



The Open Think  
Tank Directory

# Regional Brief Africa

On Think Tanks

February 2022

Think Tank State of the Sector

2020–2021

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# The Open Think Tank Directory

The Open Think Tank Directory (OTTD) was created to overcome the shortage of publicly available information about think tanks and other policy research centres and expertise bodies worldwide. On Think Tanks builds and maintains it with the aim of offering a public and open database that benefits the entire evidence-informed-policy community. Through it, centres can identify potential collaborators and connect with peers, funders and others; for the body of scholars who study think tanks, the directory provides a sample frame for their investigations; interested people can browse the profiles of think tanks and also get an overview of the sector; and funders can identify organisations that focus on their agendas. The database is downloadable through this link, which helps increase the sector's transparency.

Defining which organisations are to be included is a difficult task, as think tanks themselves are difficult to define. In the Open Think Tank Directory, we have defined think tanks as a diverse group of knowledge and engagement organisations that have as their (main) objective to undertake research, generate knowledge and use evidence-informed arguments to inform and/or influence policy and its outcomes. To do this, they perform a range of functions, including undertaking research, aiming to influence the public agenda, monitoring how specific policies are carried out, suggesting or advocating for policy changes, and so on.<sup>1</sup>

The directory has been compiled and is updated using a mixed approach: web searches in Google; suggestions for inclusion by country and regional experts; think tanks' websites; and direct submission by or contact with think tanks. We have established a review criterion for transparency of the quality of the data and include the sources of the information in the profile of each organisation.

**The Open Think Tank Directory does not make any evaluations of the organisations it features.**

## Funding

The development and maintenance of the Open Think Tank Directory has been, and remains, possible thanks to many funders. It has been built based on contributions and grants from: The Open Society Foundations, the Regional Programme Energy Security and Climate Change Latin America from Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., UNICEF's Office of Research-Innocenti, Robert Bosch, USAID, and most importantly our grant from the Hewlett Foundation that makes the management, improvement, update and analysis of the Open Think Tank Directory possible.

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<sup>1</sup> See [FAQs](#) for more on inclusion criteria.

# Introduction

The regional briefs are companion reports to the Think Tank State of the Sector 2020–2021 report. They aim to provide a more nuanced look at the think tank sector in each continent and the subregions within it. This report is based on an analysis of 2020 and 2021 data from 211 active think tanks,<sup>2</sup> and it aims to describe (but not explain) the think tank sector in Africa.<sup>3</sup>

## **This regional brief provides an overview of:**

- How many organisations from Africa feature in the OTTD?
- When were think tanks in the Africa founded?
- Which topics do African think tanks mostly focus on?
- What is the most common business model among African think tanks?
- What is the turnover of African think tanks?
- How much do African think tanks publish?
- What is the staff size?
- Who founds African think tanks?
- How many men and women African lead think tanks?
- Which social media channels do African think tanks use?
- List of think tanks in the region.

We hope this overview helps further understanding of the think tank sector in Africa and that it inspires others to explore the data further.

## **Data quality**

As in the main report, and given the nature of the methodology and the data available, the findings are representative at the sample level. The report is not a complete sector analysis, but an analysis of the sample of think tanks that the Open Think Tank Directory holds.

