



The Open Think
Tank Directory

Regional Brief Asia

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.¹

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.

¹ See [FAQs](#) for more on inclusion criteria.

Introduction

The regional briefs are companion reports to the 2020–2021 Think Tank State of the Sector 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 798 active think tanks,² and it aims to describe (but not explain) the think tank sector in Asia, differentiating three subregions within it: Eastern Asia, West & Central Asia and South & South-Eastern Asia.³

This regional brief provides an overview of:

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

We hope this overview helps further understanding of the think tank sector in Asia 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, and the report represents an analysis of the sample of think tanks that the Open Think Tank Directory holds. In the case of China specifically, it is clear that there are more organisations that function as think tanks than the OTTD contains information for; for example, the 2018 Annual Report on the Development of CTTI Source Think Tanks lists 655 organisations labelled as think tanks, which is more than the 188 counted in the OTTD. Nonetheless, and when compared to existing Chinese lists, the organisations registered in the OTTD seem to provide a good sample. In subsequent editions of this report we will aim to improve the sample to continue offering the best overview of the sector possible.

² 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.

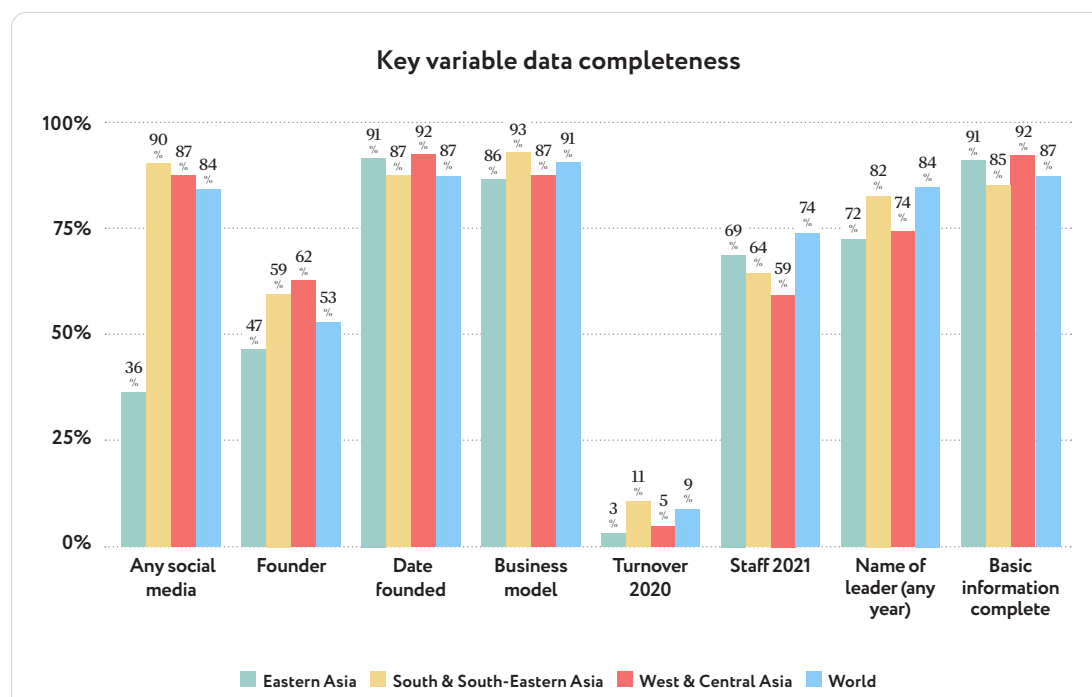
³ Click [here for the database](#) used for the analysis and report.

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;⁴ 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 is wide ranging.

Chart 1 shows the overall data completeness. Turnover information is the variable with the least data available across the world, but we found it even more difficult to source turnover data in Eastern Asia and in West & Central Asia due to language difficulties.⁵ And, as in the other regions, organisations did not readily share this information on their websites.

Another key difference to the data completeness in other regions is social media channels. The Open Think Tank Directory registers an organisation’s presence on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram, all of which are either not widely used or in some cases banned in some countries. We do not register the main social media channels that are actually used in the region, such as Qzone, TikTok, QQ, Youku, VKontakte, Odnoklassnik and Sina Weibo. Hence the social media analysis in Asia concerns their use of key Western social media networks rather than their use of and presence on social media in general.

Chart 1.



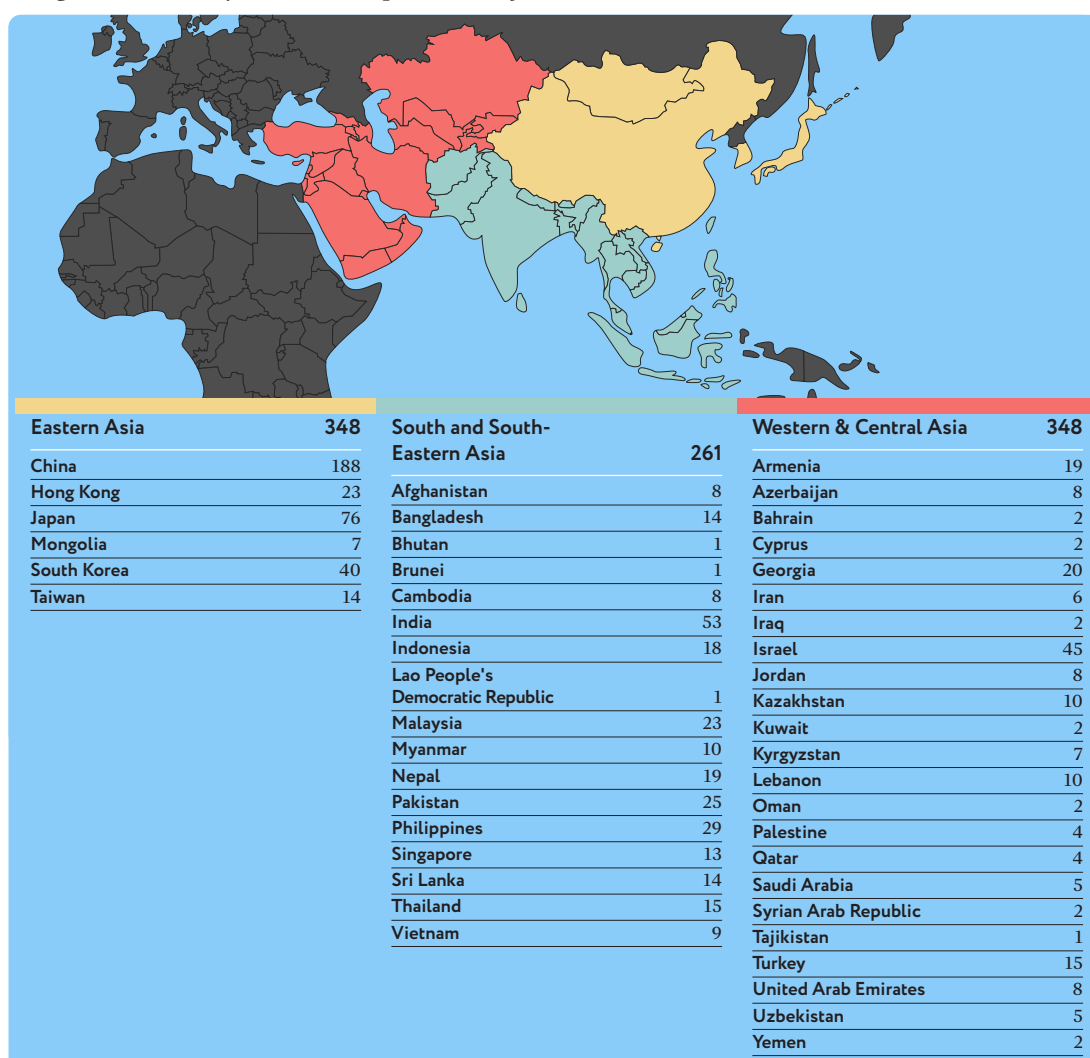
⁴ For more on differences on the information offered by think tanks on their websites see our article [‘What we learned from looking at more than 3000 websites’](#).

