. Although associate or adjunct scholars often work quite closely and regularly with one or a number of think tanks, and frequently do so for a period of many years, they are not part of the think tank's fulltime staff. The question of whether any payment is made for the work they do for the think tank is often determined on a case-by-case basis. Guest scholars, as a rule, are provided merely an office and logistical support for the research activities they carry out at the think tank. Finally, visiting fellows are normally given a fellowship, which is usually restricted to one year and includes a fixed stipend plus office space and logistical support for the pursuit of a research project in line with the think tank's own program. Some of these guest researchers may be members of the military, the administration, or industry, whereby their respective employer will have financed the research sabbatical, which generally lasts several months. The RAND Corporation makes extensive use of adjunct scholars, and almost all the researchers at The National Bureau of Economic Research are adjuncts who are managed by a relatively small fulltime staff. The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), The Brookings

Table 3.4 Research staff size and budget

<i>Institution name</i>	<i>Research staff size</i>			<i>Total</i>	<i>budget \$</i>
	<i>Resident</i>	<i>Adjunct</i>	<i>Visiting</i>		
Foreign Policy Research Institute	6	6	0	12	1,338,834
Nixon Center	6	0	0	6	1,500,000
New America Foundation	20	0	0	20	2,500,000
Progressive Policy Institute	18	18	0	36	2,740,000
Institute for International Economics	18	0	0	18	6,060,577
Hudson Institute	50	40	0	90	7,110,011
Center for Budget and Policy Priorities	39	0	0	39	7,736,269
Resources for the Future	38	18	14	70	12,009,228
Cato Institute	37	31	0	68	14,045,306
American Enterprise Institute	58	0	15	73	16,300,994
Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)	94	54	0	148	16,775,453
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP)	48	0	4	52	20,092,833
National Bureau of Economic Research	0	500	0	500	23,844,357
Council on Foreign Relations	65	100	20	185	25,720,500
Hoover Institution	80	30	50	160	28,400,000
Brookings Institution	98	173	48	319	30,227,800
Heritage Foundation	45	43	5	93	33,481,921
Urban Institute	263	0	0	263	64,490,821
Rand Corporation (R&D)	640	460	0	1100	169,046,925

Note

Data obtained through personal interviews with the respective think tanks officials and IRS.

Institution, and The Hoover Institution all maintain well established, competitive visiting fellows programs that bring up to 50 scholars a year to these institutions.

Generally, the various topics of research are assigned to employees who specialize in a small number of fields or geographical areas. The degree of autonomy afforded to researchers is determined by the structure and culture (academic, consulting, advocacy, policy enterprise) of the organization. Scholars at academic-oriented institutions have almost complete control over their research interests and priorities, while policy analysts at consulting and advocacy-oriented think tanks tend to have the least amount of freedom. Typically, the members of an academic staff have diverse professional backgrounds, and have often

had successful careers in economics, security studies, international affairs, public administration, journalism, or legal affairs – or in academia. Frequently, they hold doctoral degrees and are recognized experts in their field. Logistical support for their activities is provided by administrative and research assistants, librarians, public relations experts, and journalists. Although a research topic may often take the form of an individual project run by a fellow, teamwork is common, usually within the framework of a more extensive research program that may be interdisciplinary and involve not only the think tank's own experts but also academics and specialists from elsewhere. This can even extend to collaboration between a number of think tanks in the form of a separate study center – i.e. The AEI-Brookings Joint Center for Regulatory Studies, or The Urban Institute-Brookings Tax Policy Center, which has been successful at reaching policy and media elites. In 2005, the Center was cited every 3 or 4 days by one or more of the top five national daily newspapers.²

Political and philosophical orientation

Think tanks can be classified broadly in the categories of conservative, libertarian, centrist, and progressive/liberal. However, these lines are not easily drawn – one can find both scholars and institutions that consider themselves to be liberal or conservative, but are not ideological, are open to countervailing evidence, and receptive to outcomes that challenge long-held, worldview assumptions. The political and philosophical foundations of think tanks can affect not only the perspective from which research is conducted, but also its outcome. Some think tanks offer forthright explanations of their ideological bent, while others prefer to maintain at least the appearance of nonpartisanship. Some of the most influential think tanks can be classified in one of the above categories based on their self-expressed political or philosophical orientation, the orientation of their associated scholars, and their sponsored publications. Conservative think tanks generally espouse both a free-market economic policy and a traditionalist social policy. Libertarian think tanks are similar, yet their emphasis on laissez-faire economics is primary, and the government's role in social policy is discouraged. Today's centrist think tanks are noteworthy for the wide range of their scholars' views as well as for their emphasis on a detached and nonpartisan approach to policy that allows for a synthesis of conservative and progressive elements. Finally, the progressives generally support state-interventionist economic policy, while concurrently supporting less state intervention in social issues. Some think tanks