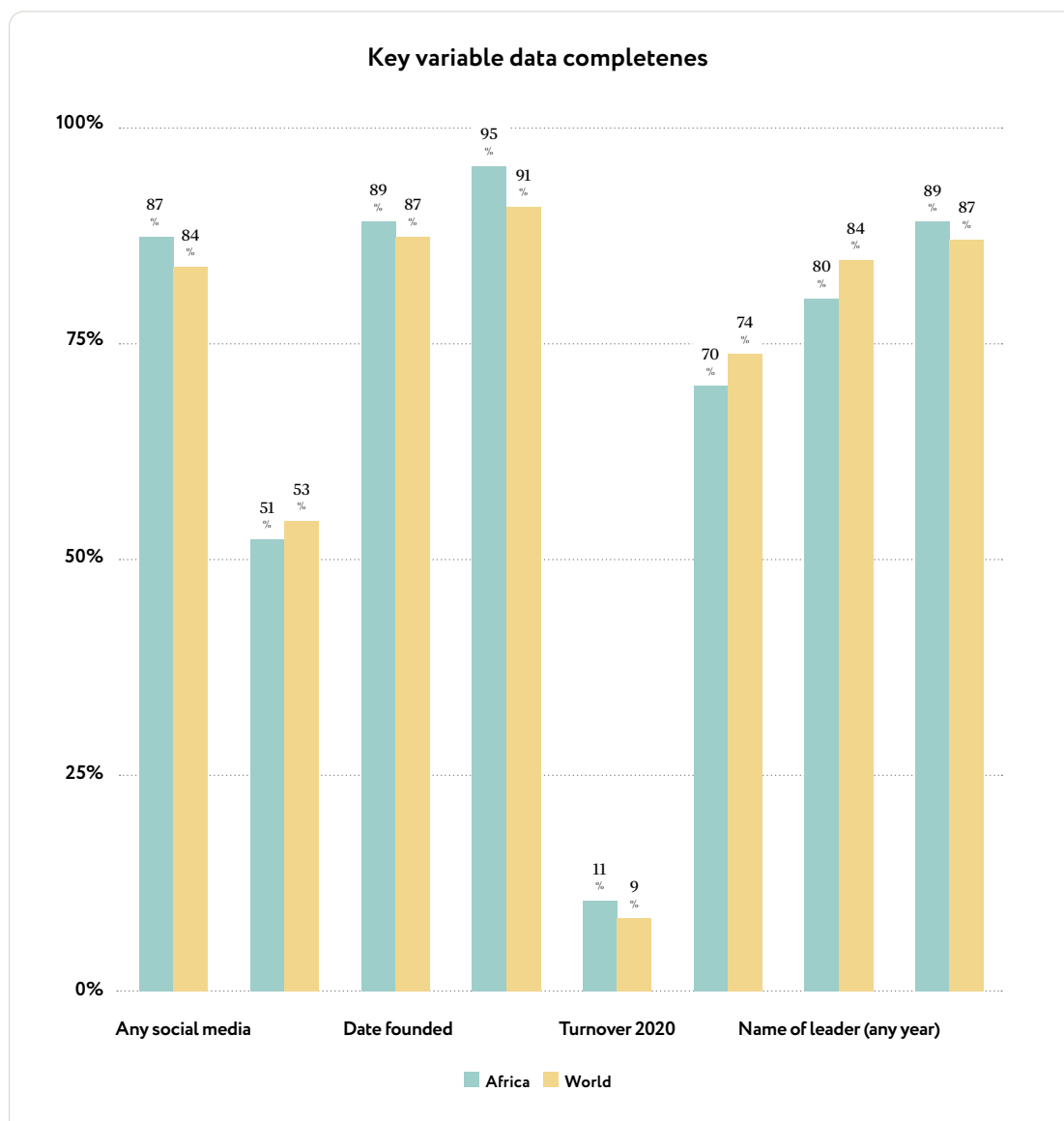
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<sup>2</sup> It does not include organisations that featured in the directory but that are defunct or deemed boundary. The cut-off date for inclusion in the report was August 2021. Organisations registered after this date have not been included in the analysis. We continue to make efforts to offer a complete overview of think tanks worldwide, but we do not claim for this to be a final and complete list of think tanks in each country.

<sup>3</sup> Click [here for the database](#) used for the analysis and report.

The data featured in the OTTD depends on the information that organisations offer on their websites, and in some cases information they themselves have offered. The information that think tanks provide on their websites varies greatly;<sup>4</sup> some offer little more than a short description, while others display great detail. Because of this, sourcing and completing data for each organisation is difficult and the data completeness by variables between regions are wide ranging. Several organisations in Africa offered little detail on their staff, leaders, publication numbers and turnover, so several variables only offer a partial outlook of the organisations in the database (Chart 1 shows overall data completeness). But nonetheless, the report reveals some very interesting trends that are worth exploring and help interested parties to understand the sector better.

Chart 1.