⁵ Some of our fieldworkers had some knowledge of Mandarin, Russian, Ukrainian and Farsi, but most had to rely on Google Translate or on the English version of the website if the organisation had one (very few did).

How many organisations feature in the OTTD?

The Open Think Tank Directory features 798 think tanks in Asia, which constitutes 26%⁶ of the think tanks in the database. These organisations are further subdivided into: Eastern Asia (11% of the whole database), South & South-Eastern Asia (8%) and West & Central Asia (6%). In Eastern Asia, most think tanks are in China, followed by Japan and South Korea. In South & South-Eastern Asia, most think tanks are in India, Philippines and Pakistan. And in West & Central Asia, the countries with the most think tanks in the database are in Israel, Georgia and Armenia.

Image 1: Number of think tanks per country



note: Russia is considered part of Europe in the OTTD. If a country is not listed, it means that there are no think tanks registered in the Open Think Tank Directory under that country.

⁶ All percentages have been rounded up – this might lead to some small discrepancies through the text.

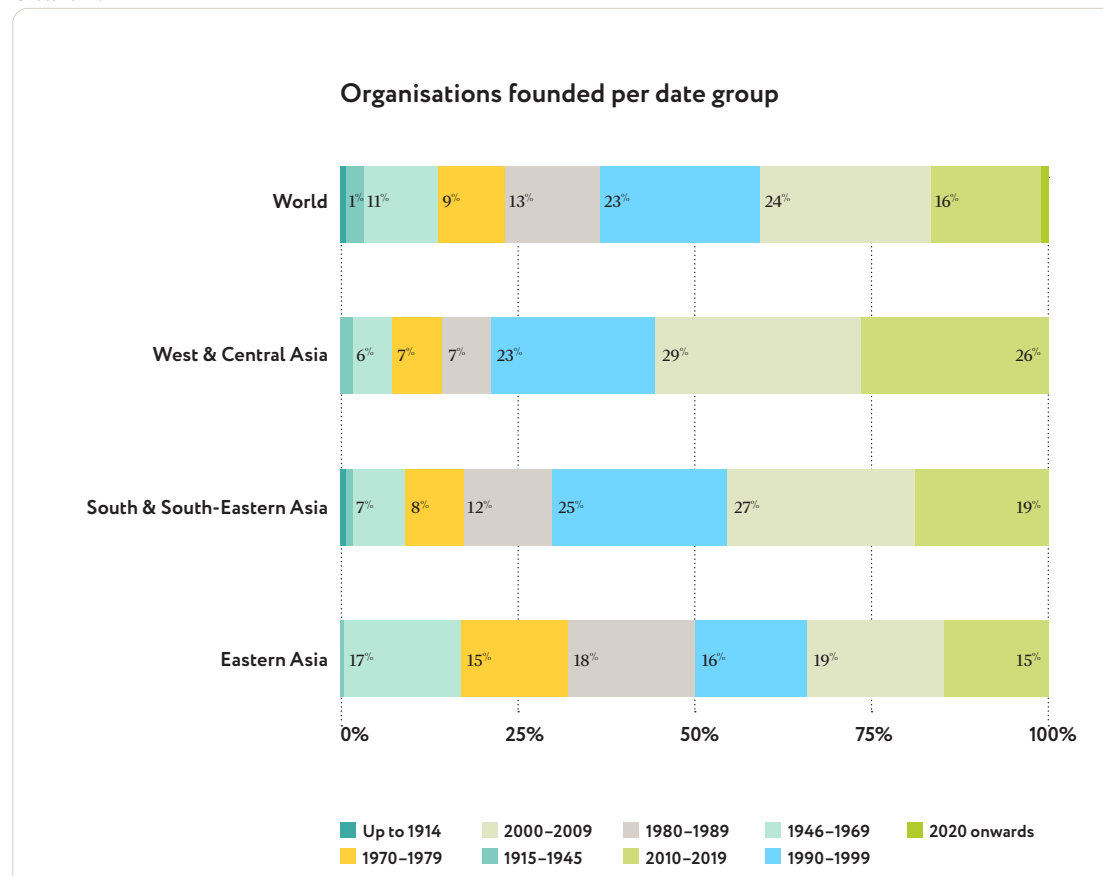
When were think tanks in Asia founded?

The average age of think tanks in Eastern Asia and South & South-Eastern Asia are within +/- three years of the world average (30), with Eastern Asian think tanks being slightly older (33 years) and South & South-Eastern Asia slightly younger (27) (see Image 2). However, think tanks in West & Central Asia are significantly younger (23) than the world average and the youngest in Asia. This trend can be better observed in Chart 2. Almost 80% of organisations in West & Central Asia were founded from the 1990s onward, making it the second youngest think tank sector in the world.⁷

Image 2: Average think tank age by sub-region



Chart 2.



n. Eastern Asia 348; South & South-Eastern Asia 261; West & Central Asia 189; world 2,692

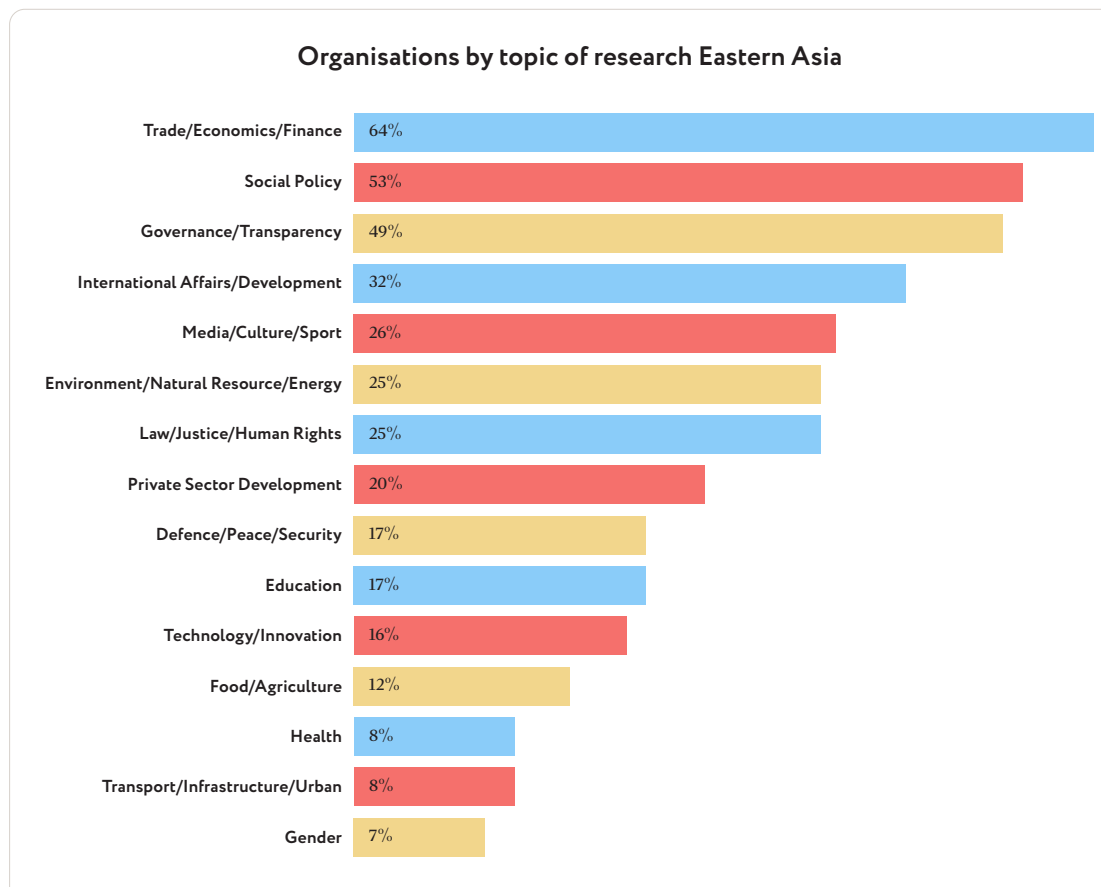
note: Organisations founded from 2020 onwards are not shown as their number is very low (19 in total).

