

# The Think Tank Index

*It's no accident that Barack Obama plucked his transition chief from a think tank. The world's idea factories are charged with brainstorming solutions to everything from global warming to Wall Street's implosion to the war on terror. In the first index of its kind, FP ranks the world's best think tanks. | By James McGann*

**I**n Washington, it's not for nothing that think tanks are called "governments in waiting." Presidents seek them out because they are critical to the global ideas industry. Far more than simply churning out endless papers, think tank wonks generate and fine-tune solutions to some of the most complex and vexing issues of the day. Leaders around the world need them to provide independent analysis, help set policy agendas, and bridge the gap between knowledge and action.

But not all think tanks are created equal. There are some 5,500 think tanks worldwide, in nearly 170 countries. Some organizations specialize in security; others in the environment. Some are intensely partisan; others fiercely independent. Some have budgets in the tens of millions of dollars; others are one-person operations. Some are already changing the world with their big ideas; others merely aspire to.

Until now, there has been no guide to this rapidly growing global industry. **The Think Tank Index** is the first comprehensive ranking of the world's top think tanks, based on a worldwide survey of hundreds of scholars and experts. Think of it as an insider's guide to the competitive marketplace for ideas that matter.

## The Think Tank Field Guide

As think tanks have grown in number and influence, a handful of distinct breeds have emerged. Here's a guide to telling the wonks from the water carriers.



### The Policymakers

These organizations enjoy a competitive advantage over their rivals when it comes to government contracts and research. They have the know-how and PR skills that ministers, bean counters, and bureaucrats seek.

- Rand Corporation, *United States*
- Urban Institute, *United States*
- Overseas Development Institute, *Britain*
- Fundação Getulio Vargas, *Brazil*
- Institute for Research on Public Policy, *Canada*



### The Partisans

These ideology-driven organizations generate the leading ideas on the right and left, develop new political talent, and offer a home to out-of-power party leaders.

- Heritage Foundation, *United States*
- Center for American Progress, *United States*
- Adam Smith Institute, *Britain*
- Civitas, *Britain*



### The Phantoms

Designed to look like NGOs, these organizations are in fact arms of the government. They've emerged as a favorite strategy for authoritarians to mask their diktats as flourishing civil society.

- China Development Institute, *China*
- Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, *Russia*
- Center for Political Studies, *Uzbekistan*



### The Scholars

The stars of the think tank world, these powerhouses of policy are regularly relied upon to set agendas and craft new initiatives.

- Brookings Institution, *United States*
- Council on Foreign Relations, *United States*
- Chatham House, *Britain*
- Danish Institute of International Studies, *Denmark*



### The Activists

These do-gooders don't simply advocate for important causes. They've become top-notch policy and research hubs in their own right.

- Human Rights Watch, *United States*
- Centre for Conflict Resolution, *South Africa*
- Amnesty International, *Britain*

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## Top 15 U.S. Think Tanks

- 1 Brookings Institution**  
 Location: Washington  
 Annual budget: \$60.7 million  
 Specialties: U.S. foreign policy, Middle East  
 Boldface names: Strobe Talbott, Kenneth Pollack, Alice Rivlin
- 2 Council on Foreign Relations**  
 Location: New York  
 Budget: \$38.3 million  
 Specialties: U.S. foreign policy, national security  
 Boldface names: Richard Haass, Michael Gerson, Walter Russell Mead, Angelina Jolie
- 3 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**  
 Location: Washington  
 Budget: \$22 million  
 Specialties: Nuclear nonproliferation, China  
 Boldface names: Jessica T. Mathews, Robert Kagan, Minxin Pei
- 4 Rand Corporation**  
 Location: Santa Monica, Calif.  
 Budget: \$251 million  
 Specialties: Military strategy, political economy  
 Boldface names: James Dobbins, Gregory Treverton, William Overholt
- 5 Heritage Foundation**  
 Location: Washington  
 Budget: \$48.4 million  
 Specialties: Tax policy, missile defense  
 Boldface names: Edwin Meese, Peter Brookes, James Jay Carafano
- 6 Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars**  
 Location: Washington  
 Budget: \$34.5 million  
 Specialties: Regional studies, democracy promotion  
 Boldface names: Lee Hamilton, Haleh Esfandiari
- 7 Center for Strategic & International Studies**  
 Location: Washington  
 Budget: \$29 million  
 Specialties: Defense policy, diplomacy  
 Boldface names: John Hamre, Richard Armitage, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Anthony Cordesman
- 8 American Enterprise Institute**  
 Location: Washington  
 Budget: \$23.6 million (2006)  
 Specialties: Trade, defense  
 Boldface names: Newt Gingrich, David Frum, Richard Perle
- 9 Cato Institute**  
 Location: Washington  
 Budget: \$19 million  
 Specialties: Libertarianism, deregulation  
 Boldface names: David Boaz, Edward Crane, Christopher Preble
- 10 Hoover Institution**  
 Location: Stanford, Calif.  
 Budget: \$34.1 million  
 Specialties: Defense policy, conservatism  
 Boldface names: Larry Diamond, Michael McFaul, Victor Davis Hanson
- 11 Human Rights Watch**  
 Location: New York  
 Budget: \$35.5 million  
 Specialties: Human rights, international justice  
 Boldface names: Kenneth Roth
- 12 Peterson Institute for International Economics**  
 Location: Washington  
 Budget: \$9.5 million  
 Specialties: Trade, globalization  
 Boldface names: C. Fred Bergsten, Anders Åslund, William Cline