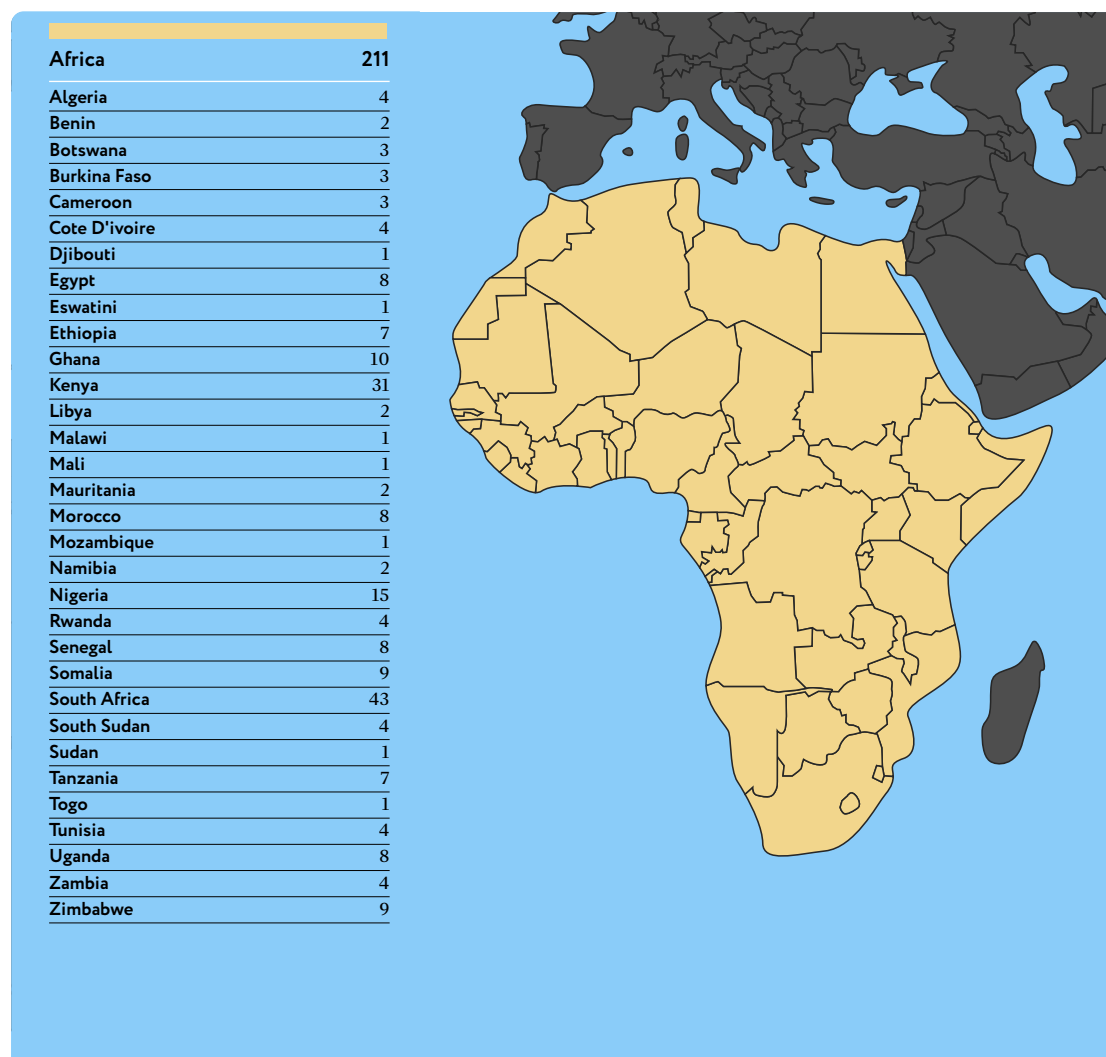


<sup>4</sup> For more on differences on the information offered by think tanks on their websites see our article [‘What we learned from looking at more than 3000 websites’](#).

## How many organisations feature in the OTTD?

The Open Think Tank Directory features 211 think tanks from Africa, which is 7% of the think tanks in the database. The countries with more think tanks are South Africa (20% of the total in Africa), Kenya (15%), Nigeria (7%), and Ghana (5%). These are the only four countries in Africa which feature at least 10 think tanks.

Image 1: Number of think tanks per country



*note: If a country is not listed, it means that there are no think tanks registered in the Open Think Tank Directory under that country.*

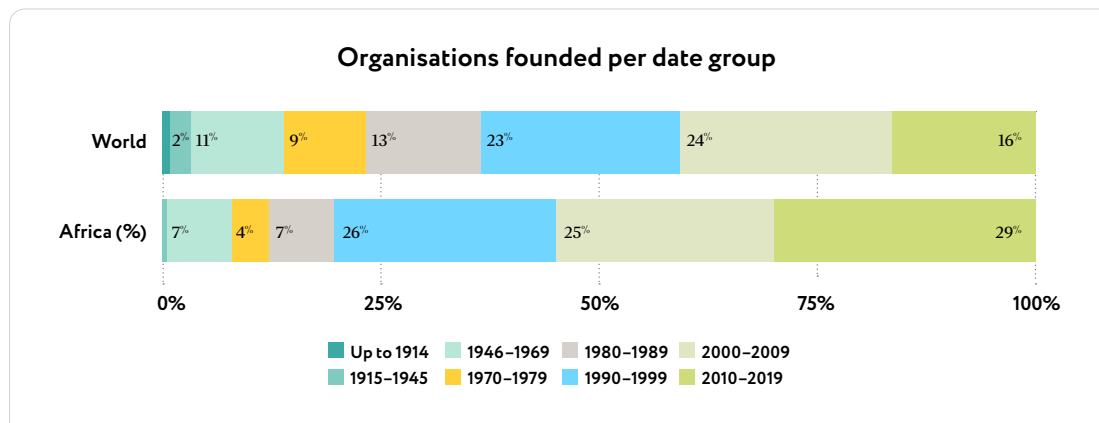
# When were think tanks in the Africa founded?

Image 2: Average think tank age



The average age of think tanks Africa is 22 years (Image 2), much younger than the world average.<sup>5</sup> As shown in Chart 2, most think tanks in Africa were established in the 1990–1999 (26%) and 2000–2009 (25%) ranges. But the continent also has a significant group of think tanks that were founded prior to the 1970s.

Chart 2.



n. Africa 188; world 2,692

Organisations founded from 2020 onwards are not shown as their number is very low (19 in total).

<sup>5</sup> Second youngest is West & Central Asia (23).

# Which topics do think tanks mostly focus on?

The key topics that are most favoured worldwide (social policy, governance/transparency and trade/economics/finance) are still in the top five most researched topics across Africa, but differences emerge. Chart 4 compares the difference between the world average and the percentage of think tanks in Africa that focus on said topic.<sup>6</sup> African think tanks diverge significantly from the world average in, and focus more on, food/agriculture, being the region that predominantly focuses on issues within this topic. Think tanks in Africa also focus more (in comparison to other regions) on health and gender.

Chart 3.