⁷ Second to Africa where the average think tank age is 22 years.

Which topics do think tanks mostly focus on?

Across all three subregions in Asia, the main topic of research varies as shown in Charts 3, 4 and 5. The key topics that are most favoured world-wide (social policy, governance/transparency and trade/economics/finance) are still in the top five most researched topics across these subregions, but differences emerge. Chart 6 compares the differences between the world averages and the percentage of think tanks in each subregion that focus on each topic.⁸ Eastern Asia diverges significantly from the world average in trade/economics/finance and media/culture/sport, and shows less interest than average in health and environment/natural resources/energy. South & South-Eastern Asia roughly follows average world interests, with a slightly higher interest in defence/peace/security and health. Finally, West & Central Asia shows more interest in international affairs/development, and defence/peace/security, and less in environment/natural resources/energy.

Chart 3.



n: 348

⁸ Only topics in which any of the subregions diverge by at least 10% from the world average are shown.

Chart 4.



Chart 5.

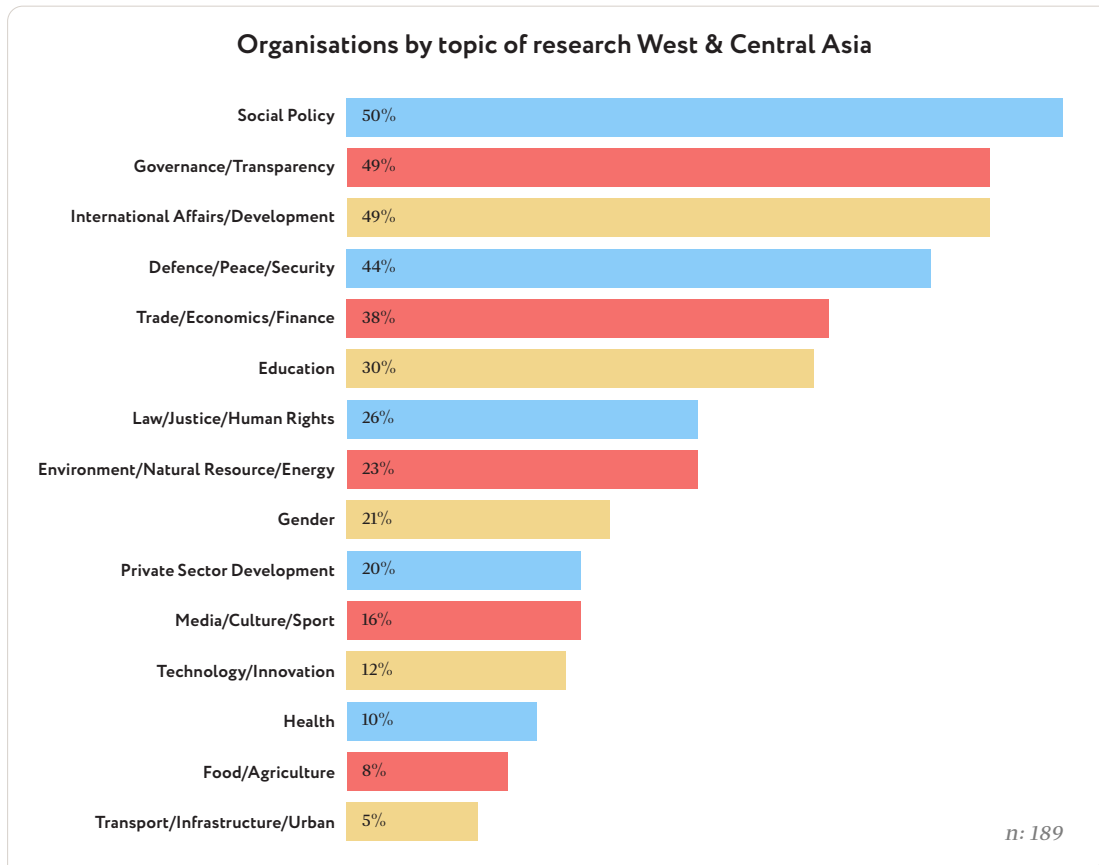
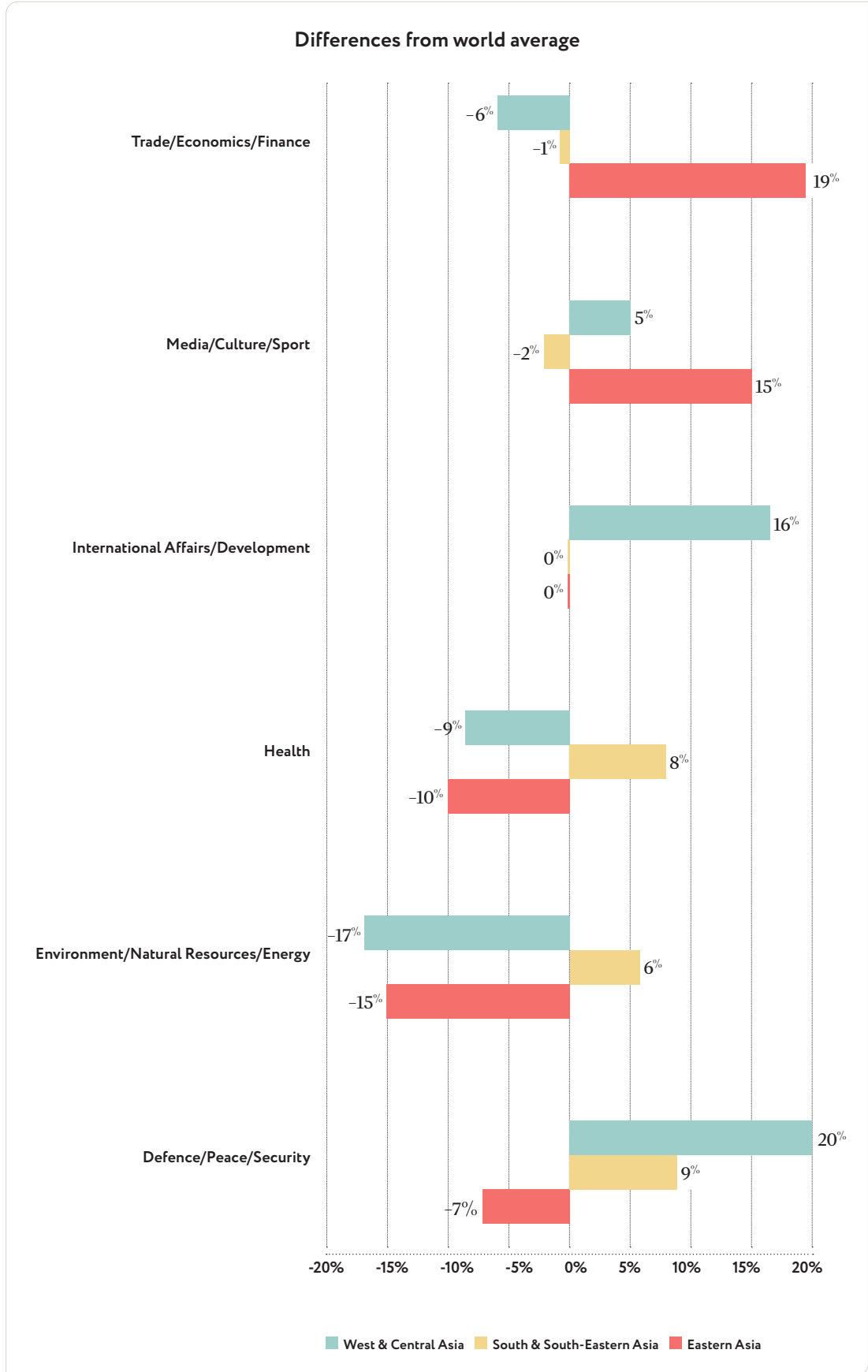


Chart 6.