that focus on particular fields or issues (i.e. defense and security think tanks) are categorized as conservative or progressive-based on the current manifestation of conservative and liberal orientation in those particular fields. For the purposes of this discussion and for the remainder of the book, I will use the terms progressive and liberal interchangeably.

Think tanks that follow the realist or neo-conservative school in defense and foreign policy are categorized as conservative, while those that generally represent a more liberal internationalist approach are categorized as progressive. The association of narrowly focused think tanks may shift over time, but Table 3.5 identifies the current ideological alliance of some of the leading think tanks in the United States. This

Table 3.5 Political and philosophical organization of US think tanks

<i>Conservative</i>	
American Enterprise Institute	Hudson Institute
Competitive Enterprise Institute	Manhattan Institute
Family Research Council	National Center for Policy Analysis
Heritage Foundation	Progress and Freedom Foundation
Hoover Institution	
<i>Libertarian</i>	
Cato Institute	Reason Foundation
<i>Center-Right</i>	
Center for Strategic and International Studies	Washington Institute for Near East Policy
Milken Institute	
<i>Centrist</i>	
Baker Institute	National Bureau of Economic Research
Council on Foreign Relations	Public Policy Institute of California
Economic Strategy Institute	RAND Corporation
Freedom Forum	Resources for the Future
Institute for International Economics	
<i>Center-Left</i>	
Brookings Institution	New America Foundation
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Progressive Policy Institute
Carter Center	Urban Institute
<i>Progressive/Liberal</i>	
Center for American Progress	Economic Policy Institute
Center for Defense Information	Institute for Policy Studies
Center for Public Integrity	Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	Justice Policy Institute
Citizens for Tax Justice	Worldwatch Institute

being said, the think tank community, regardless of an individual scholar's party affiliation or philosophical orientation, recognizes a scholarly tradition, a commitment to serving the public interest and developing policies that are for the good of the nation. While not every scholar or institution adheres to these standards 100 percent of the time, it is these standards that most think tanks and policymakers have come to expect from the scholars who work at these institutions.

State-based think tanks and networks

Over the past two decades, Congress and the White House have shifted considerable responsibility to the states – a movement that began with the attempts of the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations' to craft a "New Federalism." These changes have brought about a devolution of political power, legislative authority, and financial responsibility to the states. As a result, states today have more power and greater responsibilities than in the past, though they are currently contending with serious financial constraints and increasing demands for programs and services. In the wake of 9/11 and subsequent homeland security demands, most states' fiscal burdens have become even more strained and complex. Decisions about taxing and spending – a difficult enterprise under any circumstances – challenge policymakers as they shape their responses to issues such as improving the quality and funding for public education, health care reform, and economic development. Out of necessity, many states have had to develop new and often innovative approaches to funding programs, staffing government, and managing information. At the state level, necessity is the mother of invention and state governments now serve as incubators for policy innovations that are then adopted by other states and the federal government. These factors have not gone unnoticed by advocates on the right and the left. A growing number of liberal and conservative donors and think tanks have chosen to focus their resources on the State House rather than the White House, and with good reason, according to Mark Schmitt, Director of Governance and Public Policy at the Open Society Institute, "Many of the most exciting political reforms – health care, welfare and campaign finance reform, for example – are occurring at the state level."³

Once viewed as a Beltway phenomenon, public policy institutes have proliferated far beyond the banks of the Potomac. Washington, DC remains home to 368 public policy institutes, but the rest of the 1,368 such organizations in the United States are dispersed throughout the 50 states. Thanks to the growing demand for state-level analysis which

began in the 1970s, many state-based think tanks have been established to help governments analyze and solve more localized issues. John Raisian, Director of The Hoover Institution remarks, "The proliferation of state-based think tanks in the United States bespeaks an ambition to contribute to the well-being of citizens therein and make states true laboratories for observing diverse approaches to public policy formation and dialogue."⁴ This section seeks to shed some additional light on the proliferation of these organizations at the state level by exploring the evolution of both liberal and conservative state-based think tanks.