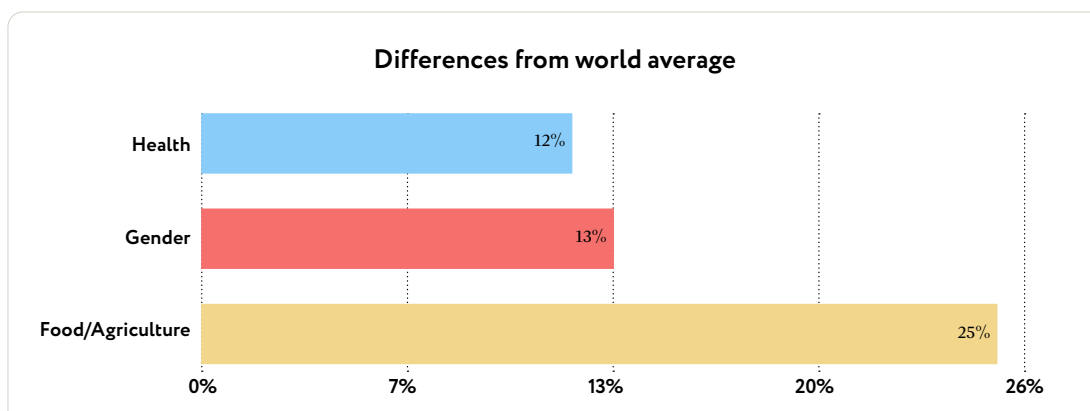


n:211

<sup>6</sup> Only topics in which think tanks in Africa that diverge by at least 10% from the world average are shown.



Chart 4.

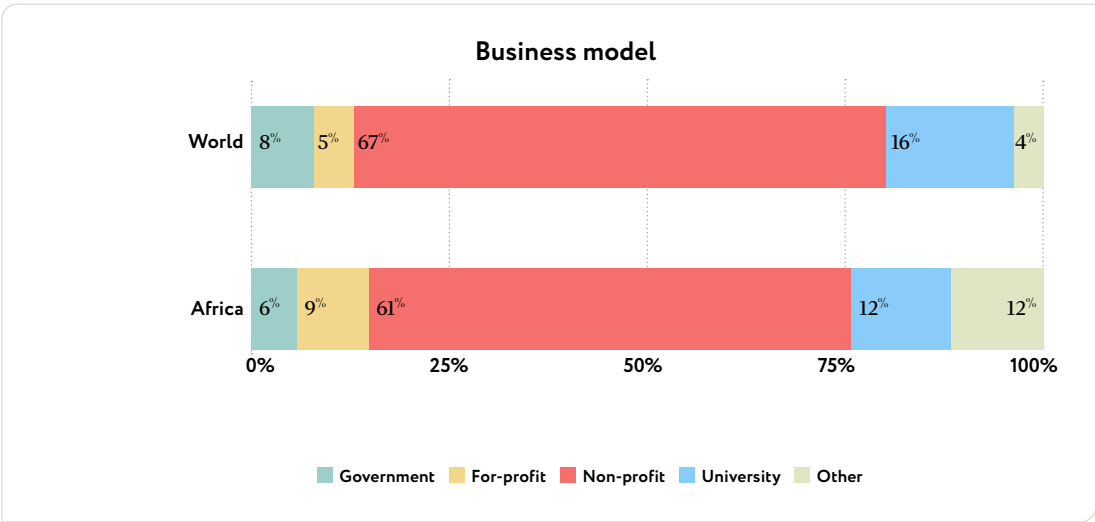


n: 211

# What is the most common business model?

Most of the think tanks in the database have a non-profit business model (67%), and this trend was also observed in Africa. About two-thirds (61%) of think tanks in the region are non-profits, followed by university (12%) and other business models (12%). Government is the least common type of business model in Africa.

Chart 5.