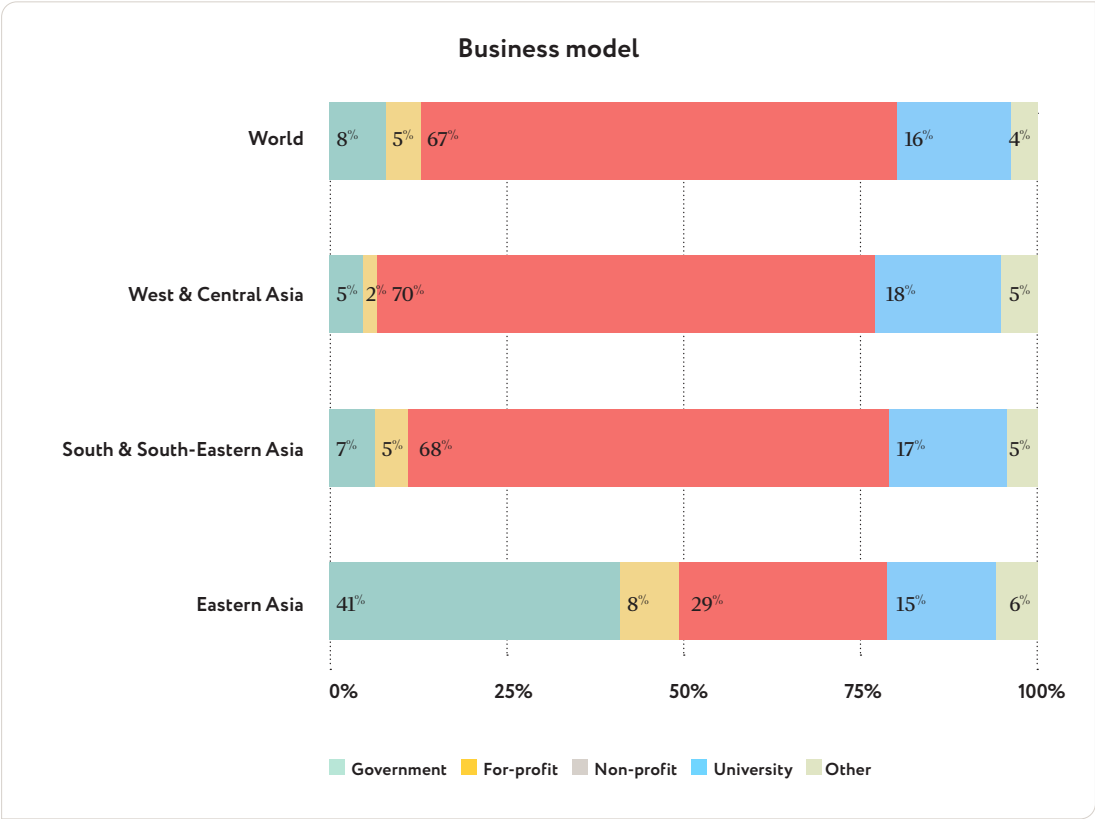


note: Only includes topics in which any of the subregions diverge by at least 10% from the world average.

What is the most common business model?

Most of the think tanks in the database have a non-profit business model (67%). However, this is not the case across all subregions in Asia. More than two-thirds of think tanks in South & South-Eastern Asia and West & Central Asia are non-profits, while in Eastern Asia only a third of think tanks in the OTTD are non-profits. Eastern Asia has more think tanks with a government business model (41%) than non-profit (29%). Meanwhile, in South & South-Eastern Asia and West & Central Asia, university-based organisations are the second most common business model at 17% and 18%, respectively.

Chart 7.

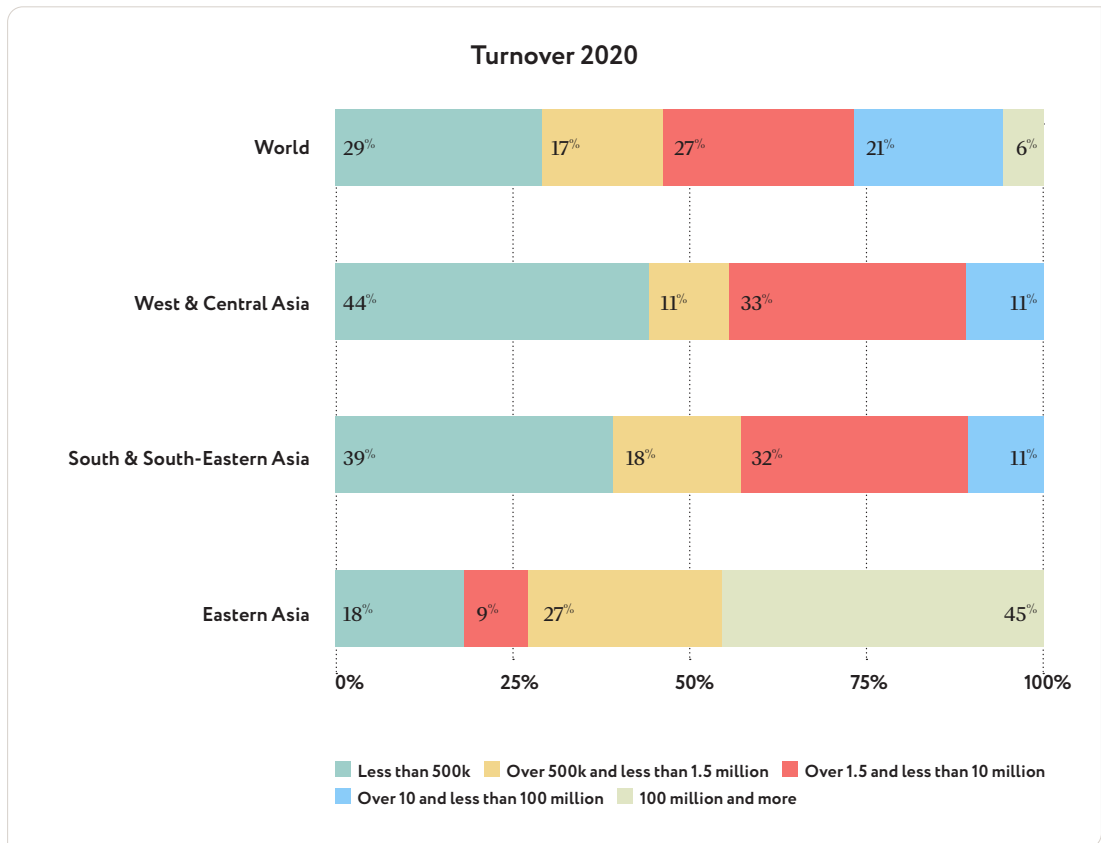


n. Eastern Asia 300; South & South-Eastern Asia 242; West & Central Asia 165; world 2,819

What is the turnover of think tanks?