The evolution of think tanks seems to parallel key political events and social movements in the United States. Dating back to some of the earliest think tanks, such as The Brookings Institution and The Russell Sage Foundation, it is possible to trace the growth to these institutions to seven time periods:

1st Wave:	1900–29	World War I and the Great Depression
2nd Wave:	1930–45	World War II
3rd Wave:	1946–80	Cold War, Vietnam War and War on Poverty
4th Wave:	1989	End of Cold War
5th Wave:	1980–2005	Conservative War of Ideas
6th Wave:	2001–Present	Globalization and War on Terror
7th Wave:	2002–Present	Liberal War of Ideas

Due to the heavy focus on domestic and foreign policy issues by public policy institutions inside the Beltway, a need for more localized and state-based think tanks has developed in the last 20 years. As written in "Academics to Ideologues":

The newest trend in the industry is the creation of state-based think tanks, which are located in state capitals throughout the United States and are focused on state and local issues. The devolution of federal programs and increased power to the states has sparked this latest movement in the industry. Since the early 1980s, over 25 institutions have come into being, most of them with the backing of conservative foundations and corporations.⁵

While both conservative and liberal think tanks have been receiving continuous monetary support over the past three decades, the latter have not been provided with the same holistic, concentrated, and coordinated support from individuals and private foundations that conservative organizations have benefited from over the last 20 years.

Table 3.6 US think tanks by state

Alabama	16	Nebraska	7
Alaska	3	Nevada	4
Arizona	20	New Hampshire	12
Arkansas	8	New Jersey	36
California	165	New Mexico	7
Colorado	28	New York	142
Connecticut	43	North Carolina	22
Delaware	3	North Dakota	4
Florida	27	Ohio	26
Georgia	27	Oklahoma	8
Hawaii	11	Oregon	16
Idaho	4	Pennsylvania	38
Illinois	54	Rhode Island	19
Indiana	20	South Carolina	6
Iowa	11	South Dakota	4
Kansas	15	Tennessee	15
Kentucky	11	Texas	42
Louisiana	9	Utah	7
Maine	20	Vermont	5
Maryland	43	Virginia	99
Massachusetts	172	Washington	22
Michigan	30	West Virginia	6
Minnesota	23	Wisconsin	21
Mississippi	11	Wyoming	0
Missouri	18	Washington, DC	368
Montana	8		
Total: 1,736			

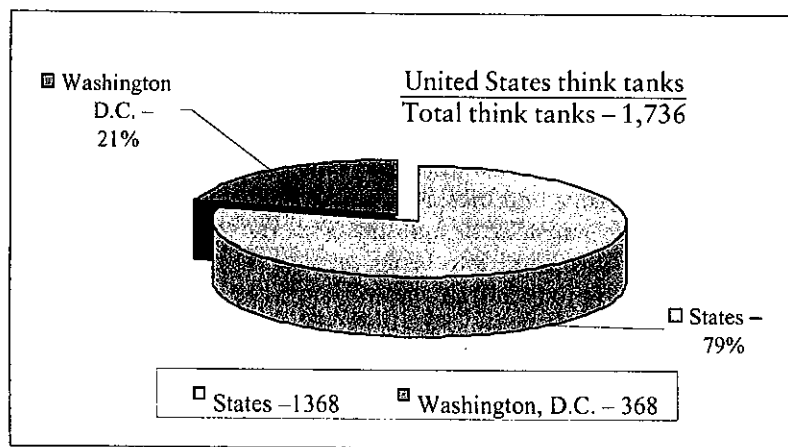


Figure 3.1 US think tanks by location

Not surprisingly the conservative movement is much more visible today as a result of its effective strategy of investing in ideas and institutions. Linda Tarr-Whelan, of the Center for Policy Alternatives, commented on the main issue facing the progressive community, “Progressive funders are funding direct service efforts at the state level ... What’s missing is anything dealing with a larger vision. Who is funding the infrastructure for a progressive agenda?”⁶