- 13 United States Institute of Peace**  
 Location: Washington  
 Budget: \$24.7 million  
 Specialties: Conflict resolution, postconflict stability  
 Boldface names: Richard Solomon, Scott Lasensky, J. Alexander Thier
- 14 National Bureau of Economic Research**  
 Location: Cambridge, Mass.  
 Budget: \$29.8 million  
 Specialties: Economic growth, empirical research  
 Boldface names: James Poterba, Robert Lipsey, Martin Feldstein
- 15 Center for Global Development**  
 Location: Washington  
 Budget: \$9.8 million  
 Specialties: Globalization, inequality  
 Boldface names: Nancy Birdsall

## Top 10 Non-U.S. Think Tanks

- 1 Chatham House**  
 Location: London  
 Budget: \$12.4 million  
 Specialties: International economics, regional studies
- 2 International Institute for Strategic Studies**  
 Location: London  
 Budget: \$15.3 million  
 Specialties: Nonproliferation, counterterrorism
- 3 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute**  
 Location: Solna, Sweden  
 Budget: \$5.3 million  
 Specialties: Arms control, conflict management
- 4 Overseas Development Institute**  
 Location: London  
 Budget: \$25.9 million  
 Specialties: International development, humanitarian issues
- 5 Centre for European Policy Studies**  
 Location: Brussels  
 Budget: \$8.6 million  
 Specialty: EU affairs
- 6 Transparency International**  
 Location: Berlin  
 Budget: \$13.3 million  
 Specialty: Anticorruption
- 7 German Council on Foreign Relations**  
 Location: Berlin  
 Budget: \$6.4 million  
 Specialties: German foreign policy, international relations
- 8 German Institute for International and Security Affairs**  
 Location: Berlin  
 Budget: \$16.4 million  
 Specialties: German foreign policy and security
- 9 French Institute of International Relations**  
 Location: Paris  
 Budget: \$8.1 million  
 Specialties: Trans-Atlantic relations, European affairs
- 10 Adam Smith Institute**  
 Location: London  
 Budget: \$500,000  
 Specialties: Free-market and social policies

 The Policymakers
  The Partisans
  The Phantoms
  The Scholars
  The Activists

## Top Think Tanks for Innovative Ideas

- 1 Cato Institute**  
Cato's libertarian stance, once viewed as fringe, is now considered respectable. With its anti-incumbent, anti-Washington attitude, Cato has antagonized liberals with its push to privatize Social Security, as well as conservatives with its vigorous opposition to the Iraq war.
- 2 Brookings Institution**  
From healthcare reform to recommendations on closing the prison at Guantánamo Bay, Brookings has a breadth of expertise that allows it to offer innovative fixes for nearly every critical issue facing the United States today.
- 3 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**  
Carnegie's role in opposing the invasion of Iraq and providing critical research on issues such as Iran's and North Korea's nuclear weapons programs places it at the heart of some of Washington's defining policy debates.

## Best New Think Tanks

(of the past 5 years)

- 1 European Council on Foreign Relations**  
Populated by European heavyweights like Nobel Peace Prize laureate Martti Ahtisaari and former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, the ECFR aims to craft a common foreign policy for an increasingly integrated Europe.
- 2 Bruegel**  
Funded by EU member states and located in Brussels, Bruegel specializes in driving European economic growth and making the continent more competitive in the global economy.
- 3 Center for American Progress**  
Thanks to its all-star roster of experts and savvy use of new media, CAP has emerged as the intellectual center of Democratic D.C.

## Most Impact on Public Policy Debates

- 1 Brookings Institution**  
When important debates occur in Washington—whether over Middle East peace, global finance, or urban strategy—it's a fair bet that Brookings is driving the conversation.
- 2 Heritage Foundation**  
A partisan approach, obsession with the latest policy issues, an effective marketing strategy, and proximity to the seat of power (it is steps away from the U.S. Congress) give Heritage an influential edge.

## Best Think Tanks By Region

**Latin America:**  
Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales,  
*Argentina*

**Middle East & North Africa:**  
Al-Ahram Center for Political And Strategic Studies, *Egypt*

**Asia:**  
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, *China*

**Sub-Saharan Africa:**  
Centre for Conflict Resolution,  
*South Africa*

**For More Online:**  
For the complete Think Tank Index, including more rankings, go to [ForeignPolicy.com/extras/ThinkTankIndex](http://ForeignPolicy.com/extras/ThinkTankIndex).