Most think tanks in South & South-Eastern Asia and West & Central Asia have a turnover of less than USD 500,000, followed by think tanks with a turnover of over USD 1.5 million and less than USD 10 million. However, more think tanks in Eastern Asia (45%) tend to have higher revenue (USD 100 million or more). For comparison, among the world-wide turnover values, most think tanks in the world turn over less than USD 500,000 and only a small portion (6%) have a turnover of USD 100 million or more.

Chart 8.



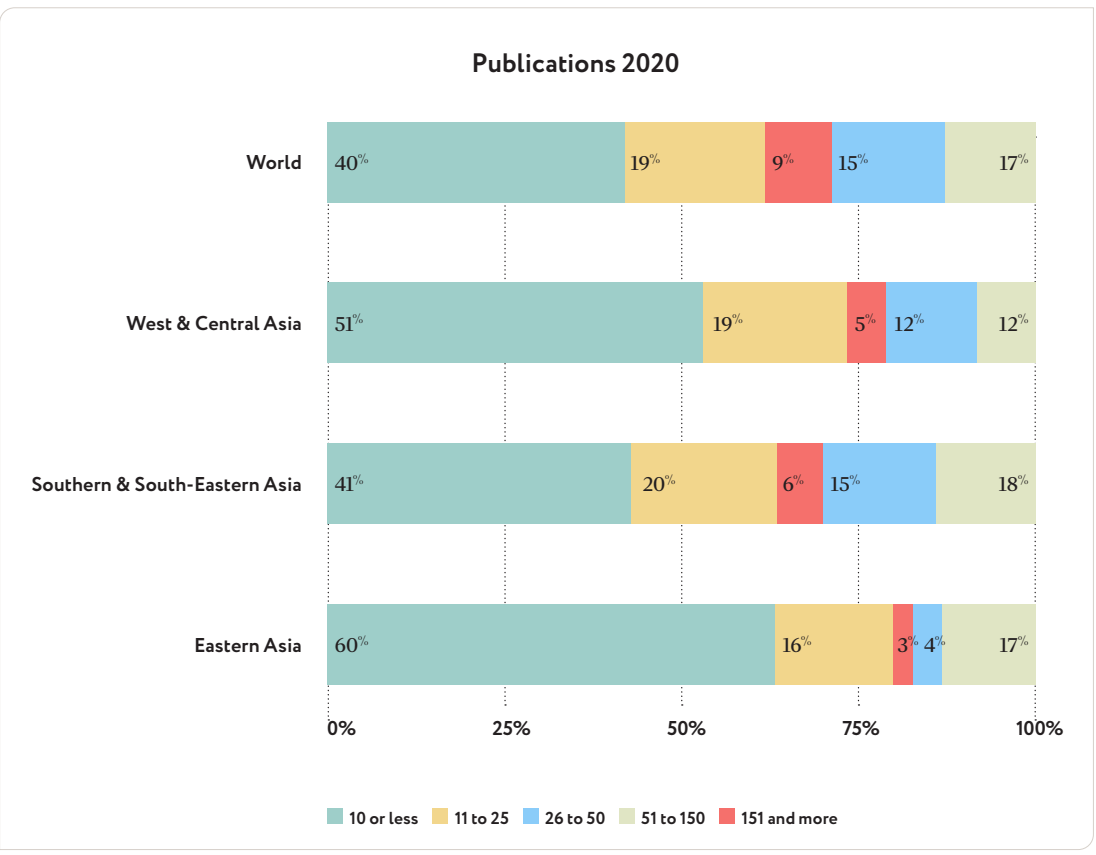
n. Eastern Asia 11; South & South-Eastern Asia 28; West & Central Asia 9; world 263

How much do think tanks publish?

Asia has more think tanks that release publications than most parts of the world, except for Europe. The numbers for Eastern Asia should be read with care, however, as the low publication numbers don't seem to be consistent with what we know of think tanks in the region, nor with the rest of the variables. In subsequent editions we will expand on this variable to be able to present more adequate data.

But as an overview, most think tanks in Asia published 10 or fewer pieces in 2020, similar to the world average, and about a quarter of think tanks published more than 50, also consistent with the world average.

Chart 9.



n: Eastern Asia 106; South & South-Eastern Asia 112; West & Central Asia 57; world 1,011

What is the staff size?

Eastern Asia has a significantly higher average and median staff size compared to the rest of Asia and the world. Moreover, its average staff size is more than five times higher than its median staff size, which indicates that some think tanks are significantly bigger than most of the think tanks in this subregion.

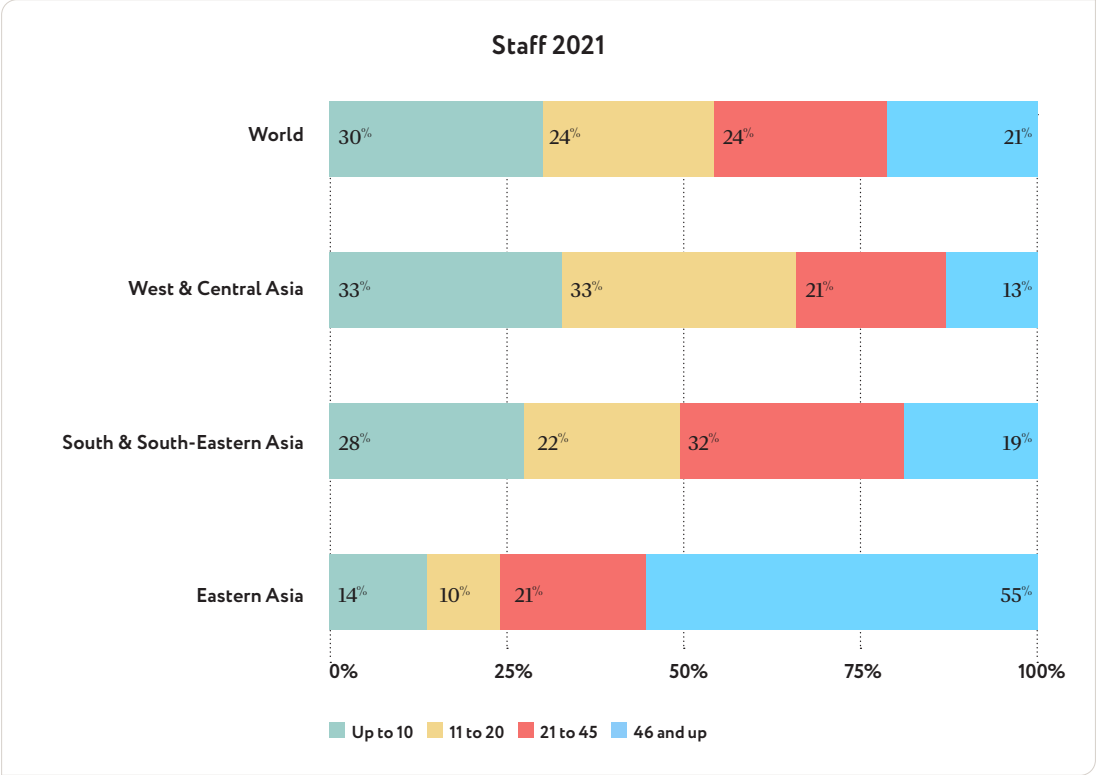
Table 1.