Without funding and a clear vision, progressive think tanks have developed in an uneven and uncoordinated fashion. The early liberal think tanks were established to challenge the Washington, DC establishment and support the Great Society and various other environmental and social causes. During the 1980s and 1990s, the conservative “war of ideas” ushered in a host of think tanks at the national and state level to challenge the welfare state and the social activists of the 1960s and 1970s. However, because of a hasty start:

Progressives wound up with a strong set of small to medium-sized think tanks, mostly in the Beltway, oriented toward single issues and focused on analysis and information rather than on policy development and winning over the public or politicians to an ideological perspective ... We wound up with a very young and incomplete set of state-level think tanks. And we wound up with an organizing capacity that is in many areas powerful at the local level, but is almost always disconnected from the substantial progressive policy-development capacity.⁷

With the conservatives on the march and establishing more state-based think tanks, liberals are getting the hint, too. David Dyssegaard Kallick notes a positive trend in progressive ideology:

Slowly, progressives are acknowledging – sometimes even embracing – the reality of an increasing local and state-level progressive policy institutions pursuing local battles and creative strategies for addressing healthcare coverage, minimum wage hikes, and other issues once thought of as federal issues.⁸

In the late 1990s, liberals realized that they were losing elections and control of the policy agenda and began to rally foundations and activists to retake Washington, DC. Mark Schmitt, Senior Fellow at the New American Foundation and Director of the Open Society Institute’s Program on Governance and Public Policy, captures what is at stake, “the future of progressive advocacy leadership and policy formulation

could depend on the viability of the state-based coalition[s]" that bring together progressive think tanks and advocacy groups at the state level.⁹

To fully understand the evolution of liberal/progressive think tanks, it is necessary to take a closer look at the think tank network of public interest research groups (PIRGs). Established in the 1970s as an outgrowth of the consumer movement spearheaded by Ralph Nader, PIRGs are now part of a nation-wide movement of state-based think tanks, primarily concerned with environmental issues, consumer protection, and political and social justice. Nonetheless, PIRGs differ from other think tanks in that they were founded as, and are still very much today a student group. In fact, most of their members and financial resources come from student-driven organizations. The first state PIRG was established in 1971, with a national group established in 1983.¹⁰ Since their inception, the state-based PIRGs have mainly focused on the local impact of national issues, such as environmental advocacy and consumer safety, and have concentrated their campaigning efforts at the grassroots level.¹¹

Nevertheless, PIRGs have come to include in their ranks a much broader group of people in both the research and advocacy parts of their activities. In comparison with progressive Washington-based think tanks, they have been in the vanguard in their proposals and even more so in their outreach methods by making extensive use of door-to-door and street canvassing. This has helped them to stay in touch with citizens' concerns, and made them comparatively more representative of local populations than their national counterparts.

One example of a state-based PIRG is PennPIRG. Founded in 1986, it has offices in Philadelphia and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and a national lobbying office (USPIRG) in Washington, DC. Its mission statement reads as follows:

When corporate or governmental wrongdoing threatens our health and safety, or violates the fundamental principles of fairness and justice, PennPIRG stands up for Pennsylvania consumers. We conduct investigative research, publish reports and exposes, advocate new laws, and, when necessary, take corporate wrongdoers or unresponsive government to court.¹²

PennPIRG has been successful on many fronts and continues to serve as a prime example of a state-based public research institute employing a progressive agenda and using extremely grassroots methodology. With that in mind, it should be noted that "while progressives fund a

variety of causes, progressive and mainstream organizations simply do not have similar foundation support" as conservatives.¹³

Another interesting model of a progressive, state-focused think tank network is The Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA). Although based in Washington, DC, CPA focuses exclusively on state legislative issues. As the motto reads, it is "of, by and for state legislators,"¹⁴ and its actions are effectively split between policy research and the empowerment of state legislators through leadership development and network building. It provides legislators talking points, policy summaries, and the *Progressive Agenda*, a reference book for progressive legislators. CPA's most innovative feature is its emphasis on skills development, best seen through its creation of The Fleming Leadership Institute, which offers training for state legislators from around the country. With its integrated strategy, CPA is attempting to create a one-stop think tank for progressive state legislators by providing the training, the content, and the network necessary to implement policy.

