

“Think Tanks” Background material

United States

There are 1776 think tanks in the US

- 91% created since 1951
- More think tanks have been established since 1970 than in the previous 50 years
- Number of think tanks have more than doubled since 1980--58% established in just the last 25 years
- 31% established between 1981-1990---End of Post-WWII consensus and Challenge to the Welfare State
- Most of the think tanks that have come into existence in the U.S. since the 1970s are specialized focusing on a particular discipline or policy issue
- About 20% or approximately 350 of the think tanks are located in Washington, DC
- More than 50% are university affiliated
- The number of think tanks being established has declined over the last 7 years

Reasons for the Growth of Think Tanks

- Information revolution has increased the volume and flow of ideas and information
- End of government monopoly on information
- The complexity and technical nature of policy problems has grown which has made decision making more difficult
- The size of government has expanded but its effectiveness has not which has led to a crisis in confidence in government officials
- Globalization and the growth of state and non state actors
- Need for timely and concise information and analysis “in the right form at the right time”

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

- Political and regulatory environment hostile to think tanks and NGOs
- A change in funding priorities for think tanks by public and private donors has made their support more targeted and restrictive
- Underdeveloped institutional capacity decreases survival rate
- Increased competition from advocacy organizations, for profit consulting firms and electronic media is impacting some think tanks
- Donors tend to fund short term projects and programs instead of strengthening capacity and building institutions
- Institutions have served their purpose and have discontinued their operations

Top 30 Think Tanks in the U.S.*
(Arranged Alphabetically)

American Enterprise Institute
Baker Institute of Public Policy
Brookings Institution
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Carter Center
Cato Institute
Center for American Progress
Center for Global Development
Center for Strategic and International Studies
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
Council on Foreign Relations
Economic Policy Institute
Henry L. Stimson Center
Heritage Foundation
Hoover Institution
Hudson Institute
Institute for International Economics
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
Manhattan Institute
National Center for Policy Analysis
New American Foundation
Nixon Center
National Bureau of Economic Research
Progressive Policy Institute
RAND
Resources for the Future
Urban Institute
United States Institute of Peace
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
World Resources Institute

<http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/psthink.html> Good site to check out the think tanks.

Think Tank Assignment

Think tanks are scholarly groups that provide much of the information political leaders in Congress receive. To be able to recognize the political leanings of these groups aids in recognizing biases. Data may take a particular “spin” depending on who is pedaling the information. An educated observer has better opportunity to weigh the statements made by leaders if the individual can recognize the agenda of the information experts.

- Locate the websites for the 4 think tanks on the web.
 1. Heritage Foundation
 2. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities
 3. American Enterprise Institute
 4. Center for Media and Public Affairs

- 1. **Vocabulary** What words are used that lead you to believe that the orientation of the think tank is conservative, liberal, moderate or nonpartisan? Make a list of the words that are most important in persuading you on the nature of this site’s politics.

- 2. **Issues** What issues are prominently featured on these pages? Does the choice of issues discussed at the site confirm or contradict your impression of the political leanings of this site. List the three issues that you think best portray the political leanings of the site.

- 3. **Positions** What political positions are announced that suggest the think tank represents the political persuasion you have identifies? List several.

- 4. **Deception** Do you detect and attempts to use vocabulary or discuss issues in deceptive ways? (ex. Does a liberal site use conservative labels for issues that it discusses? If so, discuss them.