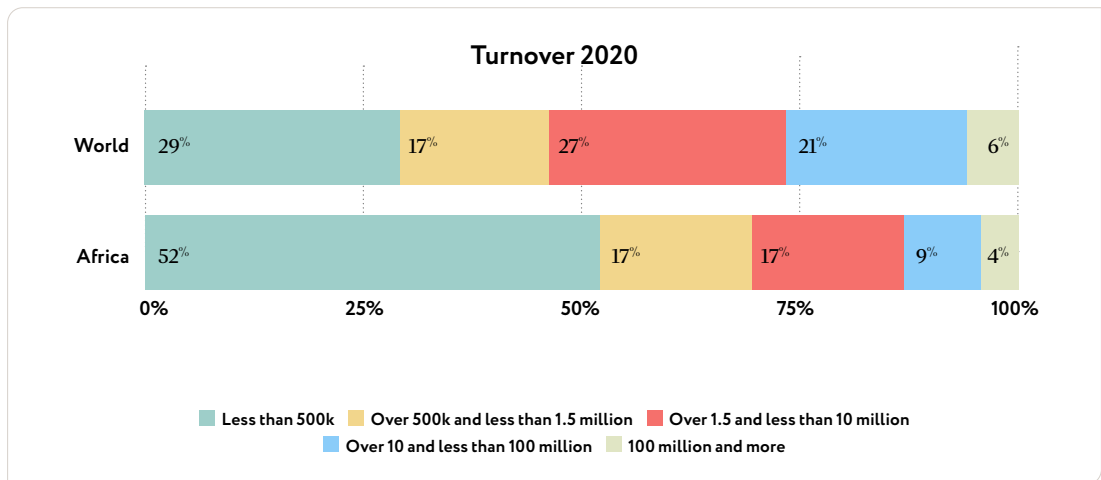


n: Africa 211; world 2,819

# What is the turnover of think tanks?

The turnover of think tanks in Africa is significantly lower than the world average. More than half (52%) of the think tanks in Africa have a turnover of less than USD 500,000, and only 13% (compared to 27% worldwide) have a turnover of over USD 10 million.

Chart 6.

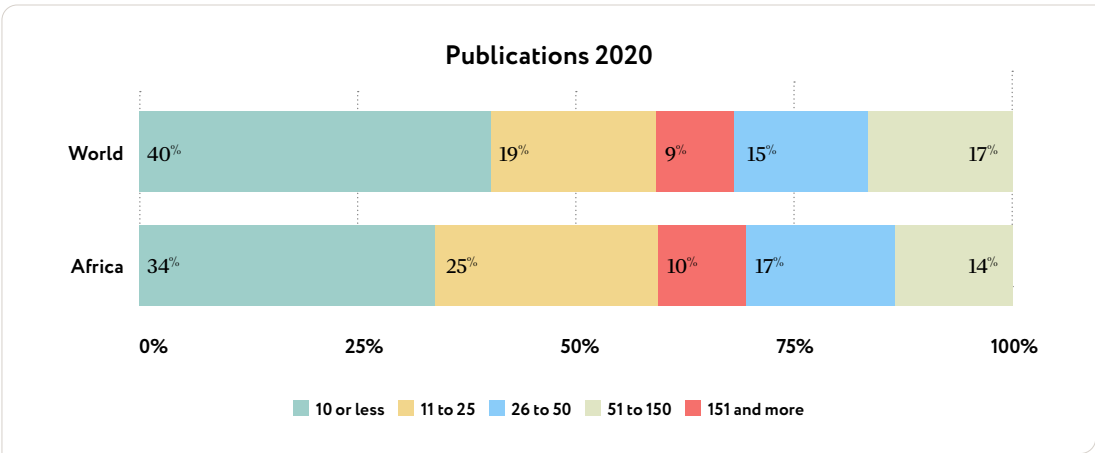


n: Africa 22; world 263

# How much do think tanks publish?

More than half of the think tanks in Africa released up to 25 publications in 2020 (59%), consistent with the world trend (59%). The other half is primarily comprised of think tanks that released 26 to 50 (17%), 51 to 150 (14%) and more than 150 (10%) publications. The number of think tanks in Africa that release more than 150 publications is slightly less than the world average.

Chart 7.



n: Africa 59; world 1,011

# What is the staff size ?

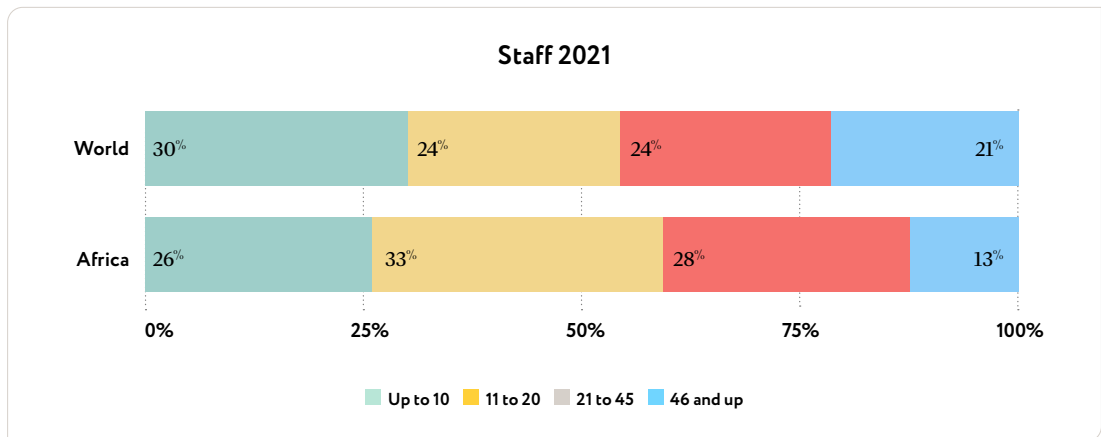
Africa’s average staff size is half the average in the world, which indicates that the staff size in most think tanks in Africa is generally smaller. However, the median staff size of African think tanks and the world are closer to each other, which indicates that think tanks in Africa are smaller in general and also that there is a smaller proportion of larger organisations in the region. This is more clearly seen in Chart 8, which shows that most think tanks in Africa (59%) have a staff size of up to 20 (compared to 54% worldwide), and only 13% of think tanks in the region have teams with more than 46 members.

Table 1.