Between the progressive and conservative think tanks, with an agenda neither too left nor too right, are the centrist think tanks. An example of a centrist state-based think tank, in the mold of RAND, is The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), which serves to improve public policy through objective, non-partisan research. The main areas of research for PPIC are population, economy, governance, and public finance, with correlate studies on such issues as immigration, growth and infrastructure, and political participation. In keeping with the RAND model, PPIC has assembled a staff of multi-disciplinarians, who provide divergent perspectives on key policy issues. PPIC also provides research to government commissions and presents testimony to lawmakers on a regular basis. Most importantly, PPIC makes their findings widely available to the public, in addition to lawmakers, nonprofit and for-profit sectors, media, etc. According to David Lyon, its President, the Institute is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving public policy in California. The Institute was established in 1994 with an endowment from William R. Hewlett.¹⁵

Another centrist, regionally-based, statewide think tank is The Pennsylvania Economy League (PEL), which was established in 1936 and reflects the challenges of the period and the desire of civic leaders of that time to bring knowledge to bear on state and local policy issues. PEL is headed by Executive Director, Steven T. Wray, and about half-funded by its Board of Directors' membership contributions. The balance is derived through joint ventures with local governments, foundations, corporations, and private-sector leadership organizations. The League seeks to increase the competitiveness of the region by analyzing

the impact of public policies on the economy. Beyond analyzing public policy, PEL also advocates policies that have been beneficial in other areas of the country and collaborates with local leaders in the business, government, and civil society realms to promote initiatives that will make the region a more desirable place to live. Additionally, PEL strives to highlight current issues in an effort to inform the public of what is happening in the region. PEL's objectives include:

- creating opportunities to inform and involve taxpayers in the process of policy development and implementation;
- maintaining a network of private leadership and staff throughout the state to identify problems and opportunities associated with government and public policy;
- providing research, analysis, and planning to initiate actions by public and private leadership;
- working in partnership with governmental, business, and civic groups to develop consensus and action on programs and solutions that can increase the effectiveness of state and local governments, and improve the economic competitiveness and quality of life in the state.

Historically, PEL was an academic-oriented think tank that was deeply rooted in quantitative analysis and economics. In recent years, however, it has employed many of the strategies developed by more policy-oriented think tanks, and crafted innovative approaches to packaging and disseminating its research and analysis to reach larger audiences.¹⁶

Since 1991, conservatives have created an influential think tank network at the state level whose efforts often focus on family issues. According to Center for American Progress Senior Fellow, Eric Alterman and *Columbia Journalism Review* reporter, Paul McLeary:

Many historians identify the origins of this [conservative] effort with an influential 1971 memo written by Lewis Powell ... Powell decried what he termed to be the "broadly-based" attack on the American economic system by the "communists, New Leftists and other revolutionaries," which found its most prominent voice in all the usual liberal bogeymen – college campuses, the media, intellectual and literary journals, and the arts and sciences.¹⁷

Powell's solution was "a clarion call to multinational corporations to begin to fund the necessary institutions to train conservative journalists, economists and teachers to begin preaching the right-wing gospel."¹⁸

And answer that call they did. Sam Brunelli of The American Legislative Exchange Council, sums up the conservative approach:

If we intend to govern this nation, then our battle begins on the other side of the Beltway. And we must recognize that on this new battlefield, a negative agenda will not sell. In the states, the conservative movement must advance a positive agenda for governance, an agenda which speaks to the real challenges people face and that draws its strength from the principles and values that the people hold dear.¹⁹

One purpose of local think tanks is to "influence policy using city, regional, and state media, whereas their Washington, DC-based colleagues try to influence policy using national media."²⁰ Similar to their national counterparts, think tanks trying to affect policy at the state level often have a conservative or liberal agenda. Accordingly, state level think tanks resemble their older siblings and adopt many similar methods of operation. According to Lawrence Soley, a professor of journalism at Marquette University:

Conservative [state-based] think tanks [are] patterned after the highly successful Washington, DC-based American Enterprise Institute (1996 revenues: \$16.5 million) and Heritage Foundation (1996 revenues: \$28.7 million) that opened up around the United States during the 1980s and early 1990s.²¹