Staff size indicators		
	Average staff size	Median staff size
Eastern Asia	317	57
Southern & South-Eastern Asia	31	21
West & Central Asia	25	14
World	62	18

n: Eastern Asia 87; South & South-Eastern Asia 138; West & Central Asia 76; world 1,716

Most think tanks in Eastern Asia (55%) have a staff size of 46 and up, while most think tanks in South & South-Eastern Asia (28%) and West & Central Asia (33%) have teams of up to 10 staff members. Most think tanks in the world have a team size of up to 10 (30%).

Chart 10.

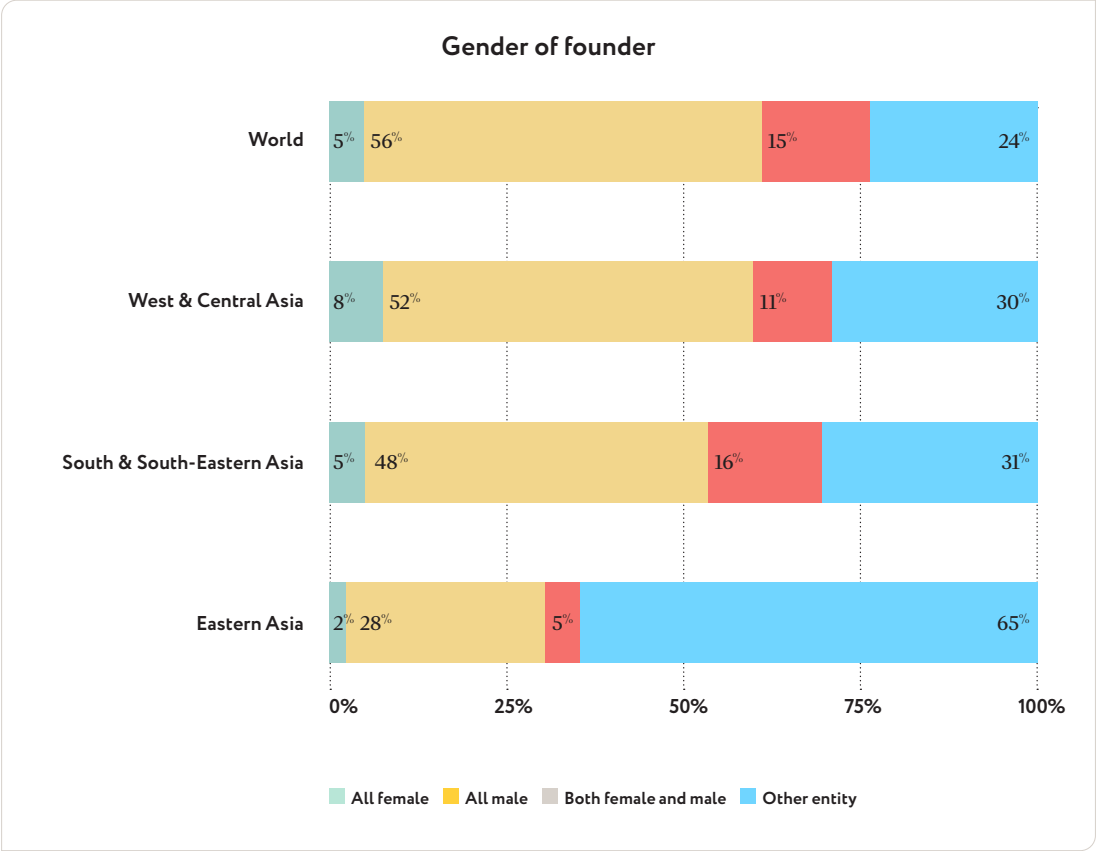


n: Eastern Asia 87; South & South-Eastern Asia 138; West & Central Asia 76; world 1,716

Who founds think tanks?

Most think tanks in the world were founded by males (56%), followed by other entities (24%), a mix of male and female co-founders (15%) and then females (5%). This trend is consistently observed among think tanks in South & South-Eastern Asia and West & Central Asia, but not in Eastern Asia. In Eastern Asia, most think tanks were founded by other entities (mainly government-affiliated entities). Men are the second most common founders of think tanks in Eastern Asia (28%).

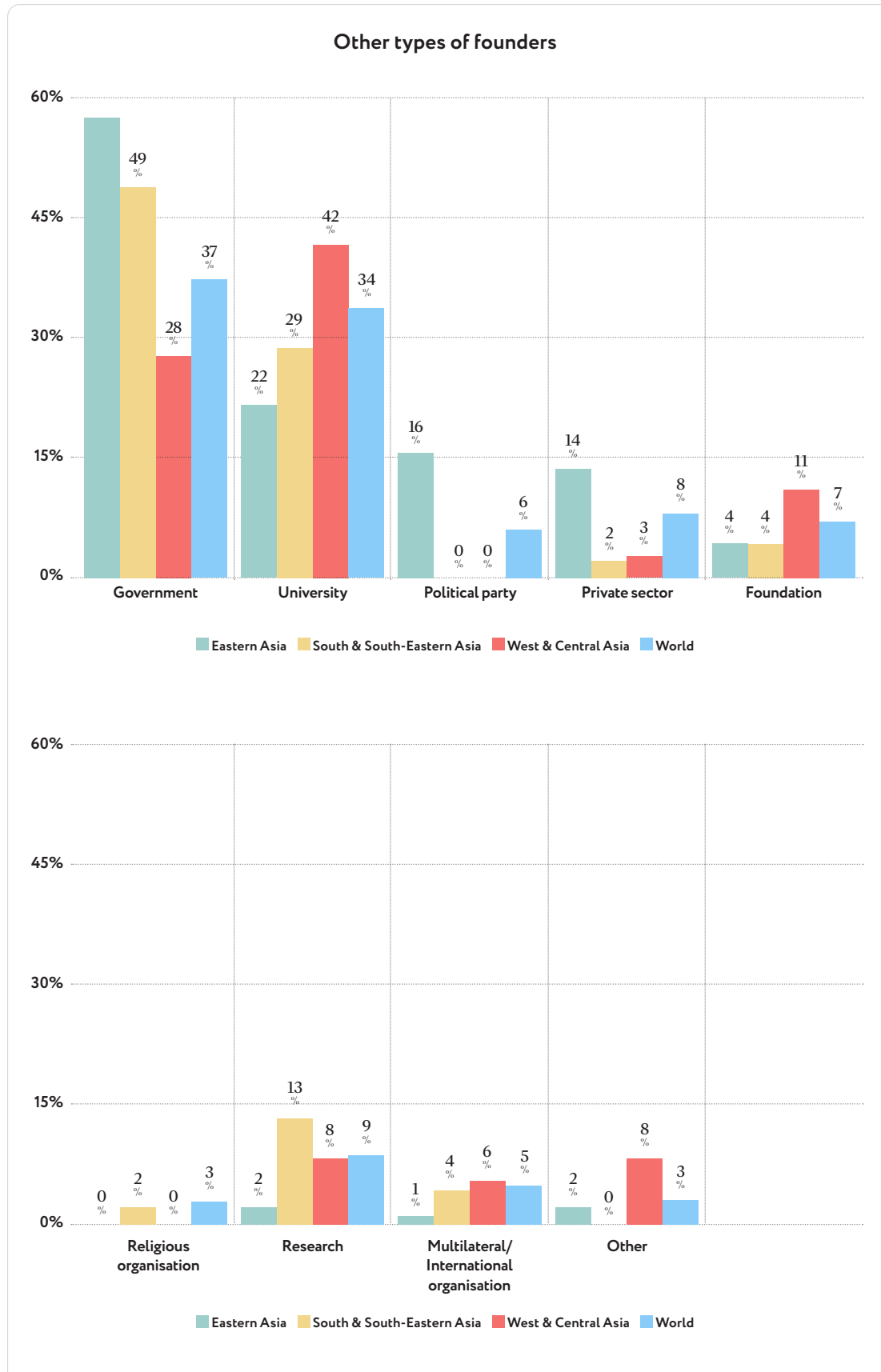
Chart 11.



n: Eastern Asia 162; South & South-Eastern Asia 155; West & Central Asia 118; world 1,633

Among think tanks that were founded by other entities or types of founders, government-affiliated entities are most common among Eastern Asia (58%) and South & South-Eastern Asia (49%), which is consistent with the world trend. However, in West & Central Asia, university founders are most common, with government-affiliated entities only coming in second.