Staff size indicators		
	Average staff size	Median staff size
Africa	31	15
World	62	18

n: Africa 91; world 1,716

Chart 8.

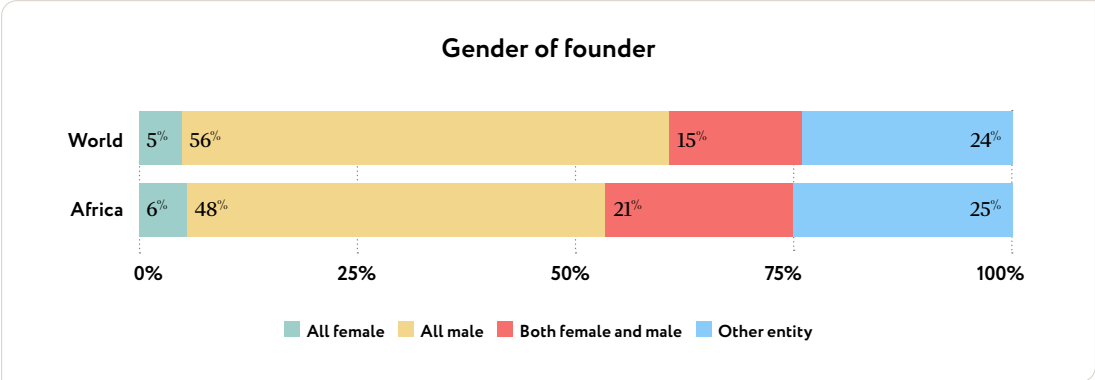


n: Africa 91; world 1,716

# Who founds think tanks?

Most think tanks in the world were founded by men (55%), followed by other entities (24%), a mix of male and female co-founders (15%), and least by all women founders (5%). This trend is consistently observed among think tanks in Africa, with most think tanks founded by males (48%) and only a small portion established by female founders.

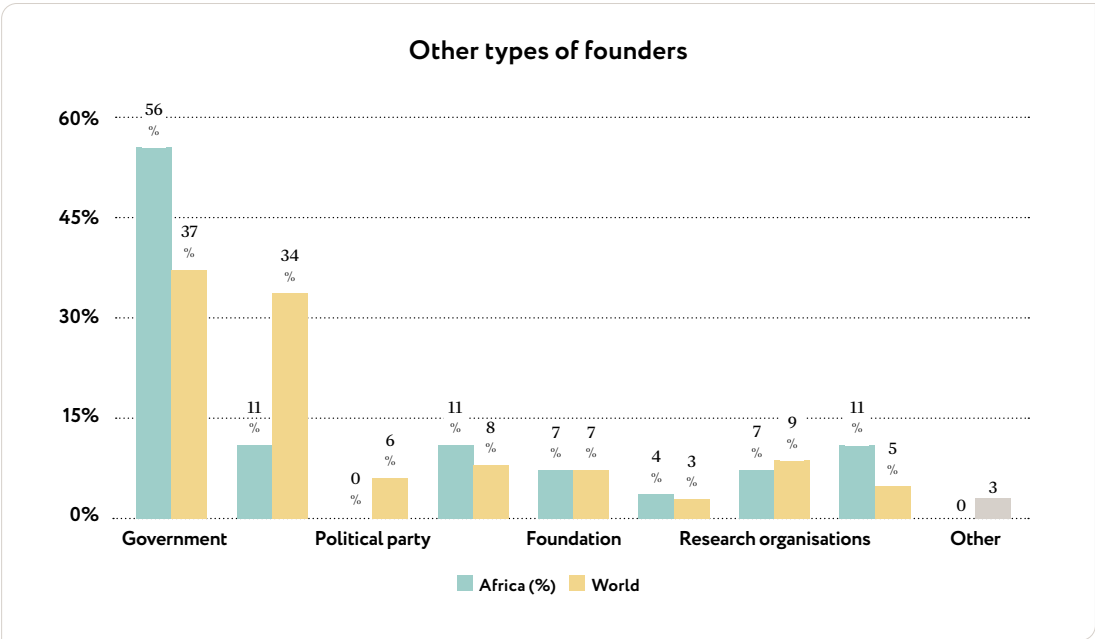
Chart 9.



n: Africa 107; world 1,633

Among think tanks that were founded by other entities or types of founders, government-affiliated entities are most common among think tanks in Africa (56%). This is interesting because very few think tanks in the region have a government business model. However, this is consistent with the world trend.

Chart 10.