The State Policy Network, which provides training and networking opportunities to state-based think tanks, maintains that there are 49 conservative state-based think tanks spanning 42 states.²² According to The State Policy Network, a self-described "leadership training center and resource clearinghouse for America's state-based free market think tank community,"²³ these think tanks are generally organized with The Heritage Foundation in mind and are funded by right-wing foundations, such as Bradley and Scaife. State-based think tanks, while a relatively new phenomenon, have been instrumental in the implementation of many important policy initiatives surrounding issues such as welfare benefits. An example of such an institution and its impact is The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, which was a major advocate of school vouchers.²⁴ In addition to The State Policy Network, the conservative state-based think tanks also connect through The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which was established in 1973 by Paul Weyrich. The Council proactively brings state legislators into the fold on conservative issues and aims to "advance the Jeffersonian

principles of free markets, limited government, federalism, and individual liberty."²⁵ In striving towards these goals, ALEC has been supported by corporations such as Ford and Texaco, and has been tied to prominent government officials such as Ronald Reagan, Tommy Thompson, and Newt Gingrich. ALEC aims to have conservatives control the policy agenda at the state and national level.

During the Reagan administration, ALEC formed task forces which teamed up with administration officials and focused on the development and implementation of public policy. Gradually, these task forces emerged as think tanks and creators of model bills. Currently, ALEC draws input from leaders in the private sector as well as government officials in order to generate model legislation that will stimulate debate. Following the Reagan administration, ALEC became less a promoter of ideas and more of an activist think tank that it is today.

One great example of a successful state-based conservative think tank is The Heartland Institute in Chicago, established in 1984:

The Heartland Institute's mission is to discover and promote free-market solutions to social and economic problems. Such solutions include parental choice in education, choice and personal responsibility in health care, market-based approaches to environmental protection, privatization of public services, and deregulation in areas where property rights and markets do a better job than government bureaucracies.²⁶

Under the leadership of its board of directors and President, Joseph L. Bast, The Heartland Institute's research focuses on the Midwest, particularly on issues of government spending, taxation, healthcare, and the environment. Besides the permanent staff, two committees also debate policy issues. One committee is made up of academics and conducts research, while the other consists of elected officials who suggest topics for research and produce model legislation.²⁷

Recognizing the significance of the Internet, The Heartland Institute has created PolicyBot, a clearinghouse of conservative research from other think tanks such as The Heritage Foundation. Additionally, Heartland has various publications including *School Reform News* and *Health Care News* as well as three websites that together receive more than a million hits each month.

The Heartland Institute receives its funding from individuals, foundations, and corporations, and thus is able to work independently of the government or other special interest groups. The Institute also prominently and effectively adopts technology and other new trends in

Table 3.7 Political and philosophical orientation of state-based think tanks

<i>Progressive</i>	<i>Conservative</i>
Alabama Arise Citizens' Policy Project (Alabama)	Cascade Policy Research Institute (Oregon)
Center for Policy Alternatives (Washington, DC)	Center for the New West (Colorado)
Democracy South (Virginia)	Heartland Institute (Illinois)
Dirigo Alliance (Maine)	John Locke Foundation (North Carolina)
Northeast Action (New England)	Mackinac Center for Public Policy (Michigan)
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (Nevada)	Manhattan Institute (New York)
Revisoning New Mexico (New Mexico)	Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research (Massachusetts)
Western States Center (Oregon)	Public Policy Foundation (Georgia)
Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (Wisconsin)	Yankee Institute for Public Policy Studies (Connecticut)

order to reach a broader audience. This ingenuity helps the organization adapt to society, continue its mission, and serve as a model for others to follow.²⁸

While the explosive growth of think tanks would be expected to taper off, in actuality the exact opposite has occurred. This continuation is in part fueled by the growth of both liberal and conservative organizations. More and more, interest groups are formally organizing and adopting the think tank model to accomplish their goals. In a world of perpetual change based on the continual introduction of new ideas, more questions and information naturally needs to be researched to fill new knowledge gaps:

The trend toward specialization and vigorous competition not only challenges existing institutions to alter the way they do business but also presents a major opportunity for new or emerging institutions to develop innovative technologies and seize a major share of the market.²⁹

As PennPIRG, CPA, Public Policy Institute of California, Pennsylvania Economy League, ALEC, and Heartland Institute demonstrate, interest groups from liberals, centrists, and conservatives will fuel competition. The state-based think tank movement has proven to be extremely innovative and influential at the state and national level. Ideas and researchers do not appear to be in short supply; and if funding continues to be available, new state-based think tanks are sure to continue dotting the landscape well beyond the Beltway.