Chart 12.

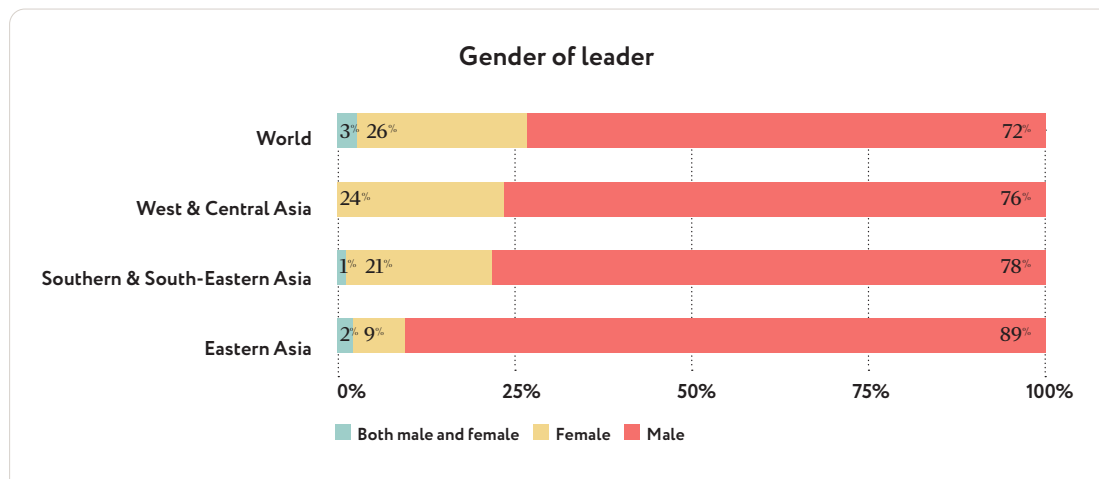


n: Eastern Asia 99; South & South-Eastern Asia 45; West & Central Asia 36; world 445

How many men and women lead think tanks?

The think tank sector has consistently been dominated by male leaders across the world (72%), and this is consistent with the findings in Asia as shown in Chart 13.

Chart 13.



n: Eastern Asia 251; South & South-Eastern Asia 215; West & Central Asia 140; world 2,624

The data shows that female-founded think tanks are predominantly led by females, while male-founded think tanks continue to have male leaders across Asia and world-wide. However, think tanks with a mix of male and female co-founders tend to have more female leadership in both Asia and the world overall. Lastly, among think tanks that were founded by other entities, more females tend to hold leadership positions in Asia but in world-wide trends they are led more by males by a small margin.

Table 2.

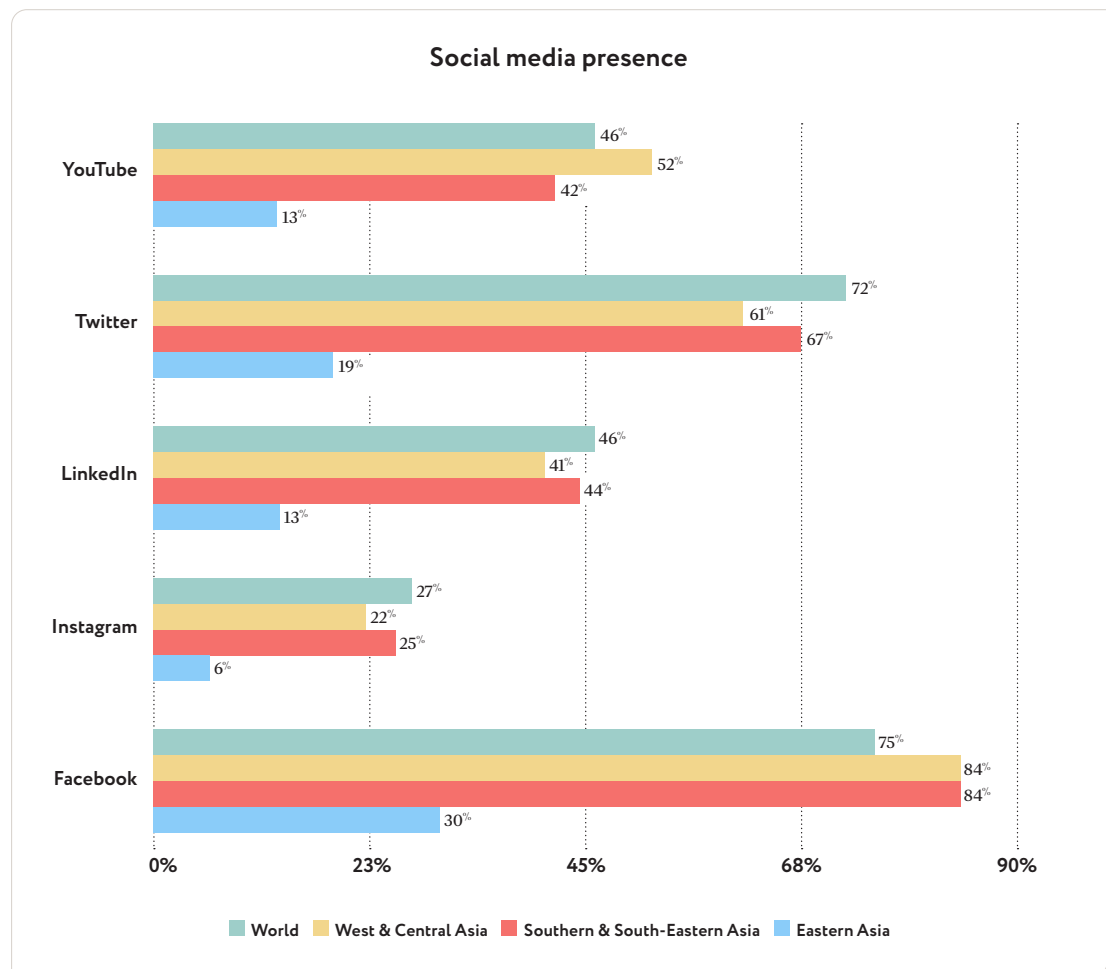
Gender of founder by gender of leader												
Gender of founder	Latest leader gender											
	Eastern Asia			Southern & South-Eastern Asia			West & Central Asia			World		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
All female	0%	2%	2%	21%	1%	5%	19%	3%	7%	14%	2%	5%
All male	18%	29%	28%	29%	57%	51%	27%	57%	50%	40%	63%	57%
Both male and female founders	9%	4%	4%	21%	16%	17%	19%	9%	12%	24%	12%	15%
Other entities	73%	66%	66%	29%	26%	27%	35%	31%	32%	22%	23%	23%
<i>n</i> :	11	111	122	28	104	132	26	75	101	367	1055	1422

Which social media channels do think tanks use?

As mentioned in the introduction, as the OTTD does not register presence on the most used social media networks in Asia, the social media analysis presented here is only of think tanks' use of key Western social media networks rather than their use of and presence on social media in general.