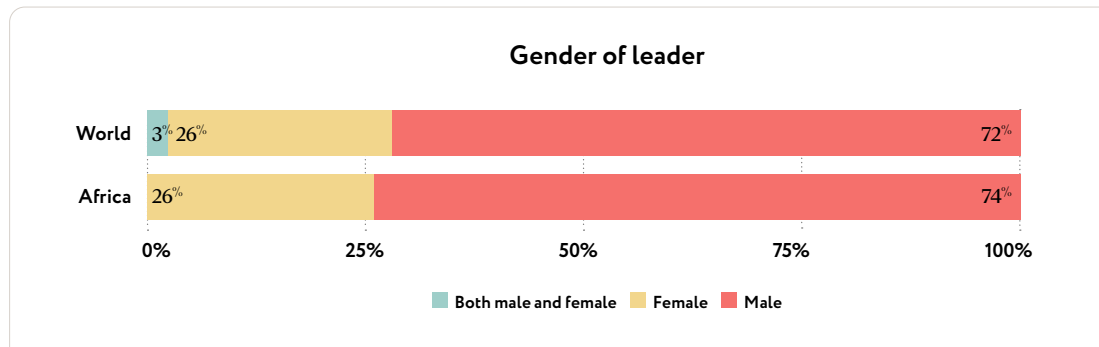


n: Africa 29; world 445

# How many men and women lead think tanks?

The think tank sector has consistently been dominated by men across the world (72%), and this is consistent with the findings in Africa (74%) as shown in Chart 11.

Chart 11.



n: Africa 169; world 2,624

Comparing against the gender of the founder, female-founded think tanks are predominantly led by females. As expected, male-founded think tanks continue to have male leaders across Africa and the rest of the world. While African think tanks with a mix of male and female co-founders tend to have more male leadership (22%) than female (21%), albeit with a small margin, there are more female leaders (24%) than males (12%) in the world overall for think tanks with mixed-gender founders. Lastly, among think tanks that were founded by other entities, females tend to hold leadership positions in Africa but looking at the world-wide values these organisations are more likely to be led by males, by a small margin.

Table 2.

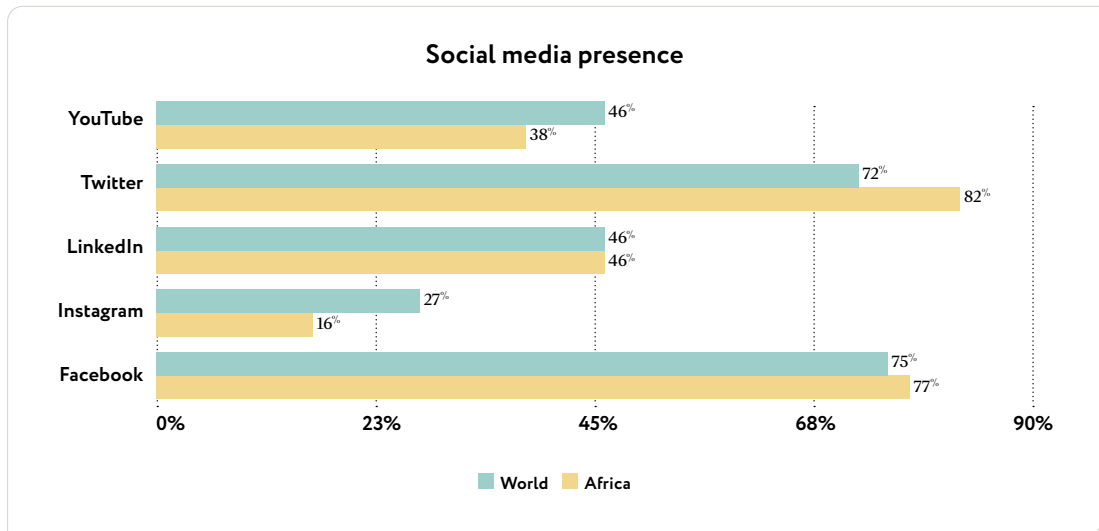
Gender of founder	Gender of founder by gender of leader					
	Latest leader gender					
	Africa			World		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
All female	17%	1%	5%	14%	2%	5%
All male	33%	54%	49%	40%	63%	57%
Both male and female founders	21%	22%	22%	24%	12%	15%
Other entities	29%	22%	24%	22%	23%	23%

n: Africa 92; world 1,463

## Which social media channels do think tanks use?

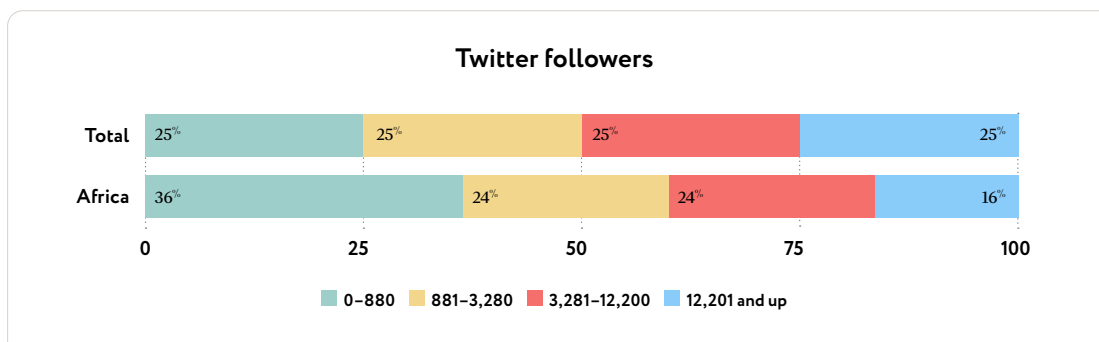
Most think tanks in the world use Facebook (75%), but more think tanks in Africa have a Twitter account (82%) than Facebook (77%). As in most regions of the world, Instagram is the social media channel least used by think tanks.