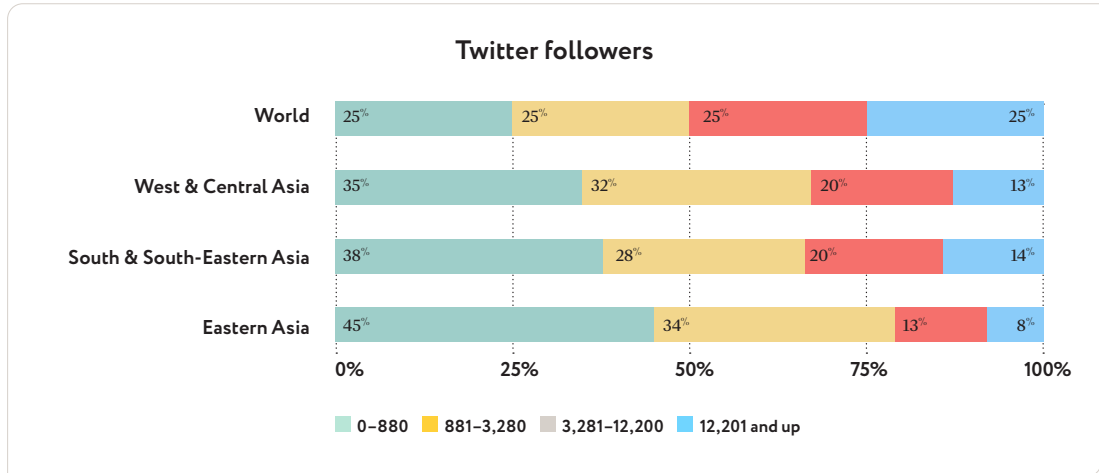
West & Central Asian think tanks use YouTube more than the other regions. Twitter (67%), LinkedIn (44%) and Instagram (25%) are used more in South & South-Eastern Asia than in other regions.

Chart 14.



Aside from South & South-Eastern Asia having more think tanks with Twitter accounts in the region, it also has the greatest number of think tanks with Twitter accounts that have 12,201 or more followers. As expected, the number of followers of think tanks in Eastern Asia tends to be low, with 0–880 followers (45% of think tanks with Twitter accounts).

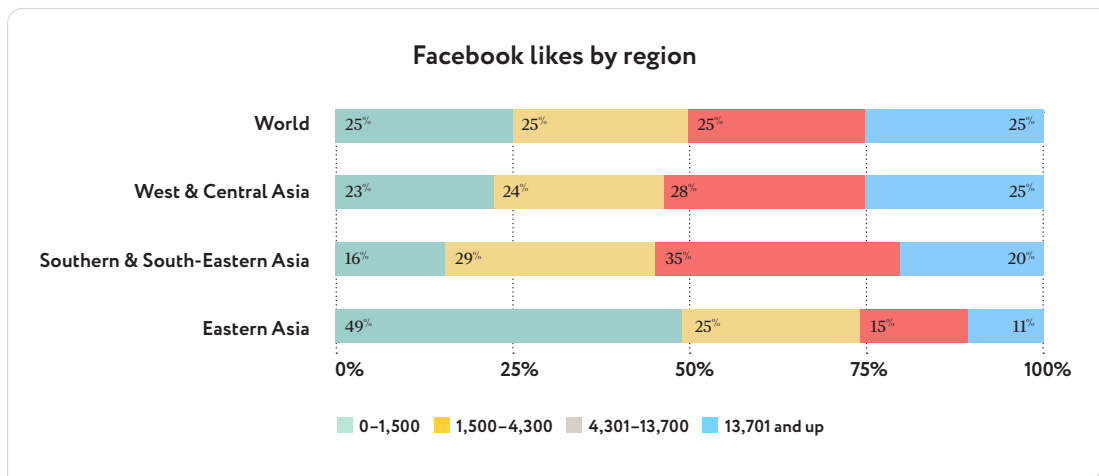
Chart 15.



n: Eastern Asia 62; South & South-Eastern Asia 169; West & Central Asia 109; world 2,157

More Facebook accounts in West & Central Asia have higher numbers of likes than in other Asian subregions (25%). In Eastern Asia, the number of Facebook accounts with 13,701 or more likes is low (11%). This could be attributed to limited access to Facebook in China, where most of the think tanks in Eastern Asia are located (54%).

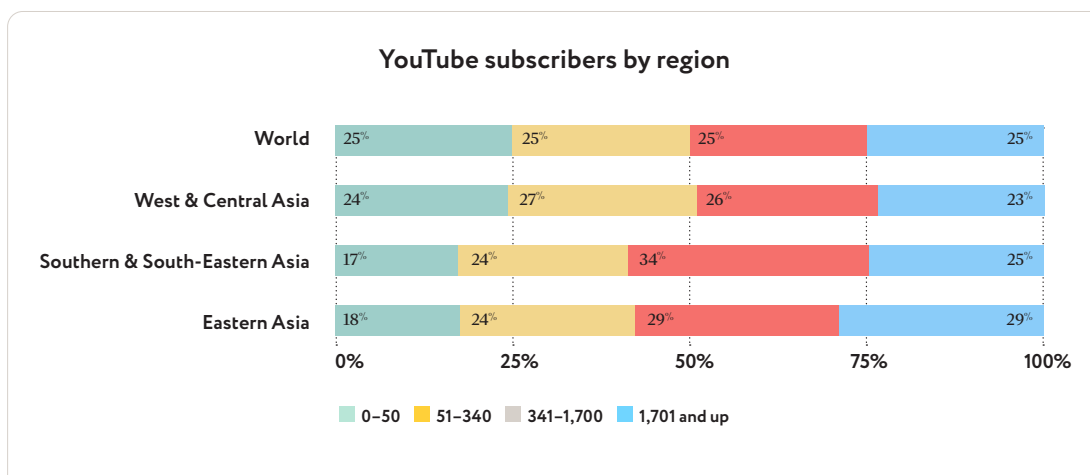
Chart 16.



n: Eastern Asia 104; South & South-Eastern Asia 217; West & Central Asia 155; world 2,305

Although only 13% of think tanks in Eastern Asia use YouTube, they have the highest number of subscribers compared to other subregions: of those with YouTube accounts, 29% have 1,701 or more subscribers. Eastern Asia also has the highest median number of YouTube videos posted (128), as well as the highest median number of views (55,580), followed by South & South-Eastern Asia (median videos posted, 121; median views, 42,979) and then West & Central Asia (median videos posted, 114; median views, 44,868).

Chart 17.



n: Eastern Asia 45; South & South-Eastern Asia 109; West & Central Asia 98; world 1,436

List of think tanks – Asia

Click on each country to take you to the list of all organisations from Asia included in the Open Think Tank Directory.⁹

South & South-Eastern Asia

- Afghanistan
- Bangladesh
- Bhutan
- Brunei
- Cambodia
- India
- Indonesia
- Lao People’s Democratic Republic
- Malaysia
- Myanmar
- Nepal
- Pakistan
- Philippines
- Singapore
- Sri Lanka
- Thailand
- Vietnam

Eastern Asia

- China
- Hong Kong
- Japan
- Mongolia
- South Korea
- Taiwan

West & Central Asia

- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Bahrain
- Cyprus
- Georgia
- Iran
- Iraq
- Israel
- Jordan
- Kazakhstan
- Kuwait
- Kyrgyzstan
- Lebanon
- Oman
- Palestine
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Syrian Arab Republic
- Tajikistan
- Turkey
- United Arab Emirates
- Uzbekistan
- Yemen

⁹ 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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Tank Directory**

**[https://onthinktanks.org/
open-think-tank-directory](https://onthinktanks.org/open-think-tank-directory)**