Chart 12.



Despite Twitter being the social media platform on which most think tanks in Africa have an account, they generally (36%) have a small number of followers (0–880 followers). Almost half of African think tanks (48%) have more than 881 followers but fewer than 12,201.

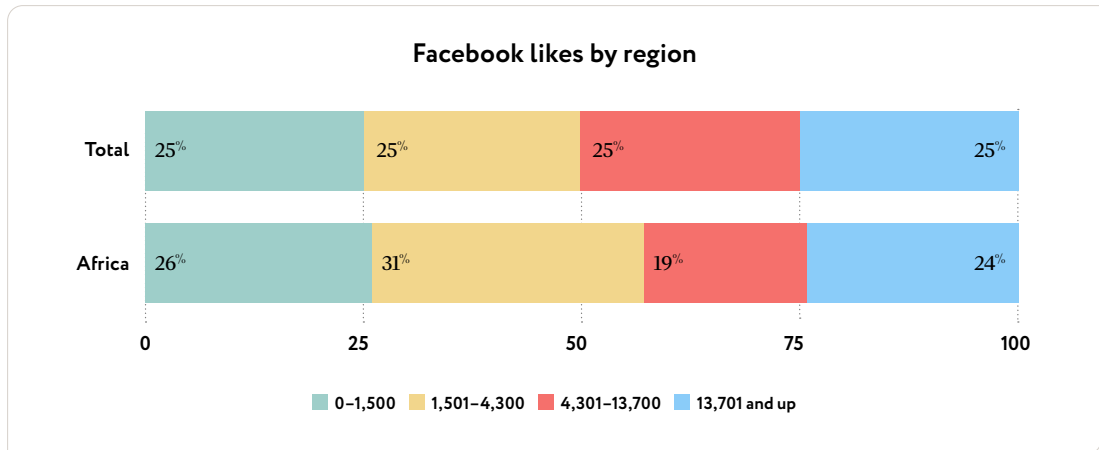
Chart 13.



The number of Facebook likes (Chart 14) for think tanks in Africa is somewhat similar to the world averages, with a quarter of think tanks in the region (26%) having up to 1,500 likes and another quarter (24%) having more than 13,700 likes. But there is a difference in the 4,301 to 13,700 group, with fewer African think tanks falling into this category.

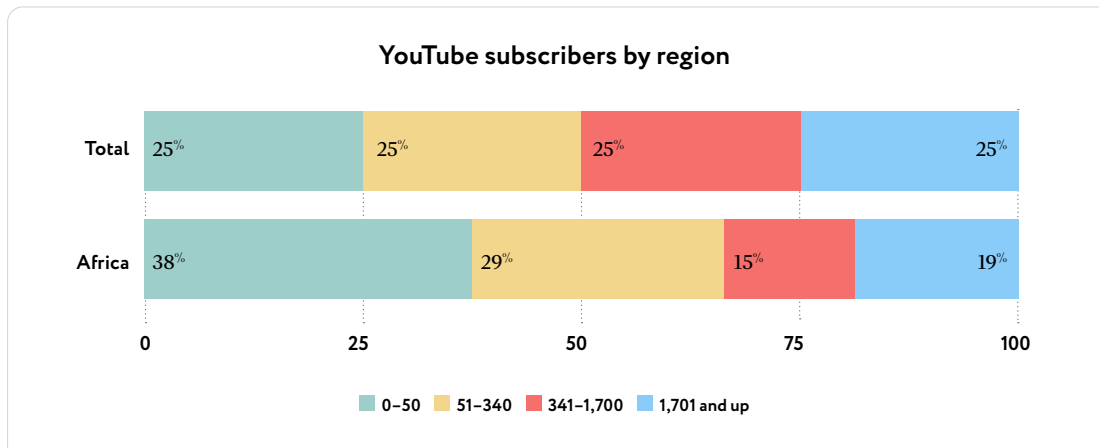


Chart 14.



A little over a third of think tanks in Africa (38%) use YouTube (Chart 15), and most of them generally have a small following as evidenced by the percentage of think tanks with up to 340 subscribers (67%), which is considerably higher than the world average.

Chart 15.



## List of think tanks – Africa

Click on each country to take you to the list of all organisations from Africa included in the Open Think Tank Directory.<sup>7</sup>

- Algeria
- Benin
- Botswana
- Burkina Faso
- Cameroon
- Cote D'Ivoire
- Djibouti
- Egypt
- Ethiopia
- Ghana
- Kenya
- Libya
- Malawi
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Morocco
- Mozambique
- Namibia
- Nigeria
- Rwanda
- Senegal
- Somalia
- South Africa
- South Sudan
- Sudan
- Swaziland
- Tanzania
- Togo
- Tunisia
- Uganda
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

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<sup>7</sup> Some organisations in each country might not have been included in the Think Tank State of the Sector 2020–2021 report as they are deemed boundary organisations ([see FAQs for a definition](#)). Click [here for the database](#) used for this report.



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